



Ibn Khaldun's Labor Theory of Value and the Question of Race Revisiting the "Nondebates of the 1970s" through *The Muqaddimah*

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Abstract

In the first volume of Capital, Marx argued that the labor theory of value could only be discovered in capitalist societies. Building on Marx's premise, this article examines Ibn Khaldun's (1377) The Muqaddimah, which presents one of the first labor theories of value in world history. After explaining different elements of Ibn Khaldun's labor theory of value, the article revisits what Giovanni Arrighi referred to as the "nondebates of the 1970s" and proposes that North Africa was already incorporated into an Italian centered capitalist world-economy in the fourteenth century. Since a key element of Marx's argument was the impossibility of the emergence of abstract labor in societies (e.g. ancient Greece) which do not have the idea of equality of human beings and human labor, in the latter part, the article analyzes Ibn Khaldun's theory of race and human equality. We show that Ibn Khaldun, through his comparative and historical observations, acknowledged the equality of all humans and the constructed nature of race, influenced by geography, history, and political economy. The world-historical analysis and theoretical interventions of the article helps us rethink capitalism and racism as two major pillars of modernity.

Keywords: Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddimah, Capitalism, Labor Theory of Value, Race, Racism, Origins of Capitalism



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In the very first chapter of Volume 1 of *Capital*, Karl Marx argues that the concept of value (distinct from use value and exchange value) could not possibly have emerged before the development of capitalism. To do this, he summons an unexpected authority to support his case: Aristotle. This “great investigator,” Marx writes, “was the first to analyse the value-form, like so many other forms of thought, society and nature” (Marx 1990: 151). Examining the investigation of commodity and money relationship in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Marx (1990) emphasizes that Aristotle,

states quite clearly that the money-form of the commodity is only a more developed aspect of the simple form of value, i.e. of the expression of the value of a commodity in some other commodity chosen at random, for he says: 5 beds = 1 house is indistinguishable from 5 beds = a certain amount of money. (P. 151)

Marx believed that in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle not only correctly identified the relationship between commodity exchange and money from a value-form perspective but also discovered the secret of commensurability. Marx (1990: 151) noted that according to Aristotle, “there can be no exchange...without equality, and no equality without commensurability.” After explaining Aristotle’s close investigation of the topic, Marx comes to the gist of the matter: that is, Aristotle’s *inability* to identify what is qualitatively equal or commensurable in exchanged commodities. “Here,” Marx (1990) wrote,

[Aristotle] falters, and abandons the further analysis of the form of value. ‘It is, however, in reality, impossible...that such unlike things can be commensurable,’ i.e. qualitatively equal.... Aristotle therefore himself tells us what prevented any further analysis: the lack of a concept of value. What is the homogenous element, i.e. the common substance, which the house represents from the point of the bed, in value expression for the bed? Such a thing, in truth, cannot exist, says Aristotle. But why not? Towards the bed, the house represents something equal.... And that is—human labour. (P. 151)

For Marx, it was no coincidence that Aristotle failed to recognize that the five beds and one house exchanged in the marketplace shared a common attribute: equal human labor. This oversight was not due to Aristotle's lack of insight but rather because the social structure of ancient Greece, founded on the inequality of human beings and the incomparability of their labor powers, lacked the necessary preconditions for deciphering labor-value relations. Consequently, it was impossible for Aristotle to develop a labor theory of value.

Aristotle himself was unable to extract this fact, that, in the form of commodity-values, all labor is expressed as equal human labour and therefore as labour of equal quality...because Greek society was founded on the labour of slaves, hence had as its natural basis the inequality of men and of their labor-powers. The secret of the expression of value, namely the equality and equivalence of all kinds of labor because and in so far as they are human labour in general, could not be deciphered until the concept of human equality had already acquired the permanence of a fixed popular opinion.... Aristotle’s genius is displayed precisely by his discovery of a relation of equality in the value-expression of commodities. Only the *historical limitation* inherent in the society in which he lived prevented him from finding out

what “in reality” this relation of equality consisted of. (Marx 1990: 151–2, emphasis ours)

This detailed dialogue and engagement with Aristotle was not merely an incidental anecdote for Marx but constituted one of the main pillars of his critique of the labor theories of value advanced by bourgeois political economists and philosophers such as David Ricardo, Adam Smith, John Locke, David Hume, Benjamin Franklin, and William Petty. These theorists posited that the source of value in any commodity was the amount of labor embodied in it and further attributed this “economic fact” to the value producing qualities of human laboring activity. Marx diverged from these bourgeois theorists in two significant ways, both linked to his emphasis on the *social* character of economic relations. Firstly, Marx argued that the value of a commodity was not related to the actual “concrete” labor (or laboring activity) embodied in it. Instead, what mattered was the concept of “abstract” labor and the “*socially necessary* labor-time” required to produce such commodities in a given society at a particular point in time. Secondly, Marx contended that the value-producing quality of labor was not an inherent quality of human activity but a *social construct* shaped by historically determined material conditions with real causal powers.

This second aspect is frequently overlooked, even by some Marxist analysts, who mistakenly ascribe a sort of supernatural power to human labor in the context of value creation. For Marx, neither the labor theory of value nor the perceived causal relationships between labor and value were timeless economic truths. Instead, they were constructs of bourgeois society, whose emergence and discovery were contingent upon a specific stage in the historical development of material conditions (see Postone 1993; Harvey 1999; Biernacki 1995). This context underscores why Aristotle's failure to discern the relationship between value and labor was so significant to Marx. In a manner akin to Sherlock Holmes solving the mystery of the “Silver Blaze” by noting the silence of the dog on the night of the crime, Marx saw himself as solving the puzzle of “value”—specifically, the historically conditioned, socially constructed nature of the labor-value relationship—predicated on the observation that a mind as formidable as Aristotle's could not perceive this relationship within the context of Greek society.

Nondebates Between Ibn Khaldun and Critical Political Economy

What Marx did not know at the time was that a fourteenth century Arab philosopher from North Africa named Abd al-Rahman Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Khaldun, who also read and carefully studied Aristotle's analysis of commodity and money, had already formulated an elaborate labor theory of value to explain the dynamics of the political-economy in the broader Maghreb region. Throughout his masterpiece, *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2015: 297) maintained that labor is the source of value. He asked the question “what is profit?” and answered that “profit is the value realized from human labour.” Examining the relationship between labor and value, he maintained that “when there is more labour, the value realized from it increases among the (people)” (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 273); “without labour, it would not have been acquired” (Ibn Khaldun

[1377] 2015: 298), and “[i]t should be known that when the (available) labour is all gone or decreases...God permits profits to be abolished” (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 299).

As we will further elaborate in the following sections, in *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun did not simply mention such links between labor, value, and profit with a quote or two. He dedicated several chapters of *The Muqaddimah* to examine different dimensions of the labor-value-profit relationship. He compared it to laws of supply and demand, explained its relationship with social division of labor, differentiated the parts of labor that produce livelihood (necessary labor) and parts that produce profit (surplus labor), and discussed how these dynamics worked within different occupations and different communities from an extremely novel comparative and historical perspective.

Unfortunately, neither Marx nor the Marxists after him ever seriously engaged with Ibn Khaldun’s observations. To our best knowledge, Marx never read Ibn Khaldun’s works (for a different view see Alatas 2006). After Marx’s death, Engels probably learned about some aspects of Ibn Khaldun’s work from second-hand resources because in an article in *Die Neue Zeit* in 1894/5, Engels presented a summary of Ibn Khaldun’s cyclical theory of history in the context of religious movements in North Africa without mentioning Ibn Khaldun’s name. Although this has been seen as evidence that Engels must definitely have read a translation of Ibn Khaldun (Alatas 2006; Irwin 2018), we think this is highly unlikely because if Engels had actually read a translation of *The Muqaddimah* as a whole, it would be extremely difficult to ignore and not to comment on the section of political economy.

Among the political economists who closely engaged with Marx’s work, Joseph Schumpeter ([1954] 1987) paid closer attention to Ibn Khaldun’s work, and praised how Ibn Khaldun realized that human geography must ultimately complement historical sociology for a long-term analysis of political economy. Unfortunately, however, he passed away a couple of months after his discovery (Oweiss 1988). Yet, perhaps the most provocative assessment came from Louis Althusser (1995: 211). “[A]part...from the woolly and literally untenable labor theory of value which Marx claimed as his one genuinely personal discovery,” Althusser wrote, “the philosophical, if not the scientific, core of Marxism was elaborated long before his day (by Ibn Khaldun, Montesquieu, etc).” Since he explicitly excludes Marx’s “literally untenable labor theory of value” from his generalization, what Althusser probably had in mind here was Ibn Khaldun’s materialist and dialectical philosophy of history, and his materialist philosophy of science, which we will briefly mention in the following sections.

Ibn Khaldun was not a predecessor of Marx in any meaningful way. Yet, many of his observations regarding political economy were important for Marxists because they anticipated Adam Smith’s political economy in key respects. This is why it is notable that even Marxists who discovered Ibn Khaldun did not really engage with Ibn Khaldun’s work, especially his political-economy, in a substantive manner. Although there were some serious efforts to integrate Ibn Khaldun’s observations for a better understanding of the dynamics of the world economy, especially accumulation regimes in Islamic North Africa from a Marxian perspective (Amin 1978; Banaji 2007; also see Rodinson 1974), it was not questioned what Ibn Khaldun’s discovery meant

for Marx's claim that the secret of value and equivalence of all kinds of labor could not possibly be discovered until the emergence of capitalism and the bourgeois society. This is surprising and unfortunate because Ibn Khaldun's discussion of the labor-value relationship in *The Muqaddimah* takes place in a distinct historical era (i.e., the fourteenth century), focuses on a unique geography (i.e., northern Africa) and in a unique social structure where slavery and unequal treatment of human groups were still prevalent. At first sight, it seems that there cannot be any better counter case to Marx's argument.

A similar omission, a tendency not to engage with a debate at a deep social theoretical level, can also be found in Ibn Khaldun scholars. Many historians and scholars who read and studied *The Muqaddimah* immediately suggested Ibn Khaldun was anticipating (or a precursor of) August Comte, Emile Durkheim, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Karl Marx (Dale 2006; Hasan 2007; also see Irwin 2018). Needless to say, the works of orientalist Khaldunians and other Western scholars who studied Ibn Khaldun—such as Arnold Tonybee, Hugh Revor Roper, and Ernest Gellner—were very important to popularize Ibn Khaldun's thought beyond the Muslim world and to question the Eurocentric premises of modernity. Unfortunately, however, much of the existing studies on Ibn Khaldun did not go beyond declaring Ibn Khaldun as a genius who was also the *first* labor theorists of value, the *first* political-economist, the *first* sociologist, and so on (see Katsiaficas 2014). Probably due to their overemphasis on Ibn Khaldun's persona and genius, many of the Khaldunian scholars missed the opportunity to question what material and historical forces prepared the preconditions of such discoveries made by Ibn Khaldun and what these discoveries meant for the historical evolution of economic and racial systems.

At the other end of the spectrum, some scholars warn us not to reflect our contemporary concepts and theories into Ibn Khaldun's work (see Al-Azmeh 1981). In his biography of Ibn Khaldun, for example, Robert Irwin suggests that Ibn Khaldun's writings are completely irrelevant to our modern world. As he puts it:

It is precisely Ibn Khaldun's irrelevance to the modern world that makes him so interesting and important. When I read *The Muqaddimah*, I have a sense that I am encountering a visitor from another planet—and that is exciting. (Irwin 2018: xiii)

Obviously, we must pay close attention to the differences between Ibn Khaldun's and our modern concepts. This is very important to avoid anachronisms, especially when dealing with a fourteenth century philosopher. After all, much can be lost or misunderstood in translation of a work published more than five centuries ago. For example, when Ibn Khaldun talks about *ribh* it is difficult to know if he meant "gross earnings" or "profit," as it depends on the context. This leads to a widespread confusion that what Ibn Khaldun meant by *ribh* is not "profit" as we understand it today, but simply "wealth created by one's labor" (see Sartori 2013). This, sometimes, is true. Yet, in other contexts, Ibn Khaldun uses *ribh* to mean "profit" in the modern meaning of the term (Oweiss 1988). To make such nuances clearer, different translations used different concepts, which introduced even more problems. Thus, in different translations of Ibn Khaldun, one can see that the same concept is translated differently sometimes as "capital accumulation," sometimes as

“profit” or “surplus.” Do not also be surprised to see terms like “capitalists” or “exploitation,” in some popular translations, or do not be frustrated to realize that “price” and “value” are translated in different ways in different texts. These issues become particularly important and problematic when we encounter terms such as “race” in translations, where it is challenging to discern the exact nature of collective identity intended in the fourteenth century without imposing our own contemporary concepts.

Having this said, we also must be careful not to seek an exact identity between concepts and theories that emerged at different points in history either. What is necessary for our purposes, instead, is to see whether or not there is a “family resemblance” (in a Wittgensteinian sense) between such concepts and theories, and if there is, we should ask what the genealogical evolution of these concepts and theories in space and time, which include both continuities and ruptures, tell us about the transformation of the phenomenon we are investigating as well as the world such phenomenon belongs to. Until now, such a task has not successfully been done.

Today there is a revival of interest in Ibn Khaldun’s work. Many sociologists, political scientists, and economists have recently applied different aspects of Ibn Khaldun’s concept of *asabiyyah* (group feeling, “we feeling,” or social cohesion), his theory of state, his political-economy, and his cyclical view of history into different contexts in innovative ways (see Alatas 1990; Anderson and Chase-Dunn 2005; Alatas 2006; Turchin 2009; Alatas 2014). Ibn Khaldun’s ideas even inspired popular forms of art such as Frank Herbert’s *Dune* science fiction novels. Some politicians found the vast information presented in Ibn Khaldun’s works as a great source for cherry-picking great insights as well. In 1981, as a part of his efforts to justify the “neoliberal turn,” even Ronald Reagan cited this Arab scholar. Portraying Ibn Khaldun as a supply-side economist, Reagan quoted Ibn Khaldun stating that, “in the beginning of the dynasty, great tax revenues were gained from small assessments,” and that “at the end of the dynasty, small tax revenues were gained from large assessments” (New York Times 1981). More recently, Boris Johnson also used Ibn Khaldun as evidence for why tax-cuts are beneficial for society in general. In 2019, Boris Johnson said that “[Ibn Khaldun] observed that if you cut taxes on the olive harvest, or whatever it was in 14th-century Tunisia, that actually people grew more olives, and tax yields went up” (Rees 2019). It is worthwhile noting that neither Reagan nor Johnson realized that Ibn Khaldun’s political economy was much closer to—if we are really compelled to find a more recent analogy—the Keynesian economic models than the neoclassical models. After all, Ibn Khaldun put even greater emphasis on the state’s role in economic affairs, particularly in terms of welfare provisions, poor aids, public works, and so on.

Despite the increasing awareness and popularity of Ibn Khaldun’s work, there remains a notable absence of serious debate between Ibn Khaldun’s theories and modern social theory, with the notable exceptions of Gellner’s (1975) close engagement and the substantial efforts of Syed Farid Alatas (2014). In this paper, we argue that these nondebates, that is, debates that are not taking place, prevent us from discovering some new aspects of the key foundational pillars of modernity such as capitalism and racism. As we emphasized earlier, Marx’s dialogue and engagement with Aristotle helped him discover something about the nature of value because it

pushed Marx to ask *what must be true about the nature of labor-value relations in order for Aristotle not to perceive human labor's role in value*. After reviewing Ibn Khaldun's observations about labor and value, instead of simply refuting Marx's argument in a Popperite manner, we will build on Marx's insights and ask *what must be true about the nature of capitalism for Ibn Khaldun to be able to discover human labor's role in value*. To answer these questions, we will, in Giovanni Arrighi's (1998) terms, rethink some of the "nondebates of the 1970s" among world-systems theorists and macro-historical sociologists.

An investigation of relations of value, labor, and capitalism through the lenses of Ibn Khaldun's thought will immediately bring to the fore a second major question about the nature of *human equality* and *racism*. After examining Ibn Khaldun's political-economy with an eye to labor-value-profit relationship, we will turn attention to his understanding of human equality and race. The world Ibn Khaldun inhabited was not immune to racial prejudices. In fact, the dominant mode of thought was based on inequality of races, humans, and their labor. Yet, as we will argue, Ibn Khaldun's was a believer in the equality of human beings and the geographically, historically, and political-economically constructed nature of race. In contrast to views that assume that Ibn Khaldun was a "racist" or held "racist ideas" in the context of medieval North Africa, we will argue that Ibn Khaldun was actually closer to a constructivist who provided a major critique of primordialist, biological determinist, and genealogical understandings of race. To decipher these elements from his works, however, we need to go beyond individual quotes to understand Ibn Khaldun's method and examine his works as a whole, and in context with his time period.

Ibn Khaldun's Life: A Brief Overview

Abd al-Rahman Ibn Muhammad Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) was a polymath. He drew on knowledge from a wide range of fields in his scholarship, including philosophy, poetry, history, and mathematics. With this diverse array of interests, he produced some of the earliest works that resemble what we today call historical sociology and political economy. Due to his use of logic, materialist assumptions, and a rationalist approach on one hand; and his theoretically guided *longue durée* perspective, aiming to transcend individual events and occurrences in history on the other, Ibn Khaldun has also been dubbed both the last Greek and the first Annales School historian (Dale 2006).

Born in Tunis in 1332, Ibn Khaldun hailed from a South Arabian lineage with deep connections to Al-Andalus during the Muslim conquest of the region (around the eighth century). His family migrated to North Africa from Al-Andalus during the *Reconquista*, nearly a century before his birth (Alatas 2013). Having held prominent political and social positions in "Spanish" Muslim society, their status was transferred and proved beneficial for the family in the political landscape of Northwest Africa, specifically in Tunis (Rosenthal 2021). Through his writings, it appears that Ibn Khaldun identified as "Arab" and considered Northwest Africa his homeland. However, there is speculation regarding the extent to which his "Spanish" (and possibly "Berber")

heritage influenced his intellectual thought. It would not be wrong to state that his identity was shaped by the Mediterranean in general. As Lawrence (2015) put it,

What distinguished Ibn Khaldun was neither his Arab lineage nor his linkage to Berbers via marriage but his Mediterranean location. At the intersection of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim influences, heir to Greek science and Arabic poetry, and connected by trade and history to Asia, the Mediterranean Sea had become the nexus of Muslim cosmopolitanism by the fourteenth century. Social mobility as well as physical travel animated Mediterranean Muslims, especially those like Ibn Khaldun, who rose to high posts in government, law and education. (Lawrence 2015: vii)

Ibn Khaldun was a scholar whose life was shaped by a pandemic. In 1349, when Khaldun was 17 years old, the Black Plague swept through North Africa. His mother, father, and many of the scholars acting as his tutors succumbed to the illness (Rosenthal 2021). In his early education Ibn Khaldun's studies revolved around the Qur'an, Quranic sciences, Arabic, jurisprudence, and poetry, which he endeavored under the tutelage of many scholars, his father included (Irwin 2018; Rosenthal 2021). He began his roughly 25-year political career during the pandemic, shortly after at the age of 20 (Burns 2006). Much of his educational development as an Islamic scholar, littérateur, historian, and early social scientist occurred from this period onward. He continued to study with other Islamic scholars and gained much of the valuable insight during this formative period that would influence his later work. His social status, connections through family in Tunis, and intelligence preceded multiple political appointments. This colorful political career, interlinked with his intellectual pursuits and his frequent need for asylum, allowed Ibn Khaldun to travel to the eastern and western expanses of the Islamic world during this time, from 1350 to his death in 1406. Ibn Khaldun journeyed from his origin, northwest Africa (Tunis, Fez, Oran), to Al-Andalus; and settled in northeast Africa—specifically Cairo, Egypt—for the later part of his life.

A brief hiatus from political life in 1374–1381 afforded him time to craft his seminal work, *The Muqaddimah*, which he completed in 1377 (Alatas 2013; Lawrence 2015). Contrary to common assumptions, *The Muqaddimah* is not a standalone book. Instead, it serves as the introduction or prologue to the seven major books that comprise his *Kitab al-'Ibar* —*Book of Lessons* (Lawrence 2015). This thick introduction, however, illustrates the scope and breadth of Ibn Khaldun's sociological insights into history, politics, economics, and culture as it provides a historically rooted macro-sociological theory that elucidates the reasons behind the rise and fall of civilizations, social cohesion within communities, and changing dynamics of political authority.

Outlines of the Khaldunian Labor Theory of Value

Ibn Khaldun's examination of labor, value, and profit interrelations permeates *The Muqaddimah* but this theme is particularly central to Chapter 5, titled “On the (Various) Aspects of Making a Living, Such as Profit and the Crafts.” He starts this chapter with an interesting observation about how equivalent values are exchanged in markets. In Charles Issawi's translation, this section of *The Muqaddimah* begins as follows:

God created for man all that is in the world.... And men possess in partnership everything in the world. Once, however, an individual possesses anything, no other person may appropriate it, unless he give[s] an *equal value in exchange* for it. Hence, once a man has acquired sufficient strength, he tries to earn an income in order to exchange it for the necessities of life.... Gain, therefore, can only come about by effort and labor.... It is clear, then, that, all, or most, incomes or profits represent the value of human labor. (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 1950: 71–72, emphasis ours).

Unlike Aristotle, who argued that real equivalences between different commodities cannot exist, Ibn Khaldun readily connects market exchange with value, and value with labor. More notably, he does not frame his observations on the role of labor in the production of values and profits as a theory (such as a labor theory of value) or a discovery, but rather as facts of his time.

The labor-value-profit relationship, explained in detail in Chapter 5 of *The Muqaddimah*, is so central to Ibn Khaldun's thought that it is already noticeable in previous chapters. In Chapter 2, for example, when Ibn Khaldun explains Bedouin civilization, he already observes that a civilization that does not pay their "craftsmen and professional workers" is doomed to collapse and decay in the long run. He observes that—

labour is the real basis of profit. When labour is not appreciated and is done for nothing, the hope for profit vanishes, and no (productive) work is done. The sedentary population disperses, and civilization decays. (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 119).

A similar theme appears in Chapter 3, where Ibn Khaldun not only comments on the destructive potential of unpaid and forced labor for a civilization but he also introduces two interesting elements to this theory that later became important for both classical political economists and their critics: "labour belongs to the things that constitute capital," and "gain and sustenance represent the value realized from labour among civilized people." (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 241).

In Chapter 5 and elsewhere in *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun (1377] 2015: 298) makes it clear values of commodities reflect their corresponding share of labor. He suggests that "in most cases, the share of labor...is obvious. A portion of the value, whether large or small, comes from (the labour)." In crafts, for example, all value is produced by labor.

It should be further known that the capital a person earns and acquires, if resulting from a craft, is the value realized from labour. This is the meaning of acquired (capital). There is nothing here (originally) except the labour (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 298)

This is precisely why the values of corresponding crafts reflect their share of labor. Like Marx, who tried to explain the role of labor in the production of value through the examples of tailoring and weaving (and the production of a coat with a value of W and 10 yards of linen with a value of 2W) (Marx 1990: 132), Ibn Khaldun chose his examples from carpentry and weaving, which are associated with wood and a yard (of cloth).

Carpentry and weaving, for instance, are associated with wood and yarn. However, in these two crafts, the labour (that goes into them) is more important, and its value is greater. If the profit results from something other than a craft, the value of the resulting profit and acquired (capital) must include the value of the labour by which it was obtained. Without labour, it would not have been acquired. (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 298)

In some commodities, however,

the share of labour may be concealed. This is the case, for instance, with the prices of foodstuffs. The labour and expenditure that have gone into them show themselves in the price of grain. But they are concealed (items) in regions where farming requires little care and few implements. Thus, only a few farmers are conscious of this element. (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 298)

In agriculture, the share of labor in the production of value was partly concealed because agricultural commodities also relied on what Marx (following Adam Smith) later called use-values without value. In *Capital* (1990: 131), Marx explained this condition by clarifying that “a thing can be a use-value without being a value. This is the case whenever its utility to man is not mediated through labor. Air, virgin soil, natural meadows, unplanted forests, etc. fall into this category.” By the same token, Ibn Khaldun also realized that there are useful things in nature—such as “rain that makes the fields thrive” (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 297)—that existed “through no [human] effort” (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 297). However, he added, “these things are only contributory. [To produce things that are useful for human-beings], [h]is own efforts must be combined with them” (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 297). This probably was one the first clear articulations of William Petty’s notion that “the labour is the Father and the active principle of Wealth, as Lands are the Mother” (Petty [1662] 1899: 68). Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2015: 299) believed that some use-values that appear to exist without labor may still need labor to be useful in the final analysis: “This goes so far that even the flow of springs and rivers stops in waste areas. Springs flow only if they are dug out and the water drawn. This requires human labour.”

Beyond Polanyi’s Marketplace: Supply and Demand in Ibn Khaldun’s Market-System

Ibn Khaldun’s ([1377] 2021) conceptualization of the relationship between labor and profit also provides some key insights about his understanding of the role labor plays in the determination of values (and prices) of commodities and services. As he puts it:

[P]rofit is the value realized from labour. When there is more labour, the value realized from it increases among the (people)... The prosperity and wealth they enjoy leads them to luxury and the things that go with it, such as splendid houses and clothes, fine vessels and utensils, and the use of servants and mounts. All these involve activities that require their *price* (?). (P. 272; also see Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 273)

The last part of the quotation (marked in italic), which alludes to Ibn Khaldun's view on the relationship between labor and prices, is not clear from this translation. In the 2021 edition, Franz Rosenthal, who translated Ibn Khaldun's text to English, discusses the difficulties of translation of the phrase *tastad-î bi-qiyamihâ* in an extended footnote (Ibn Khaldun 2021: 272, ft.105). Rosenthal (Ibn Khaldun 2021: 272, ft.105) adds that "De Slane reads [this phrase] as *tustad'â bi-qiyamihâ* and translates as 'All these are products that exist only because of the value attached to them'."¹

As evident by these translations, sometimes it is difficult to differentiate price from value in Ibn Khaldun's texts. Yet, if you look at *The Muqaddimah* as a whole, two things would immediately become apparent. First, Ibn Khaldun suggests that a commodity's value—determined by labor—is a component of its price; and second, prices of commodities—and corresponding profits that emerge out of their trade—are also affected by other elements such as custom duties, market fluctuations, and most interestingly, laws of supply and demand.

Then, when a city has a highly developed, abundant civilization and is full of luxuries, there is a very large demand for those conveniences and for having as many of them as a person can expect in view of his situation. This results in a very great shortage of such things. Many will bid for them, but they will be in short supply. They will be needed for many purposes, and prosperous people used to luxuries will pay exorbitant prices for them, because they need them more than others. Thus, as one can see, prices come to be high. (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 276)

If the existence of a labor theory of value is puzzling from a Marxian perspective, the existence of laws of supply and demand in Ibn Khaldun's work is even more puzzling from a Polanyian perspective. In *Livelihood of Man*, Polanyi (1977) clearly differentiated between capitalist and pre-capitalist/non-capitalist commercial processes using his distinction between market as a place (i.e., marketplace) and market as an institution (i.e., market-systems). For Polanyi, money, commerce, and markets as places could be found in human communities even of the simplest and earliest kind (Polanyi 1977). However, in such precapitalist markets, "necessities of life, mainly foodstuffs or prepared food, can be bought...as a rule, at set rates" (Polanyi 1977: 124). Polanyi also calls these pre-capitalist markets as non-price setting markets. For him, capitalist market-systems, that is, price-making markets, are characterized by a "supply-demand-price mechanism" (Polanyi 1977: 124–5). In *Livelihood of Man* as well as in his lesser known "Aristotle Discovers the Economy," Polanyi (1957) traces the origins of this distinction in the notion of embeddedness as well as the notion of trade of (non)equivalencies, going back to Aristotle's investigation of the matter (also see Lie 1991).

Ibn Khaldun and his lengthy explanation of laws of supply and demand in the broader Maghreb is not mentioned in any of these texts. This is unfortunate because in various sections of *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun explains how laws of supply and demand work in the context of a

¹ The same section is translated to Turkish as "*Bütün bunlar, birer kıymeti olması lazım gelen işlerdir*" (i.e., "all these are activities that must have a value") (Ibn Haldun 2012: 693).

“pre-capitalist” society. To explain why industrial goods and services are more expensive in the large and affluent cities of North Africa, for example, Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 1950) writes:

Industrial goods and services are also dearer in prosperous districts for three reasons: First because of the greater need, arising out of the luxury prevalent in such districts and the large size of their populations. Secondly, because the ease with which a livelihood may be earned, and the abundance of foodstuffs in towns, makes craftsmen less ready to accept [poor] conditions of employment and service. Thirdly, because of the presence of a large number of rich men, whose need for employing servants and craftsmen is great and who, consequently, compete for the services of the working class and pay them more than the value of their work. (P. 74)

In this paragraph alone, Ibn Khaldun puts forward three straightforward supply-demand mechanisms: (1) increased demand for industrial goods and services, which drives up the prices, (2) decreased supply of labor (in terms of willingness to work under certain conditions) due to an abundance of foodstuffs and better living conditions, which increases labor’s negotiating power and leads to higher wages, (3) increased competition among employers, which increases the demand for labor, pushing up wages above their value. Collectively, these mechanisms highlight the role supply and demand plays in creating a discrepancy between values (linked to labor) and prices (affected by excess supply and excess demand, and other mechanisms). Using a more nuanced supply-demand mechanism, Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2015) also explains why in highly populated cities with cooperative social division of labor, prices of subsistence goods are consistently low and luxury goods are high as follows:

When a city is highly developed and has many inhabitants, the prices of necessary foodstuffs and corresponding items are low, and the prices for luxuries, such as seasonings, fruits, and the things that go with them, are high. When the inhabitants of a city are few and its civilization weak, the opposite is the case. The reason for this is that the different kinds of grains belong among the necessary foodstuffs. The demand for them, therefore, is very large. Nobody would neglect (to provide for) his own food or that of his establishment for a month or a year. Thus, the procurement of (grain) concerns the entire population of a city, or the largest part of them, both in the city itself and in its environs. This is inevitable. Everybody who procures food for himself has a surplus beyond his own and his family’s needs. This surplus is able to satisfy the needs of many of the inhabitants of that particular city. No doubt, then, the inhabitants of a city have more food than they need. Consequently, the price of food is low, as a rule, except when misfortunes occur (P. 276).

It must be noted that in later sections of Chapter 5 of *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun also compares earnings of different occupations and explains how these earnings are affected by demand for their labor, showing that the types of labor in high demand will receive higher wages, and those in low demand will receive lower wages as well.

Social Division of Labor, Emergent Properties of the Combined Labor and Their Spatial Consequences

Throughout *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun underlines that the part of labor that satisfies a person's own needs (i.e., his livelihood) should be separated from the part of labor that goes beyond their needs. The latter surplus, Ibn Khaldun explains, should be seen as the basis of capital accumulation and profit. "The fruits of a man's labor," Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2015) explained,

will constitute his livelihood, if they correspond to his necessities and needs. They will be capital accumulation, if they are greater than (his needs). When the use of such accruing or acquired (gain) reverts to a particular human being and he enjoys its fruits by spending it upon his interests and needs, it is called "sustenance"... When a person does not use (his income) for any of his interests and needs, it is not called "sustenance". (The part of the income) that is obtained by a person through his own effort and strength is called "profit." (P. 297)

Different from Marx who primarily applied this distinction primarily in terms of "time" (i.e., labor-time), Ibn Khaldun applies this distinction primarily in terms of "space." Thus, his labor theory also becomes a population theory. Ibn Khaldun highlights the labor-population link by explaining the role social division of labor and co-operation plays in the formation of surplus value. In Chapter 4, Ibn Khaldun introduces the notion that division of labor in a society produces "combined labor" with emergent properties. In his view, combined labor produces more than the sum of individual labor and creates a surplus that becomes the basis of wealth for a society.

The individual human cannot by himself obtain all the necessities of life. All human beings must cooperate to that end in their civilization. But what is obtained through the co-operation of a group of human beings satisfies the need of a number many times greater (than themselves). For instance, no one, by himself, can obtain the share of the wheat he needs for food. But when six or ten persons, including a smith and a carpenter to make the tools, and other who are in charge of the oxen, the plowing of the soil, the harvesting of the ripe grain, and all the other agricultural activities, undertake to obtain their food and work toward that purpose either separately or collectively and thus obtain through their labour a certain amount of food, (that amount) will be food for a number of people many times their own. The combined labour produces more than the needs and necessities of the workers. (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 273)

Partly anticipating Adam Smith's analysis of social division of labor in a market society and his famous example of pin factory, Ibn Khaldun discusses two different cases of this social division of labor: where (a), available labor is only sufficient enough to cover the needs and necessities of inhabitants in each population; and (b), combined labor produces an even greater surplus amount than what is needed and necessary that will help each member to "enjoy luxuries," import goods from other cities through exchange, and "get a good deal of wealth."

To support his theory, Ibn Khaldun compares several cities in the Maghreb region (such as Fez, Bougie, Tlemcen, Ceura) and the broader Mediterranean (Oran, Constantine, Algiers, Biskra, Cairo) and provides an analysis of the living conditions of different social groups including judges, poor people, and beggars. His theory simply asserts that the more labor there is in a population,

the more surplus will be produced as long as members of the population cooperate with each other. Such co-operative social division of labor will bring prosperity, attract more labor through migration, and as a result will produce a virtuous cycle that will produce a geographical discrepancy between rich and poor cities and towns, based on availability of labor.

When population increases, the available labour again increases. In turn, luxury again increases in correspondence with the increasing profit, and the customs and needs of luxury increase. Crafts are created to obtain (luxury products). The value realized from them increases, and, as a result, profits are again multiplied in the town....All the additional labour serves luxury and wealth, in contrast to the original labor that served (the necessities of life). (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 274)

In contrast to the classical political-economic view epitomized by Malthus, which regards high levels of (i.e., geometric) population growth as an impediment to economic development, particularly within the context of the nineteenth century, Ibn Khaldun considered high population growth in the fourteenth century to be a precondition for economic growth, provided that there is effective cooperation among individuals, producing combined labor. He argues that even the poorest people in cities with a greater combined labor base are better off than those in cities with little or no growth because there is more wealth to be redistributed.

This can be exemplified by the condition of the poor and the beggars. A beggar in Fez is better off than a beggar in Tlemcen or Oran. I observed beggars in Fez who, at the time of the sacrifices [of the 'Id festival], begged for enough to buy their sacrificial animals. I saw them beg for many kinds of luxuries and delicacies such as meat, butter, cooked dishes, garments, and utensils, such as sieves and vessels. If a beggar were to ask for such things in Tlemcen or Oran, he would be considered with disapproval and treated harshly and chased away.... Many of the poor in the Maghrib even want to move to Egypt on account of that and because they hear prosperity in Egypt is greater than anywhere else. (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 274–275)

For Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2015: 274), “[t]he only reason for this is the difference in the labor (available) in (the different cities).”

At this point, it is crucial to clarify two points to prevent any misinterpretation of Ibn Khaldun’s ideas. Firstly, while Ibn Khaldun associates civilization with densely populated areas and a complex social division of labor, he does not equate civilization with a higher position in a hierarchical framework. Specifically, although he often states that a civilized population will be wealthier and more prosperous than an uncivilized one, he does not regard the civilized as superior to, for example, a poorer, nomadic population with a basic division of labor. Contrarily, his theory is founded on a dialectic: as a society becomes more civilized—wealthier and more indulgent in luxuries—it sows the seeds of its own demise. This is because the very mechanisms that foster wealth and population growth also erode social cohesion—that is, *asabiyyah*—rendering the society vulnerable to conquest by nomadic groups with a more primitive social social division of labor but stronger *asabiyyah*. Thus, for Ibn Khaldun, civilization is not inherently synonymous with progress. Second, although Ibn Khaldun starts from the Aristotelian premise that humans are

social and political animals and they need to cooperate, he does not believe that such division of labor and cooperation will automatically emerge. In his view, humans will not automatically or instinctively move towards such cooperation, thus it will require the act of, in his words, “political leadership” or what he calls as “royal or religious authority.”

Curious Absence of the “Historical Limit” in Fourteenth Century North Africa

The purpose of these lengthy quotes and observations is not to provide a full assessment of Ibn Khaldun's general view of political-economy, or his views on labor theory of value or supply-demand mechanism. All of these themes deserve separate and careful analyses of their own. These observations, however, aim to demonstrate that in contrast to Aristotle, who could not decipher what is qualitatively equal or commensurable in exchanged commodities, Ibn Khaldun managed to provide an answer that is surprisingly similar to the one that is later proposed by bourgeois political economists such as Adam Smith. This requires us to ask, what changed?

If historical sciences really evolved in the way Karl Popper ([1934] 1965) wanted us to believe, Ibn Khaldun's description of political-economic dynamics in North Africa in the fourteenth century would be seen as a solid counter evidence that would falsify Marx's position about the historically conditioned nature of the labor theory of value, as well as Polanyi's distinction between marketplaces and market-systems. However, Popper's method is not sufficient to deal with historical realities (Vandenbergh 1999; Danermark et al. 2019). In the social sciences, almost no theory is really falsified with counter examples (Gorski 2004). Thus, instead of using Ibn Khaldun's observations to prematurely refute theoretical insights by Marx and Polanyi, we want to use them to think further about the nature of capitalism. We can ask, what must be true about the historical evolution of capitalism for Marx and Polanyi's insights to still be valid to a certain degree, despite Ibn Khaldun's observations?

Assuming that Marx was right in his critique of bourgeois labor theories of value, which erroneously ascribed some supernatural powers to human labor (and Polanyi was right in his distinction between marketplaces and market-systems as pre-capitalist and capitalist forms respectively), Ibn Khaldun's observations about the political-economy of the broader Maghreb region begs two major questions of historical sociological importance: first, what were the material preconditions of the possibility for Ibn Khaldun's discovery of the labor value (and observation of laws of supply and demand) in fourteenth century North Africa; and second, how was this discovery possible considering the existence of slavery and a dominant worldview based on superiority and inferiority of certain human groups in the region, a worldview that can easily be seen as “racist” by contemporary standards.

Revisiting the Nondebates of the 1970s

Let us start with the first question, as odd as this question might sound at first: can fourteenth century North Africa be seen as a *capitalist* society? Answering this question with a “no!” is the easy part. While different forms of markets existed throughout history, what we today call

“capitalism” is a unique social, political, and economic phenomenon that came to being somewhere in Europe. Answering exactly “when” and “where” the capitalist relations first started, however, is more difficult because the answer is contingent on what we see as the key characteristics of capitalism.

Today, there is no consensus on the origins of historical capitalism. While most conventional accounts turn their attention to the industrial revolution in England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, some historical sociologists with an eye to comparative political economy turn attention to earlier periods such as sixteenth century Europe (Weber [1930] 1992; Wallerstein 1974) or thirteenth century Italian city-states (Fanfani 1933; Lane 1966; Braudel 1984; Arrighi 1994).

The position of Marx is informative for our purposes. It must be kept in mind that Marx never used the term “capitalism.” He instead talked about different forms of capital, capitalists, capitalist relations, capitalist process of production, capitalist mode of production, and so on. Almost all of these concepts had different “origins” in history and they all evolved and created qualitatively new forms over space and time. Even if we take Volume 1 of *Capital* as the most polished version of Marx’s views on the subject, for example, we will still see different timelines based on different conceptualizations. Although, some scholars such as Braudel and Abu-Lughod believe that Marx changed his idea about the origins of capitalism, a closer reading of *Volume 1* will reveal that Marx seems to date the origin of capitalism back to the *long sixteenth century Europe* as it pertains to the formation of a Eurocentric capitalist world market—that is, capitalist production of commodities for “world trade and the world market” (Marx 1990: 246)—the emergence of the “capitalist process of production” in manufacture (Marx 1990: 455) and the emergence of the “capitalist era” (Marx 1990: 876). However, he opts for the thirteenth/fourteenth century *Italy* as the starting point when he talks about the emergence of “capitalist production” and “free proletarians” in a particular region (e.g see Marx 1990: 876, ft1).

This difference in systemic versus region-centric interpretations can also be observed in the way different scholars selectively cite from Marx. Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), for example, seems to be in agreement with Marx’s former conceptualization which dates the origins of capitalist world-system back to sixteenth century Europe, but historians and historical sociologists with a more (city-)state-centric view (as opposed to a macro-systemic view) such as Lane (1966) and Fanfani (1933) tend to agree with Marx’s focus on the thirteenth century Italian city-states².

This difference is important for our purposes because a systemic view does not require all parts of the system to be incorporated homogeneously. Put differently, a systemic conceptualization of capitalism opens the possibility of different modes of production to be formally subsumed into a capitalist system without necessarily taking the exact forms economic relations assume in the capitalist centers. For example, in the 1970s, the dependency theorists suggested that the seemingly “feudal” (or “semi-feudal”), non-industrialized agrarian economic structures of the twentieth

² Frederick Lane (1966) characterizes Venice to be the first city to become capitalist. Likewise, Fanfani (1933) argues that a form of capitalism already existed in the thirteenth century Italian city-states as explained by Marx (1990).

century—widely categorized as “underdeveloped” satellite/peripheral economies—were not pre-capitalist social formations but they were manifestations of the penetration of capitalist relations into these regions. The world-systems analysts also saw the peripheral (or semi-peripheral) regions not as “external” areas of the capitalist world-economy but as its internal areas and the most integral components. Likewise, using a systemic explanation, in *Capital*, Marx turned attention to this mechanism by showing how the use of the *corvée* system in the Danubian Principalities of Wallachia and the use of slave labor in the U.S. South changed form when these regions were integrated into capitalist world-economy and started to compete for surplus-value production in a capitalist world market (Marx 1990).

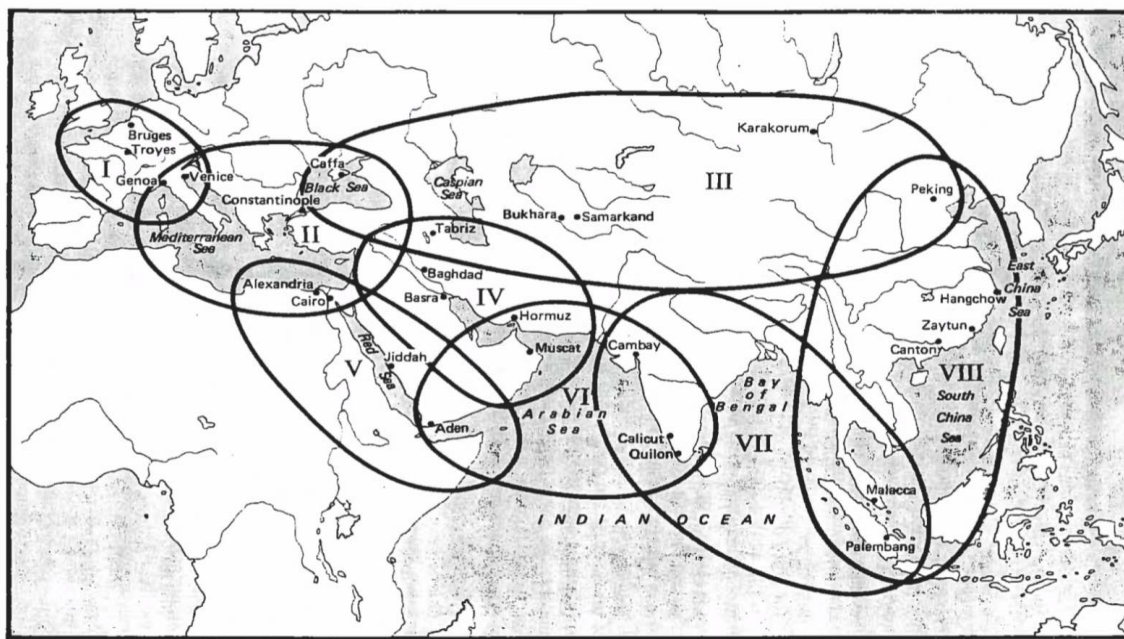
By the same token, Ibn Khaldun's observations seem to suggest that northern Africa and the broader Maghreb region was already a part of an emergent capitalist world-economy in the fourteenth century. So, the thirteenth century Italy was not merely an anomalous region where we first start to see elements of historical capitalism in embryonic forms, but these Italian city-states were also the center of an emergent capitalist production which began to pull the broader Mediterranean into competition for endless accumulation of capital. This is not an abstract speculation as this argument has already been made by Fernand Braudel (1984) as a critique of Wallerstein's conceptualization of the capitalist world-economy. In Volume III of *Civilization and Capitalism*, Braudel (1984) explicitly disagrees with Wallerstein in assigning the sixteenth century a special position in the history of the capitalist world-economy:

For Wallerstein, the European world-economy was the matrix of capitalism. I do not dispute this point, since to say central zone or capitalism is to talk about the same reality. By the same token however, to argue [as I do] that the world-economy built in the sixteenth century on its European site was not the first to occupy this...continent, amounts to saying that capitalism did not wait for the sixteenth century to make its first appearance. I am therefore in agreement with the Marx who wrote (though later went back on this) that European capitalism- indeed he even says capitalist production- began in thirteenth-century Italy. (P. 57)

As Giovanni Arrighi (1998) points out in his discussion of the *nondebates of the 1970s*, Wallerstein has never addressed this critique by Braudel and insisted on the sixteenth century as the starting point of the modern capitalist world-system. The issue at stake, for Arrighi, was not simply a matter of disagreement on the “timing” itself but on the issue of whether or not a qualitatively different capitalist world-system was already in place in the thirteenth century. Braudel's critique of Wallerstein was partly echoed in Janet Abu-Lughod's (1989) documentation of the Eurasian world trading system of the late thirteenth century and the early fourteenth century, as well as Giovanni Arrighi's (1994) discussion of systemic cycles of capitalist accumulation that dates back to Italian city-states. Unfortunately, none of these studies managed to discuss Ibn Khaldun's North Africa as a part of an emergent capitalist world-economy. Although much of the region Ibn Khaldun analyzes is covered as one of the eight circuits in Abu-Lughod's analysis (see Circuit II in Figure 1 below), Abu-Lughod does not center her discussion around “capitalism,” “labor,” or “value.” On the other hand, although Arrighi's discussion is explicitly on historical capitalism, his dual focus on the systemic cycles of capitalist accumulation on the one hand, and

the dynamics of the inter-state system on the other hand, prevents him from analyzing North Africa as an integral part of capitalist world-economy in the thirteenth century. It is noteworthy that none of these historical sociologists cited or referred to Ibn Khaldun in their works.

Figure 1. The Eight Circuits of the Thirteenth Century World System



Source: Abu-Lughod (1989: 34)

Other prominent world-systems scholars who paid closer attention to Ibn Khaldun's works used sections in *The Muqaddimah* as evidence of existence of globalization and global trade networks that predate modern capitalism (Frank 1998) and of the fact that cycles of rising and falling great powers corresponding periods of prosperity and crisis existed before the modern era (Anderson and Chase-Dunn 2005). None of these scholars, however, specifically discussed what Ibn Khaldun's political-economy meant in terms of capitalist world-economy per se.

Four Observations on the Link Between Maghreb and Emergent Capitalist World-Economy in the Fourteenth Century

We argue that Ibn Khaldun's discussion of political-economy in the broader Maghreb region in the fourteenth century opens the possibility that northern Africa was already incorporated into an emergent capitalist world-economy from a peripheral position *without developing a genuinely capitalist process of production but by absorbing existing processes of production into a competition around endless accumulation*³. Similar to the integration of slavery in the U.S. South

³ Therefore, our analysis significantly differs from Maxime Rodinson's (1974) provocative argument in his *Islam and Capitalism* where he argues that capitalistic sectors existed in the Muslim world since the emergence of Islam in the seventh century CE, and even earlier.

or the *corvée* system in the Danubian principalities, a non-capitalist form of production prevalent in North Africa seems to have been integrating into an emergent capitalist world-economy centered in northern Italy in the fourteenth century. To explain why this is the case, below, we will briefly summarize elements in *The Muqaddimah* that suggest the plausibility that North Africa was already integrated into an emergent capitalist world-economy from a peripheral position by the fourteenth century.

First, it is clear from *The Muqaddimah* that Ibn Khaldun sees Maghreb as a poorer part of a Euroasian global trade circuit that includes Europe as well as East Asia. Ibn Khaldun's ([1377] 2015) description of international trade of his time seems to support the trade circuits depicted by Abu-Lughod in Figure 1 above:

At this time, we can observe the condition of the merchants of the Christian nations who come to the Muslims in the Maghrib. Their prosperity and affluence cannot be fully described because it is so great. The same applies to the merchants from the East and what we hear about their conditions, and even more so to the Far Eastern merchants from the countries of the non-Arab Iraq, India, and China. We hear remarkable stories reported by travelers about their wealth and prosperity. These stories are usually received with skepticism. The common people who hear them think that the prosperity of these peoples is the result of the greater amount of property owned by them or of the existence of gold and silver mines in their country in larger number (than elsewhere), or of the fact that they, to the exclusion of others; appropriated the gold of the ancient nations. This is not so. The only gold mine about whose existence in these regions we have information, lies in the Sudan, which is nearer to the Maghrib (than to any other country)... A large civilization yields large profits because of the large amount of (available) labor, which is the cause of (profit). (P. 279)

Ibn Khaldun does not seem to perceive these trade relations as spontaneous and isolated acts but as parts of an interconnected system of commodity production, which causes world-money—gold and silver—to circulate between different countries. This is important because Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2015: 298) believes that “God created these two precious metals, gold and silver, to serve as the measure of all commodities... All other things are subject to market fluctuations, from which (gold and silver) are exempt.”⁴ He maintains that:

treasures of gold, silver, precious stones, and utensils are no different from other minerals and acquired (capital), from iron, copper, lead, and any other real property or (ordinary) minerals. It is civilization that causes them to appear, with the help of human labour, and makes them increase or decrease. All such things in people's possession may be transferred and passed on by inheritance. They have often been transferred from one region to another, and from one dynasty to another, in accordance with the purposes they were to serve and the particular civilization that required them. If money is scarce in the Maghrib and Ifrîqiyah, it is not scarce in

⁴ “God created [these] two mineral ‘stones,’ gold and silver, as the (measure of) value for all capital accumulations. (Gold and silver are what) the inhabitants of the world, by preference, consider treasure and property (to consist of). All other things are subject to market fluctuations, from which (gold and silver) are exempt” (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 298).

the countries of the Slavs and the European Christians. If it is scarce in Egypt and Syria, it is not scarce in India and China. (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 303)

Second, in *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun gives a clear description of how profits can be produced within such trade circuits—anticipating Marx’s M-C-M’ movement. As Banaji (2007: 58) also observed, Ibn Khaldun “defines profit [*riḥ*] as the ‘extent by which capital increases’ (or is increased), and commerce as the ‘striving for profit by means of the expansion of capital [*mu āwala ilā al-kasb bi-tanmiyyat al-māl*].” In terms of making profits through commerce, he wrote:

Commerce means the attempt to make profit by increasing capital, through buying goods at a low price and selling them at a high price, whether these goods consists of slaves, grain, animals, weapons, or clothing material. The accrued (amount) is called ‘profit.’ The attempt to make such a profit may be undertaken by storing goods and holding them until the market has fluctuated from low prices to high prices. This will bring a large profit. Or, the merchant may transport his goods to another country where they are more in demand than in his own, where he bought them. This will bring a large profit. Therefore, an old merchant said to a person who wanted to find out the truth about commerce: “I shall give it to you in two words: Buy cheap and sell dear. There is commerce for you.” (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 309–310).

Here, and elsewhere in *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun explains how long-distance trading can bring more profits using this strategy. In the sections where he discusses capital accumulation through trade, Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2015: 311) seems to anticipate Marx’s argument in Volume 2 of *Capital* in suggesting that transportation of commodities produces value, as he argues that “if [a merchant] brings goods from a country that is far away...merchandise becomes more valuable when merchants transport it from one country to another.” In addition to increasing the value, international trade also increases the prices of commodities. Ibn Khaldun explains how custom duties, in addition to market fluctuations, cause a difference between the value of commodities and their prices. He does not forget to add that capital accumulation through trade requires “cunning, willingness to enter into disputes, cleverness, constant quarrelling and great persistence” (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 313). Although these skills are necessary for the merchant capitalist to “uphold his rights against his debtor” (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 313), these are also “qualities detrimental to and destructive of virtuousness and manliness” (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 313).

Third, despite his explanation of how profit can be produced through commerce and how transport affects value, Ibn Khaldun is extremely skeptical that someone can produce extravagant wealth merely through buying cheaper and selling dearer. In different parts of *The Muqaddimah*, he explains the natural limits of a merchant capital’s ability to accumulate endlessly. He seems to be aware of how competition and increase in customs duties gradually decrease the profits from these activities over time. In different parts of *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun explains why the goal of *endless accumulation is neither feasible nor desirable*. For one thing, he believes that “no one person would have enough wealth to acquire limitless (real) property. Even if prosperity were as great as possible, the accumulation of (real) property would be gradual” (Ibn Khaldun [1377]

2015: 280). Ibn Khaldun did not think that extravagant wealth could be produced by a single person. In his view this type of wealth exists, either as a result of inheritance of value produced from several previous generations or from “fluctuations in the (real estate) market” that produces extraordinary profits especially during violent transitions from one dynasty to another.

When one dynasty ends and another begins, the militia vanishes. There is no protection, and the city collapses and is ruined. At that time, (the possession of) real estate does not make a person happy, because it is of little use in the general upheaval. (Real estate) values fall, and (real estate) can be acquired for low prices. It then passes through inheritance into the possession of someone else. (By that time,) the city has regained its youthful vigour as the new dynasty flourishes, and conditions in it are in excellent shape. The result is that one may be happy with the possession of estates and farms, because they will then be very useful. Their value increases, and they assume an importance they did not have before. This is the meaning of “fluctuation in (the real estate market).” The owner of (real estate) now turns out to be one of the wealthiest men in the city. That is not the result of his own effort and business activity, because he would be unable to achieve such a thing by himself. (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 280–281)

Even if some entrepreneurs were able to achieve super-profits through capitalizing on market fluctuations on these rare occasions, they could not possibly maintain their property and wealth long term. Their assets would likely be seized by those who have access to means of violence such as *amirs* or governors. Thus, production of super-profits from speculation in real-estate would be harmful to these entrepreneurs.

(The motive is) not to accumulate capital through such acquisitions or to provide for extravagant living. This is achieved only by a few and is achieved only rarely through market fluctuations, through the acquisition of a great deal of (real estate), and through the upgrading of real estate as such and its value in a certain city. But then, if someone achieves it, the eyes of *amirs* and governors are directed to him. As a rule, they take it away, or they urge him to sell it to them. It spells harm and hardship to its owners (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 281)

This brings us to the fourth and the most important element of Ibn Khaldun's political-economy for our purposes. In contrast to Sartori's (2013: 119) claims that, first, “what [Ibn Khaldun] meant by ‘profit’ was the wealth created by one's own labor;” and second, Ibn Khaldun “characterized...profit as based not on the productive exploitation of labor but on the sale of merchandise,” *The Muqaddimah* explains several different forms of coercive and consensual profit-extraction forms based on appropriation of other people's labor. According to Ibn Khaldun, however, failing to compensate for someone else's labor fairly has disastrous consequences. As we mentioned before, Ibn Khaldun explains that labor belongs to the things that constitute capital and like other commodities, it should be paid its full value in the market. However, those who have access to means of violence, can force or convince others to do free, coerced, or unfair work, which creates extravagant wealth but simultaneously harms the society:

One of the greatest injustices and one contributing most to the destruction of civilization is the unjustified imposition of tasks and the use of the subjects for

forced labour. This is so because labour belongs to the things that constitute capital. Gain and sustenance represent the value realized from labour among civilized people.... They have no other way to make a profit except (through labour)...if they are obliged to work outside their own field and are used for forced labour unrelated to their (ordinary ways of) making a living, they no longer have any profit and are thus deprived of the price of their labour, which is their capital (asset). (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 241)

As previously noted, throughout various sections of *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun discusses the detrimental effects on civilization of failing to remunerate labor appropriately, considering it a form of oppression and injustice. He frequently cautions the reader to understand that injustice encompasses a wider spectrum of actions, including the restriction of individuals to only certain types of work.

Injustice should not be understood to imply only the confiscation of money or other property from the owners, without compensation and without cause. It is commonly understood in that way, but it is something more general than that. Whoever takes someone's property, or uses him for forced labour, or presses an unjustified claim against him, or imposes upon him a duty not required by the religious law, does an injustice to that particular person. (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 240)

Most interestingly, in *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun explains that appropriation of others' labor may also occur under seemingly non-coercive, non-oppressive ways too. This, for example, happens when a "person of rank"—that is, someone with status and access to political power—commands over others' labor without directly forcing them to do so:

We find that the person of rank who is highly esteemed is in every material aspect more fortunate and wealthier than a person who has no rank. The reason for this is that the person of rank is served by the labor (of others). They try to approach him with their labor, since they want to be close to (him) and are in need of (the protection) his rank affords. People help him with their labor in all his needs, whether these are necessities, conveniences, or luxuries. The value realized from all such labor becomes part of his profit. For tasks that usually require giving some compensation (to the persons who perform them), he always employs people without giving anything in return. He realizes a very high value from their labor. It is (the difference) between the value he realizes from the (free) labor (products) and the prices he must pay for things he needs. He thus makes a very great (profit). A person of rank receives much (free) labor which makes him rich in a very short time. With the passing of days, his fortune and wealth increase. It is in this sense that (the possession of) political power is one of the ways of making a living. The person who has no rank whatsoever, even though he may have property, acquires a fortune only in proportion to the property he owns and in accordance with the efforts he himself makes. Most merchants are in this position. Therefore, (merchants) who have a rank are far better off (than other merchants). (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 304)

What Ibn Khaldun describes here is a distinct way of producing surplus-value through commanding over others' unpaid labor without reliance on direct coercion. Furthermore, this

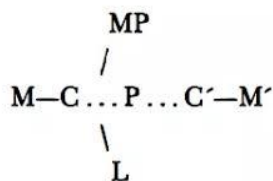
seems to be creating a new class where a certain group of the elites do not do any work but are able to accumulate capital by exploiting others' labor. As Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2015) puts it;

We have seen much of this in cities and towns as well as in the desert. People do farm work and business for these men, who sit at home and do not leave their places. But still their property grows and their profits increase. Without effort, they accumulate wealth, to the surprise of those who do not understand what the secret of their affluence is, what the reasons for their wealth and fortune are. (P. 305)

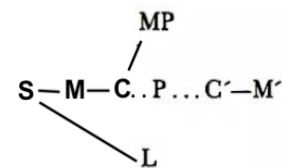
What Ibn Khaldun describes here is not a capitalist mode of production, where a given capital is used in the market to buy means of production and labor-power in an attempt to produce surplus value, as illustrated in Marx's classical formula, reproduced in Figure 2a below. Ibn Khaldun, rather, describes a situation where political status (S)—that is, “rank”, acting as a political form of capital—together with certain initial capital (M) are used to acquire means of production (tools, materials, etc; shown as MP), labor-power is attracted via rank, and both of them are put in motion for the production of surplus value. For comparison purposes, the process Ibn Khaldun describes can be shown in Figure 2b.

Figure 2. Comparison of Two Modes of Production of Surplus Value

a) Capitalist Mode of Production of Surplus Value in Capital Vol. 1



b) Mode of Production of Surplus Value via Rank in *The Muqaddimah*



The capital accumulation strategy depicted in Figure 2b differs significantly from the capitalist mode of production, and it also does not fit within the parameters of the ‘Asiatic’ mode of production. To fully understand this distinctive process of production as it occurred in the Maghreb during the fourteenth century, it is crucial to consider three key features. Firstly, according to *The Muqaddimah*, North Africa during this period was home to various categories of workers: those who voluntarily sold their labor-power as a commodity; individuals who were coerced into certain jobs without fair compensation; people working as servants; and others who resorted to begging or treasure hunting as the only available means of subsistence. However, these situations did not seem to apply to the majority at the time. The majority of the population in North Africa could still subsist through what Ibn Khaldun called the “natural ways of making a living” which included agriculture, hunting, fishing, pastoralism, craftsmanship, other forms of petty-commodity production and commerce (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 299–300). Yet, he also lets the

reader know that “the non-natural ways of making a living” (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 300–305) were also becoming widespread. This encompasses not only the practices through which rulers and individuals of high status secure profits without engaging in labor—a point previously discussed—but also extends to employment as servants and the pursuit of treasure hunting, all of which Ibn Khaldun criticizes as undesirable approaches to livelihood.

Surely, many impoverished and disadvantaged individuals lived in Ibn Khaldun's North Africa (see Rodney 2018: 61–65). However, the information presented in *The Muqaddimah* suggests that these people were not necessarily *compelled* to sell their labor, as is the case in the capitalist mode of production. We learn that it was the responsibility of the governments to care for the poor, widows, orphans, and the blind, and to enhance the livelihoods of their citizens. If really implemented, this approach likely averted the creation of a large pool of destitute workers in urgent need. Coupled with the impact of the Black Death, which reduced the overall supply of laborers, this situation might have fostered a unique environment in major cities where wages did not decline but increased beyond their typical value, as the wealthy competed for the services of these workers, as we discussed above.

The second notable difference in Ibn Khaldun's Maghreb lies in the impossibility of the emergence of an independent capitalist class without access to state power. Echoing Schumpeter's (1987) principle that the bourgeoisie cannot thrive without support from a non-bourgeois faction, Ibn Khaldun explicitly stated that merchants could not retain their assets without protection from individuals with “rank.” This reveals that “rank” plays a dual role in capital accumulation, simultaneously facilitating and constraining it. As expressed in Figure 2b above, the accumulation of surplus-value (M') is not sufficient to produce an M-C-M' movement without a simultaneous increase in political status (i.e. “rank”) (S). Thus, the wealth hierarchy in North Africa seems to align with the rank hierarchies. As Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2015) explains,

Each member of a lower class seeks the support of rank from members of the next higher class, and those who gain it become more active among the people under their control in proportion to the profit they get out of it. Thus, rank affects people in whatever way they make their living. Whether it is influential or restricted depends on the class and status of the person who has a particular rank. If the rank in question is influential, the profit accruing from it is correspondingly great. If it is restricted and unimportant, the (profit) is correspondingly so. (P. 306)

Moreover,

A person who has no rank, even though he may have money, acquires a fortune only in proportion to the labor he is able to produce, or the property he owns, and in accordance with the efforts he makes coming and going to increase it. This is the case with most merchants and, as a rule, with farmers. It also is the case with craftsmen. If they have no rank and are restricted to the profits of their crafts, they will mostly be reduced to poverty and indigence, and they do not quickly become wealthy. They make only a bare living, somehow fending off the distress of poverty. (P. 306)

Of course, in such a political-economic system, the commercial activities of the ruler, who holds the highest rank, could yield extravagant profits if he were to engage in profit-making ventures. However, this would produce a process of centralization of capital by pushing all other competitors and small-scale producers out of business, and thus paradoxically undermine the wealth of the ruler by reducing tax revenues. Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2015) devotes a section of *The Muqaddimah* to explaining why this strategy is highly detrimental to both the subjects and the ruler himself. He notes,

Now, when the ruler, who has so much more money than [other farmers, petty-producers, merchants and subjects in general] competes with them, scarcely one of them will any longer be able to obtain the things he wants, and everybody will become worried and unhappy. Furthermore, the ruler can appropriate much of (the agricultural produce and the available merchandise), if it occurs to him. (He can do this) by force or by buying things up at the cheapest possible price. Thus, he will be able to force the seller to lower his price. [...] Often, the merchant and farmer has to [sell at the lowest prices] over again. He thus exhausts his capital and has to go out of business. [...] Consequently] the revenue from taxes vanishes altogether or becomes dangerously low. (P. 233).

Finally, and most importantly, from Ibn Khaldun's perspective, the desire to accumulate capital, gain extravagant wealth, and access to luxury and abundance has a major detrimental side-effect for the society as a whole. As we mentioned earlier, Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2015) does not see civilization necessarily as progressive. He believes that civilization leads people

to an easy, restful life in the shadow of the ruling dynasty, and to adopt royal habits in building and dress... the more luxuries and plenty they acquire, as well as all other things that go with luxury and plenty.... Eventually, [*asabiyyah*] group feeling is altogether destroyed. They thus invite their own destruction. The greater their luxury and the easier the life they enjoy, the closer they are to extinction... (P. 109)

In the final analysis, as people accumulate more capital and produce abundance, people gradually "sink into luxury." All these processes eventually produce a societal form of alienation, which manifests itself as the dissolution of the *asabiyyah* and the dismantling group feeling/solidarity within the society. In doing so, capital accumulation prepares the preconditions of the society's own demise and its conquest with another group with stronger *asabiyyah*. This is why the history of North Africa, according to Ibn Khaldun, is a cyclical history of the rise and fall of civilizations associated with the rise and fall of their *asabiyyah*.

(In)Equality of Human Labor and the Race Question in *The Muqaddimah*

In the previous section, our analysis aimed at explaining the historical conditions that allowed for Ibn Khaldun's labor theory of value, focusing on North Africa's integration into an emerging Mediterranean-centered capitalist world-economy from a peripheral position during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Nevertheless, the second part of the puzzle remains: How did the labor

theory of value emerge amid widespread slavery in the Maghreb region and a dominant worldview rooted in beliefs of superiority and inferiority of certain human groups? This question is particularly pertinent considering Marx's observation that Aristotle's failure to conceive the labor theory of value was largely due to Greek society's reliance on slavery and its belief in the inherent inequality of men and their labor capacities.

This question is also important because readers of *The Muqaddimah* will quickly encounter numerous quotes by Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2021) that might initially suggest he strongly believed in the inequality of humans, and their abilities, including their labor capacities. For instance, *The Muqaddimah* contains passages such as,

To the south of this Nile, there is a Negro people called Lamlam. They are unbelievers. They brand themselves on the face and temples. The people of Ghana and Takrur invade their country, capture them, and sell them to merchants who transport them to the Maghrib. There, they constitute the ordinary mass of slaves. Beyond them to the south, there is no civilization in the proper sense. There are only humans who are closer to dumb animals than to rational beings. They live in thickets and caves and eat herbs and unprepared grain. They frequently eat each other. They cannot be considered human beings. (P. 118–119)

[T]he Negro nations are, as a rule, submissive to slavery, because (Negroes) have little that is (essentially) human and possess attributes that are quite similar to those of dumb animals, as we have stated. (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 117)

Negroes are generally light-headed, reckless and prompt to mirth, fond of every kind of dancing, and everywhere renowned for their stupidity. (Ibn Khaldun 1950: 46)

In *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun makes several horrible remarks not only about the “Negroes” but also about other groups, such as the Slavs (see e.g., Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2021: 168–9). Many scholars who have encountered these quotes in *The Muqaddimah* have labeled Ibn Khaldun as a “racist” or, at the very least, a product of his time, susceptible to the racial prejudices prevalent in his society (see Dover 1952). Here, we do not aim to conduct a thorough evaluation of these discussions, the challenges in translating these terms into modern English, or problems with extrapolation of our concepts of “race” and “racism” into the context of the fourteenth century. However, understanding Ibn Khaldun's views on human equality is crucial for our argument because, if Ibn Khaldun believed in the inherent inequality of human beings and the incompatibility of their labor power (similar to Aristotle), it would imply that the necessary conditions for Ibn Khaldun's formulation of a labor theory of value, as Marx envisioned in *Capital*, were indeed absent.

We contend that Ibn Khaldun was a believer of human equality and, thus, the equivalence of their labor powers⁵. This thought was partly a result of developments that unfolded six centuries earlier, when the Abbasid Caliphate overthrew the Umayyad Caliphate. The Umayyads had upheld the belief in Arab superiority and favored Arabs, especially those from the Quraish tribe, over all

⁵ It should be noted that this embrace of the concept of equality does not seem to extend to gender equality.

non-Arab ethnic groups, leading to significant dissatisfaction among non-Arabs. As Rodinson (1974: 30) put it, however, “[w]ith the Abbasid revolution of 750, the equality established between ethnic groups [within the Islamic Caliphate].” While the explicitly discriminatory policies of the Umayyad Caliphate were abolished with the Abbasid revolution, one should take the notion of “ethnic equalization” with a grain of salt. At best, the aftermath of the Abbasid revolution bears resemblance to the outcomes of bourgeois revolutions in the following millennium, which, despite advocating for and normalizing the discourse of various forms of human equality in theory, were unable to eliminate (even produced and reproduced) ethnic/racial prejudices and other forms of discrimination in practice. Thus, from the Abbasid Dynasty (750–1258 CE) to the era of Ibn Khaldun, certain forms of prejudices, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices not only persisted but also evolved, giving rise to new forms.

Yet, one of Ibn Khaldun's objectives in *The Muqaddimah*, we argue, was to challenge some of these prejudices and stereotypes of the era by demonstrating that various traits and qualities previously ascribed to certain groups (such as the “Negroes”) were not inherent to “those people” themselves but were rather the products of broader environmental structures and socio-political dynamics. Thus, insofar as race is characterized by inherent, hereditary, and permanent qualities, Ibn Khaldun did not believe in its existence. If we really have to use our contemporary notion of race, then, Ibn Khaldun could be seen as an early proponent of racial constructivism, rejecting the essentialist/primordial or biological determinism of race, aligning more closely with how contemporary critical sociologists view race today (e.g., Chatterjee 1993; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Loveman 1999; Go 2004; Steinmetz 2016). For him, race was a construct, produced by structural (environmental) and socio-political conditions, capable of changing and evolving over time.

If this was the case, however, what went wrong in *The Muqaddimah*? Part of the answer lies in Ibn Khaldun's method. Like Marx several centuries later, Ibn Khaldun also took his method very seriously, sometimes at the cost of being misunderstood⁶. Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2015) explained his view of “history” in the foreword of *The Muqaddimah* as follows:

On the surface history is no more than information about political events, dynasties, and occurrences of the remote past, elegantly presented and spiced with proverbs.... The inner meaning of history, on the other hand, involves speculation and an attempt to get at the truth, subtle explanation of the causes and origins of existing things, and deep knowledge of the how and why of events. History, therefore, is firmly rooted in philosophy. It deserves to be accounted a branch of it. (P. 5)

As Alatas (2014) observes, Ibn Khaldun distinguishes between the history at the level of appearances (*ẓāhir*) and its deeper meaning (*bāṭin*), which he believes can be uncovered through theoretical analysis. A detailed examination of *The Muqaddimah* reveals that many sections within its chapters switch back and forth between detailing these “appearances” and providing a more detailed theoretical exploration of their “deeper meanings.” Many of the appalling quotations about

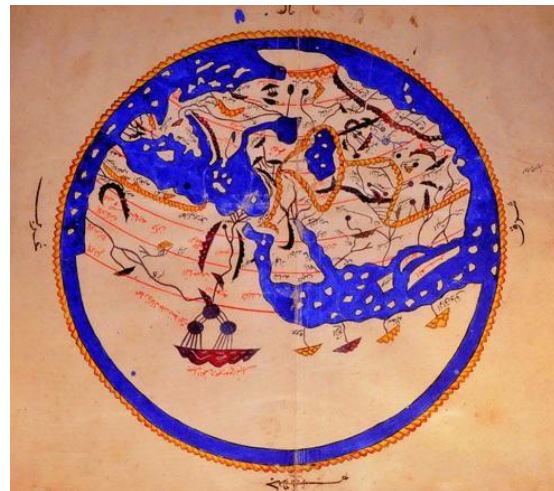
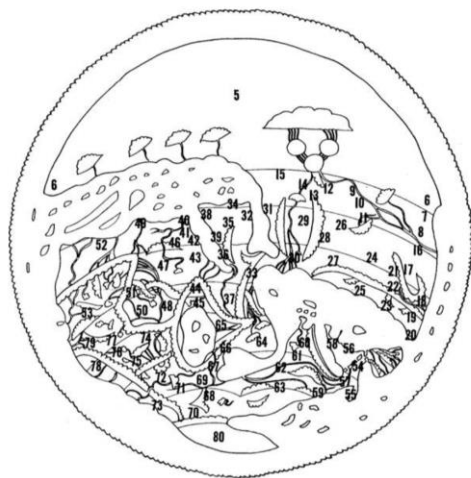
⁶ From our perspective, claiming that Ibn Khaldun was a racist is equivalent to saying that Marx (1990: 116) believed that the value of labor-power was always paid at its value in the capitalist markets because he wrote that “the money-owner buys everything necessary...in the market, and pays for it at its full value.”

Negroes, for example, are from the “First and Second Prefatory Discussions,” where Ibn Khaldun outlines the physical and social geography of the world (and the “human civilization”) as understood by philosophers and scholars of his era. In different parts of the book, he indicates that much of this information was derived from works like Ptolemy's Geography and subsequently by the author of the Book of Roger (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 50). For instance, the First Prefatory Discussion concludes with a reference: “All this was mentioned by Ptolemy in his work and by the Sharif al-Idrisi in the Book of Roger” (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 53). At the outset of the Second Prefatory Discussion, he reminds readers that his summary reflects the knowledge available at that time:

We shall now briefly summarize the best-known countries, rivers, and seas of each section. Our model will be the data set forth in the *Nuzhat al-mushtaq* which al-Alawi al-Idrisi al-Hammudi composed for the Christian king of Sicily, Roger, the son of Roger.... He composed the book in the middle of the sixth [twelfth] century. He utilized many books by authors such as al-Masudi, Ibn Khurradadhbih, al-Hawqali, al-Udhri, Ishaq al-Munajjim, Ptolemy and others. We shall begin with the first zone and go on from there to the last one. (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2021: 116)

Although Ibn Khaldun does not remind the reader for some time, his description of the world—including the characteristic properties attributed to Negroes, the Slavs, and other “races”—are all part of the presentation of the level of knowledge of his time based on his “data” from external sources such as al Idrisi, al Kindi, and so on. Even the map he uses to explain the world is the exact replica of the map (turned upside down) used in the Book of Roger, as we illustrate in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. World Maps in *The Muqaddimah* (left, upside down) and in the *Book of Roger* (right)



Source: Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2021) and Al-Idrisi (1989).

Although it becomes confusing from time to time as Ibn Khaldun does not cite his sources, the often-misunderstood quotations regarding races were part of how the human civilization appeared to philosophers and scholars of Ibn Khaldun's time. However, Ibn Khaldun's real contribution comes elsewhere, when he wants to go beyond these appearances and begins to explain why these characters are attributed to certain groups of people but not others. He believes that geography and climate have played a major role in determining such qualities.

Ibn Khaldun's ([1377] 2015: 63) aim becomes more explicit in Fourth Prefatory Discussion, titled "The influence of climate upon human character," where he says: "We have seen that Negroes are in general *characterized* by levity, excitability, and great emotionalism. They are found eager to dance whenever they hear a melody. They are everywhere *described* as stupid" (emphasis ours)⁷. In this section, he argues that "the real reason for these opinions" (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 63) is the influence of climate on these human beings. He does not forget to add that:

Al-Masudi undertook to investigate the reason for the levity, excitability, and emotionalism in Negroes, and attempted to explain it. However, he did no better than to report, on the authority of Galen and Ya'qub b. Ishaq al-Kindi, that the reason is a weakness of their brains which results in a weakness of their intellect. This is an inconclusive and unproven statement (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 64).

As readers carefully move from one section to another, it becomes clear that Ibn Khaldun aims to refute almost all generalizations regarding racial stereotypes of his time. Following in the footsteps of Greek philosopher Hippocrates and Muslim philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Ibn Khaldun does not believe in the biological or genealogical nature of races or even skin-colors. He believes that the skin color that has widely been attributed to race is nothing but a product of the heat and cold associated with different climates:

The black skin common to the inhabitants of the first and second zones is the result of the composition of the air in which they live, and which comes about under the influence of the greatly increased heat in the south. The sun is at the zenith there twice a year at short intervals. In all seasons, the sun is in culmination for a long time. The light of the sun, therefore, is plentiful. People there have to go through a very severe summer, and their skins turn black because of the excessive heat. Something similar happens in the two corresponding zones to the north, the seventh and sixth zones. There, a white skin is common among the inhabitants, likewise the result of the composition of the air in which they live, and which comes about under the influence of the excessive cold in the north.... In consequence, the colour of the inhabitants is white, and they tend to have little body hair. Further consequences of the excessive cold are blue eyes, freckled skin, and blond hair. (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 59–60)

The same heat and climate, Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2015: 64) observes, also affect people's "levity, excitability, and emotionalism" and all other attributes ascribed to them. To put it in a

⁷ At the end of Third Prefatory Discussion, for example, Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2021: 168–9) writes, "it has even been *reported* that most of the Negroes of the first zone dwell in caves and thickets, eat herbs, live in savage isolation and do not congregate, and eat each other.... The reason for this is their remoteness from being temperate" (emphasis ours).

more scientific way, he suggests that the observed empirical relationship between races and their qualities are *spurious* relationships caused by the effect of climate and other structural forces. There is nothing inherent with these racial groups.

At the end of Third Prefatory Discussion, Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2015) provides a general criticism of genealogical theory of racial differences. He notes that,

among the inhabitants of these zones about whom we have historical information are, for instance, the Arabs, the Byzantines (Rum), the Persians, the Israelites, the Greeks, the Indians, and the Chinese. When genealogists noted differences between these nations, their distinguishing marks and characteristics, they considered these to be due to their different descents. They declared all the Negro inhabitants of the south to be descendants of Ham. (P. 61)

This, from Ibn Khaldun's ([1377] 2015) perspective, was a major "error" because he believed that seemingly physical traits and markers attributed to race could change as the physical geography and climate surrounding people changed:

To generalize and say that inhabitants of a specific geographical location in the south or in the north are descendants of such-and-such...because they have a common colour, trait, or physical mark which that forefather had, is one of those errors which are caused by disregard, both of true nature of created beings and of geographical facts. (There also is disregard of the fact that the physical circumstances and environment) are subject to changes that affect later generations. P. 61–62)

Some parts of Ibn Khaldun's critique of racial stereotypes in *The Muqaddimah* was part of his refutation of the "Curse of Ham," which was often used to justify anti-Black racism throughout the transatlantic slave-trade (Bashir 2019: 96). In *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2015) turned attention to the lack of any racial traits in biblical texts:

Genealogists who had no knowledge of the true nature of things imagined that Negroes are the children of Ham, the son of Noah, and that they were singled out to be black as the result of Noah's curse, which produced Ham's color and the slavery God inflicted upon his descendants. It is mentioned in the Torah that Noah cursed his son Ham. No reference is made there to blackness. The curse included no more than that Ham's descendants should be the slaves of his brothers' descendants. To attribute the blackness of the Negroes to Ham, reveals disregard of the true nature of heat and cold and of the influence they exercise upon the climate and upon the creatures that come into being in it. (P. 59)

Besides the effects of geography on the construction of racial differences, Ibn Khaldun's explanation also took into account historical and socio-political contingencies that produced some of the qualities that are attributed to certain races. For example, while many of the philosophers of his time and before him believed that "negroes are, as a rule, submissive to slavery," as cited by Ibn Khaldun, to him, such characteristic was not linked to Negroes but to a consequence of a lost political struggle. In the section, where he explained this quote, Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 2015) wrote:

A nation that has been defeated and has come under the rule of another nation will quickly perish. The reason for this may possibly lie in the apathy that comes over people when they lose control of their own affairs and, through enslavement, become the instrument of others and dependent upon them. Hope diminishes and weakens. (P. 117)

In the Fifth Prefatory Discussion, he explains how economic factors with respect to abundance and scarcity impact the human body and character (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2021). Moreover to show why characteristics hitherto attributed to different racial groups were not traits of those groups but combined consequences of *geography, climate, history, and economics*, Ibn Khaldun compares human groups and gives plenty examples of white peoples (such as Slavs) who shared similar descriptions with Negroes; of Black peoples who did not share any of the characteristics that were attributed to Negroes; of Black peoples who gradually turned white; and of white peoples who gradually turned Black. For example, he observes that:

Negroes from the south who settle in the temperate fourth zone or in the seventh zone that tends toward whiteness, are found to produce descendants whose colour gradually turns white in the course of time. Vice versa, inhabitants from the north, or from the fourth zone who settle in the south produce descendants whose colour turns black. This shows that colour is conditioned by the composition of the air. (Ibn Khaldun [1377] 2015: 60)

Similarly, Ibn Khaldun's ([1377] 2021) examination of racial classifications also considered the impact of power dynamics in shaping the conventional interpretations of these terms. For instance, he noted:

The inhabitants of the north are not called by their color because the people who established the conventional meanings of words were themselves white. Thus, whiteness was something usual and common (to them), and they did not see anything sufficiently remarkable in it to cause them to use it as a specific term. Therefore, the inhabitants of the north, the Turks, the Slavs, the Tughuzghuz, the Khazars, the Alans, most of the European Christians, the Gog and Magog are found to be separate nations and numerous races called by a variety of names [as opposed to a common skin color]. (P. 172)

In short, Ibn Khaldun made a major effort in *The Muqaddimah* to challenge and deconstruct racial stereotypes of his time. He maintained that characteristics attributed to racial groups (such as the “Negroes”) were not intrinsic to those groups but were rather shaped by environmental, socio-political, and economic factors. Thus, to the extent that Ibn Khaldun addressed the concept of 'race,' he advanced a view that sees it as a fluid construct, open to change and transformation, rather than as a fixed biological determinant.

Concluding Discussion: Towards a Long-Historical Conceptualization of Modernity, Capitalism and Racism

These observations highlight that Ibn Khaldun's views on the equality of humans (and their labor power) were significantly different from those of Aristotle, who argued that some individuals were natural slaves, designed for physical labor and lacking the rational capacity for self-governance. Ibn Khaldun, in contrast, critically addressed prevailing racial stereotypes, myths, and the genealogical theories that justify human inequality prevalent during his time. The question of whether or not the social, political, and legal-administrative structures of Ibn Khaldun's North Africa could be called "racist," however, is more difficult to answer. To answer this question, we need to consider the strictly "modern" nature of the term, which has its links in colonialism and empire (Chatterjee 1993; Go 2004; Steinmetz 2016) and competition for power within the capitalist world-economy (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991).

The real difficulty partly lies in the way our analysis forces us to rethink "modernity" in this paper. As our analysis (of historical preconditions of a labor theory of value) makes clear, we maintain that capitalism (like racism) is a distinctively modern phenomenon. However, as our analysis of Ibn Khaldun's political-economy and broader dynamics of world economy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries suggest, dynamics we associate with modernity may not be as recent as widely assumed. One of the authors of this paper already argued that many main pillars of modern society—capitalism, nationalism and chauvinism (in Hannah Arendt's sense)—can already be found in an embryonic form in Italian city-states in the fourteenth century (Karataşlı 2016). In this paper, through an analysis of Ibn Khaldun's *The Muqaddimah*, we assessed the probability of extending some elements of this argument to the southern shores of the Mediterranean by showing that material preconditions of the discovery of labor theory of value was present in fourteenth century North Africa, which was being integrated from a peripheral position into an emerging Mediterranean-based and Italy-centered capitalist world-economy during Ibn Khaldun's era.

Rethinking the historical co-evolution of capitalism and racism—along with modern states, competing empires, and nationalism—as key pillars of modernity produces an interesting contradiction, which may help us rethink racism from a modernist perspective. This contradiction can be summarized as follows: ideas about the modernity of "value" (and Marx's insights regarding the conditions for the possibility of discovering the labor theory of value) were based on the premise that human societies and their corresponding ideological structures gradually moved from a world of perceived inequality of human beings and in-equivalency of their labor to a world of perceived equality of human beings and equivalency of their labor. This narrative is reflected in bourgeois ideology in general. However, when historical sociologists and critical scholars of race theorize "racism," they rightly emphasize its modern nature (defined as a hierarchical conceptualization of human groups, their unequal treatment, and their "scientific" justifications) with a focus on the role played by capitalist modernity and imperial colonization by Western Empires as part of their competition for power and prestige within the capitalist world-economy. In this latter narrative, it appears as if the world has moved in the opposite direction: from a world

of heterarchical racial relations, where racial groups were seen as equal (or non-existing or non-comparable), to a hierarchical one where they are perceived and treated unequally.

The resolution of this contradiction, by understanding how both narratives can simultaneously be accurate, tells us something essential about the modern nature of *racism* in a capitalist world economy. What lies at the core of racism does *not* seem to be an unequal perception and a corresponding unequal treatment of human groups based on relations of domination. If this was the case, there would be no need for ideological or scientific justification anyway. From the perspective presented in this paper, what lies at the core of racism seems to be unequal treatment of human groups *despite the intuitive understanding—at least at the level of political-economic relationships—that all human beings are equal and their labor-powers are equivalent*. This is precisely why racism needs a scientific *justification* based on the biological nature of race in the modern era. This suggests that in a capitalist world economy where humans are widely regarded as holders of homogeneous, interchangeable labor powers yet not treated as such in the domains of economy, society, and politics, the presence of racist politics (or people or actions) is not a prerequisite for the emergence of racism. Under these conditions, mere neutrality—that is, failing to actively combat the unequal treatment of racial groups—is sufficient to produce and reproduce racism. Therefore, it is notable to see that in the *Muqaddimah*, we find not only a labor theory of value rooted in an intuitive understanding of the equivalence of humans and their labor, but also a serious intellectual effort to counteract prevailing theories and ideas that challenge and undermine these equivalences.

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