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Genealogy or Asabiyya? Ibn Khaldun between Arab Nationalism and the Ottoman Caliphate

NURULLAH ARDIÇ, İstanbul Şehir University

Introduction

Ibn Khaldun’s concept of asabiyya, as well as his view of the rise and fall of civilizations as outlined in his theory of ʿumran, are known to have influenced generations of scholars since the late 16th century. To a certain extent, the Ottoman elites of the 16th–19th centuries also adopted the Khaldunian view of history and politics, and there has been some modern research done on Ibn Khaldun’s impact on these Ottoman intellectuals as well. However, the role played by this important Muslim thinker in the political struggles of the Ottoman milieu has not been paid enough attention.

This article examines Ibn Khaldun’s ‘contribution’ to the political debates on the Ottoman Caliphate during the first quarter of the twentieth century, particularly during World War I and its aftermath. It discusses an important debate between pro-Ottoman actors and Arab nationalists on what is known as the “Quraysh question,” which centered on a hadith that states that the caliph must be a member of the Quraysh tribe of Mecca (of which Prophet Muhammad was a member) as a precondition for caliphate. In this connection, the article analyzes how Ibn Khaldun’s interpretation of this problem was appropriated by Ottoman intellectuals and political actors in relation to the “Arab caliphate” project that developed in the context of British and French colonialism in the Middle East. While Arab nationalists stressed the ethnic background of the leader as a fundamental precondition for caliphate, Ottoman supporters chose to embrace the Khaldunian theory instead, which emphasized the asabiyya of the caliph’s rule, rather than his genealogy or tribal affiliation.

The Historical Context

Since the Qur’an does not contain prescriptions for any specific political system, but rather emphasizes only general principles (such as justice, consultation, and preventing oppression), the theory of the caliphate was derived from the practices of Muslim society during the period c.e. 610–660. This society during these fifty years was under the leadership of the
Prophet Muhammad and the first four caliphs (Abu Bakr, Omar, Othman, and Ali), who are regarded as the “best of mankind after the prophets,” especially by Sunni Muslims. The classical theory found in the *Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah* (“The Rules of Government”) literature that first emerged in the eleventh century³ defined the caliphate as “a succession from the Prophet, and as such, a general leadership/authority on matters of religion and the world.”⁴ It proposes that a caliph should be just, knowledgeable and virtuous, and must be either elected by the *Ahl al-hal wa al-* ʿ*aqd* (the prominent members of the Muslim community) or appointed by a previous caliph, and then approved by the larger community by getting its *bayʾah* (“consent”). This early literature often emphasizes the legitimacy and significance of the first four “rightly-guided caliphs” while maintaining the illegitimacy of the Umayyad caliphate (661–750). Later, the Abbasid dynasty (751–1258) was usually regarded as legitimate by the *ulema*. When the Islamic world was in chaos in the eleventh and thirteenth centuries as a result of the Buwayhi and Mongolian invasions, respectively, some scholars, including Ibn Khaldun, viewed political and military power (as opposed to genealogy) as a legitimate source of authority for the caliph.⁵

Some of the early political theorists of Islam (e.g., al-Mawardi [972–1058]) also stipulated that the caliphate belonged to the Prophetic family and therefore the caliph should be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. This argument was based on an authentic tradition of the Prophet, known as the Quraysh *hadīth*, which stated that “Imams are from the Quraysh.”⁶ This genealogical requirement was a problem for neither the Umayyads nor the Abbasids, since both of these dynasties had branched out from the Prophet’s blood relatives. Following the Mongolian invasions in 1258, however, the “Quraysh condition” became problematic as the Abbasid dynasty collapsed, and the descendants of the Prophet in the Sunni world lost their political and military power.

In light of this development, a number of Sunni theorists, including ʿAyni, al-Jurjani, al-Baqillani and Ibn Khaldun (the first three being leading theologians), discarded the Qurayshite descent as an essential element of the Sunni theory of the caliphate.⁷ They argued that the ruling contained in the Quraysh *hadīth* was specific to the period of the Prophet and the first four caliphs (610–660), and that the *hadīth* was no longer applicable under the new circumstances. Ibn Khaldun in particular argued that the reason the Prophet Muhammad mentioned the Quraysh tribe in the *hadīth* was related to their strong *asabīyya* at the time: Mecca was the only polity that was strong enough to bring together all other tribes under the rule of one—the Quraysh—and thus unite the Muslim community. He argued that since the Quraysh were no longer the dominant dynastic group in the Muslim world (because the power of its *asabīyya* had declined), this *hadīth* was no longer applicable. Ibn Khaldun thus argued:

[A] direct relationship with the Prophet . . . exists [in the case of Qurayshite descent], and it is a blessing. However, it is known that the religious law has not as its purpose to provide blessings. Therefore, if descent be made a condition [of the imamate], there must be a [public] interest which was the purpose behind making it into law. If we probe into the matter and analyze it, we find that the [public] interest is nothing else but regard for group feeling [*asabīyya*]. . . . Therefore we consider it a [necessary] condition for the person in charge of the affairs of the Muslims that he belong to people who possess a strong group feeling, superior to that of their contemporaries, so that they can force the others to follow them and the whole thing can be united for effective protection. . . .

Furthermore, [the world of] existence attests to [the necessity of group feeling for the caliphate]. Only he who has gained superiority over a nation or a race is able to handle affairs. The religious law would hardly ever make a requirement in


⁷ Arnold, *Caliphate*, 74–76; Avci, “Hilafet.”
contradiction to the requirements of existence. And God, He is exalted, knows better. 8

Hence for Ibn Khaldun, the Quraysh condition could be discarded as an element of caliphate theory. Instead, Ibn Khaldun and others emphasized political and military power as fundamental preconditions for being caliph, already included in the classical theory of the caliphate. The presence of a number of *hadith* that denied the Quraysh tribe any religious or political privilege (see below) also justified the Khaldunian position.

With the decline of the Abbasid caliphate, the Ottoman Empire took over the caliphal flag. Selim I (reigned 1512–1520) “transferred” the caliphate from Cairo to Istanbul in 1517, after which his descendants carried the title of the caliph until after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1922. The official Ottoman historiography claims that the last Abbasid Caliph, Mutawakkil ʿAlallah III, voluntarily left his title to the Ottoman Sultan, Selim I, in a ceremony that took place in the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. 9 Some modern historians dispute the “transfer” of the caliphate from the Mamluks to the Ottomans on the grounds that no such ceremony is recorded in historical sources; they argue instead that it was invented by the 18th-century historian D’Ohsson, whose work was the first to mention it.10 However, this argument is narrowly focused on the ‘ceremony’, and misses the main point: a ceremony was not required, or had ever occurred, before Selim I, for the transfer of the caliphate.

The real legal issue for the Ottomans was the problem of the caliph’s genealogy. Moreover, according to many historical sources, Ottoman sultans used the title Caliph both before—at least since Murad II (1421–1451)—and after Selim I.11 However, starting from Selim I, they also used the title of Great Caliph (*Halife-i Uzma*) in official documents, and asked in their letters to other Muslims rulers that they be recognized as the true caliphs of the Muslim world in an attempt to revive the political power of the caliphate.12 Furthermore, the argument that Ottoman sultans claimed this title only when the Empire was weak13 is also contradicted by historical evidence. For example, the powerful sultan Mehmed II (1451–1481) was referred to as “Caliph” by contemporary sources; similarly, Süleyman I (1520–1566), in whose reign the Ottoman Empire was at the peak of its military and political power, was one of the sultans who most frequently used this title.14 In fact, in his letters to less powerful rulers he demanded that his caliphate be recognized by them.15

Obviously, the Ottomans were not of prophetic descent; notwithstanding, the Quraysh condition did not emerge as a major problem for them during the classical period of the Empire (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries), since the Ottomans were the strongest Muslim state at the time, with virtually no challengers. The Quraysh condition remained only a theoretical problem, which was relatively easily addressed by the Ottomans, who often drew on Ibn Khaldun’s interpretation of the Quraysh *hadith*.

Although it has been argued that Ibn Khaldun was first “discovered” by Orientalists in the context of European colonialism in the nineteenth century and that he “was not a famous Muslim scholar before he achieved fame among non-Muslims of expansionist Europe,”16 recent research has shown that this was not true: there were many manuscript (and, later, published) copies of the *Mugaddima* in the libraries of Istanbul and other Ottoman cities, and many commentaries were written on it by pre-nineteenth century

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13 See, e.g., S. Akgün, *Halifelüğin Kaldırılması ve Laiklik* (İstanbul, 2006).
15 M. Gökbilgin, *Kanuni Sultan Süleyman* (İstanbul, 1992), 96–99. I do not wish to imply that the Ottoman rulers were accepted by everyone as a universal leader (caliph) of the Muslim *ummah*, only that they tried to get other rulers’ recognition and to revive the political power of the caliphate, starting from the mid-sixteenth century.
16 See, e.g., B. Lawrence, ed., *Îbn Khaldun and Islamic Ideology*, (Leiden, 1984), 5.
Ottoman scholars. Moreover, Cornell Fleischer has shown that Ottoman intellectuals knew the *Muqaddima* at the end of the sixteenth century, and that such leading scholars as Kâtip Çelebi and Naimâ in the seventeenth century made explicit references to Ibn Khaldun. Furthermore, the *Muqaddima* gained popularity and was translated into Ottoman Turkish in the early eighteenth century, when Sheikh al-Islam Pirizâde Mehmed Sâhib Efendi (d. 1749) translated (and commented on) the first two-thirds of the book between 1725 and 1730, which was the *Muqaddima’s* first-ever translation from Arabic. A century later, the rest of the book was translated in part by İsmail Ferruh Efendi (Bulaq 1274/1857; Istanbul 1275/1858) and then in full by the scholar and Grand Vizier Ahmed Cevdet Pasha (d. 1895), who published the entire translation in Istanbul in 1860. Therefore, it is safe to say that Ibn Khaldun was widely read by the Ottoman intellectuals and statesmen at least since the late sixteenth century.

Ottoman jurists and intellectuals embraced the Khaldunian position (though not necessarily directly from him) on the Quraysh issue early on. For example, the historian Lütfi Pasha, who was also Sultan Süleyman I’s Grand Vizier, solved this potential legitimization problem by justifying the absence of tan Süleyman I’s Grand Vizier, solved this potential ample, the historian Lütfi Pasha, who was also Sul-

The debate over the “Quraysh condition” for the caliphate was, as mentioned above, revived in the late Ottoman era (late nineteenth century) when Arab nationalists, with the “encouragement” of the British and the French, made a claim for an Arab Caliphate. The proponents of the “Arab Caliphate,” such as Egyptian intellectuals Abdur-rahman al-Kawkabi and Rashid Rida, based their objection to Ottoman rule on the claim that the Ottoman sultans had seized the caliphate from the Abbasids by force, and that Arabs had a religious and historical right to the caliphate. In particular, they claimed that the caliph should be a member of the Quraysh tribe, based on the Quraysh *hadith*. This claim in particular, and Arab nationalism in general, had a close connection with the international political context of the early twentieth century—i.e., with British and French colonial activities. Both Britain and France had plans to install ‘puppet’ caliphs in the Arab world to politically and ideologically control Muslims in colonial India and North Africa. The French were planning to create a “Maghrib caliphate” by installing Sultan Yusuf of Morocco as caliph, whereas the British wanted to create an “Arab caliphate” under their own control by helping Sharif Hussein of Mecca declare his rule.

The main aim of the colonial powers was to break the political and ideological power of the Ottoman sultan on their Muslim colonies, and ultimately to destroy the Ottoman caliphate, which was a real threat to their interests in the Muslim World. For this purpose, they started an anti-Ottoman campaign, which involved the effective propaganda for the illegitimacy of the Ottoman caliphate (discussed above) that also affected Arab nationalist intellectuals and politicians.

The Problem of Alternative Caliphs and the Quraysh *Hadith*

Supported by both the major colonial powers (except for Germany) and the European press, the Arab na-
tionalist movement flourished, particularly in Syria and Egypt. Arab nationalists often brought up the Quraysh condition primarily in order to question the legitimacy of the Ottoman sultan’s status as the “Caliph of all Muslims.” They also emphasized this issue (and utilized the famous hadith as a basis for it) as a discursive ground on which claims for an Arab caliphate could be built. In fact, later, when Sharif Hussein of Mecca and King Fuad of Egypt made claims for the caliphate in 1924 and 1926 respectively, their supporters would often resort to the Quraysh hadith to justify their claims.

On the other hand, pro-Ottoman intellectuals and politicians responded to the Arab nationalist (and European) challenge to the Ottoman caliph by emphasizing his status as the only legitimate leader of the Muslim ummah. They also strongly stressed the illegitimacy of the claims for alternative caliphates by Arab leaders. A major discursive strategy they employed as part of this struggle was invoking the canon texts of Islam, i.e., the Qurʾan and the prophetic hadith. They particularly resorted to the famous “ul al-amr” verse (Qurʾan, 5:59) that commands to obey God, the Prophet and “those vested with authority among [Muslims].” This Qurʾanic verse, along with certain hadiths, was particularly useful for the supporters of the Ottoman sultan due to the fact that the Qurʾan and the prophetic hadiths had an unquestionable authority for Muslims.

In addition to referencing Qurʾanic verses and prophetic traditions for legitimization purposes, many of the pro-Ottoman actors also invoked them for bringing up more specific themes to defend the Ottoman caliphate. One of the more popular themes in this context was the question of alternative caliphs. During World War I this question turned out to be a significant problem for the Ottoman political center, which had been greatly weakened by then. Some local leaders, such as Sharif Hussein, the Sharif of Mecca, and Yusuf, the Sultan of Morocco, sought to base their claims for caliphate on their purported prophetic descent.

To support the Ottoman caliphate against these claims, some activists who had ties to the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the ruling party in Istanbul, published several declarations, pamphlets and books. For example, Muhammad Safa, who was an Egyptian journalist and a member of the Ottoman secret service, the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa, wrote a book, entitled The Islamic Caliphate and the Ottomans.25 Published in Istanbul both in Arabic and Turkish, the book was a direct critique of Arab nationalists and their use of the Quraysh argument. The dissemination of such publications in the Middle East, North Africa and Europe was largely funded by the CUP. These publications presented the Ottoman Empire as the “Great Caliphate” (Hilafet-i Uzma), emphasizing that on religious grounds there could only be one caliph at a time, and accusing the competing claims as heretical and the principal cause of disunity among Muslims. Accordingly, they presented the “false caliphs” as puppets of the imperialist powers—Britain, France and Italy. The Islamic discourse on the question of multiple caliphs found in these pro-Ottoman publications tended to rely heavily on prophetic traditions.

This theme was dominant particularly in the writings of North African and Arab traditionalist scholar-activists in support of the Ottoman position—such as Sheikh Ismail Safayihi, Salih Sharif Tunusi, Sheikh Salih Yafi and Muhammad Safa, who all quoted different versions of the same hadith that stated that if a rival imam (caliph) were to emerge with a claim for leadership, he should be punished by death for violating God’s command and disturbing the unity of the Muslim ummah.26 Similarly, Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari, the president of the Muslim League of India (1918–1920), a member of the Indian National Congress, and a friend of Gandhi’s, cited the same hadith (together with Qurʾanic verse 26:49), referred to Sharif Hussein by name, and accused him of back-stabbing the Muslim world in the midst of war by revolting against the legitimate “Caliph of Islam” and therefore violating an important principle of the Sharia:

Carried away by his ambition and selfish interests, Sharif Hussein revolted against the Caliph of Islam, who was to be unquestionably obeyed, as he himself admits. By doing this, he not only violated a principle of civilized ethics, but he also failed to observe a command by Allah and His Messenger as described in the Muslim faith and religious teachings. . . .The Prophet said that “Evil tithes will come repeatedly. But he who seeks to separate this ummah, which is a


united community, slay him with the sword, be he who he may.”

Likewise, in the last of his three pamphlets on the caliphate, Tunusi, a scholar and intellectual from the Maghrib, criticized the Moroccan sultan, citing a different hadith (“Whoever creates dissension within, or tries to separate from, the ummah is acting with Satan”28) and accused him of committing a great sin.29 This discourse was part of an effort to resist the apparent disintegration of the Muslim world by saving the Ottoman caliphate at a time when that world was undergoing an intense process of colonization by the European powers. The prophetic hadiths that emphasized Muslim unity were thought to be effective sources by the pro-Ottoman actors against the “separatist” claims for alternative caliphates.

As part of the same effort, some intellectuals who supported the Ottoman sultan felt compelled to respond to what is known as the “Quraysh question”— that of the caliph’s ethnic connection to the Quraysh tribe. As mentioned above, this problem emerged when Britain, France and Italy began to be concerned about the Ottoman Caliph Abdülhamid II’s potential destabilizing influence on Muslims living in their colonies in India, the Middle East and North Africa in the last quarter of the 19th century. When Abdülhamid was deposed and replaced by a weak caliph in 1908, the European powers accelerated their efforts to undermine the caliphate with anti-Ottoman propaganda in their colonies, claiming that a Turkish caliph who had not come from a Quraysh tribe could not be a true one, and that the Ottomans had seized this title by force from the true Arab (Abbasid) caliph in the sixteenth century.

At this point, the powerful CUP government started to pursue—however temporarily and partially—a policy of Panturkism (unification of Turkic peoples), in addition to Panislamism. When some Arab nationalist ulema, led by al-Kawakibi (1854–1902), “re-discovered” (à la Hobsbawn’s “invention of tradition”) and re-popularized the hadith of the Prophet (“Imams are from the Quraysh”30), they took up the Europeans’ claims and legitimized them with reference to this particular hadith. Arab nationalists such as Sharif Hussein and al-Kawakibi constantly exploited the hadith as part of their plans to establish an Arab caliphate after gaining independence from the Ottoman Empire. Many Arab nationalists, including Rashid Rida, discussed the hadith in detail in their writings on the caliphate. Referring to such classical theorists as al-Mawardi, al-Taftazani and Ibn Humam, Rida described in detail how being the Prophet’s descendant was a fundamental prerequisite for the caliphate, which was supposed to be a single and exclusive rule.31 This, he argued, nullified the caliphate of the Ottoman sultans, which clearly violated this principle.

The Quraysh condition has been agreed upon by all ulema resulting in an ijma [scholarly consensus]; it [the hadith] was reported by reliable hadith scholars, and all the Sunni theologians and jurists have used it as evidence. Moreover, the historical practice has always been in this line since the people of Medina accepted a Prophet from Quraysh and obeyed him. The ummah, too, has always obeyed him for centuries now; so much so that nobody has ever dared to seize the caliphate by force, other than the Turks who forced the Abbasids to recognize their suzerainty. . . .32

The idea that the caliph was required to be a member of the Quraysh tribe was a discursive strategy based on the unquestionable authority of Prophet Muhammad in Islam. It was a very useful instrument for Arab nationalists because it both legitimized their plans to secede from the Ottoman Empire and accomplished this through a religious discourse: the hadith implied, on the one hand, that the Ottoman rule in the Arab world was not a legitimate one, and that Arabs had a religious (hence unquestionable) right to caliphate, on the other. It was also useful in terms of shielding the Arab nationalist movement against the potential charge that nationalism was an un-Islamic ideology. In this case, an Islamic justification was in dispensable for the nationalists because religion was the ultimate source of legitimacy in Muslim society.

30 al-Nishaburi, al-Mustadrak ʿala al-Sahîhayn, IV: 76.
32 Ibid., 19.
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Yet pro-Ottoman actors, too, resorted to religious justification in their critique of the Arab nationalist movement. Those living in the peripheral provinces of the caliphate such as those in North Africa—Egypt in particular—quickly reacted to the Arab nationalist movement, perceiving it as a real threat to Muslim unity under the existing caliphate. The primary discursive strategy in their response was to invoke sacred texts of Islam, particularly the prophetic traditions, as well as resorting to the help of Islamic intellectual tradition, including the works of Ibn Khaldun.

Pro-Ottoman actors applied two main discursive techniques against the nationalist claim for the Quraysh condition. First, they cited several hadiths that denied any ethnic requirement for the leadership of the ummrah. Secondly, they re-interpreted the Quraysh hadith, which was technically an authentic (i.e., irrefutable) one, in a way that allowed them to justify a non-Quraysh ruler’s caliphate. As mentioned above, they derived this reinterpretation from such leading classical scholars as Ibn Khaldun, ‘Ayni, al-Jurjani and al-Baqillani, who had argued that, in the hadith, the Prophet mentioned the Quraysh not because of his ethnic identity, but because it was the only tribe at the time that was able to unite all tribes under its leadership due to its special political and ideological status. Thus, the strongest available state (i.e., the Ottoman Empire) could now assume this title based on its paramount asabiyya.

Ibn Khaldun had lived and produced his work in a context in which the Muslim world was in chaos following the Mongolian invasions. This chaotic situation was epitomized by the fall of Baghdad in 1258 on the one hand, and the social and political disintegration of Muslim society in North Africa and Iberia during the same century on the other. The political turmoil without doubt affected Ibn Khaldun’s view of the caliphate.

Therefore, it is no surprise that the later Ottomans, who were under similarly chaotic political and military conditions, took up the Khaldunian theory of the caliphate. The post-World War I period was characterized by a political crisis in which the supporters of the Ottoman caliphate had to defend it against intellectual attacks by European imperialists and Arab nationalists. They saw Arab nationalism as a separatist movement supported by Britain and France during the first quarter of the twentieth century. For this reason, they heavily emphasized the idea (and policy) of the unification of Muslims (İttihad-i İslam) already put into effect by Abdülhamid II in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. As part of this strategy, the Ottoman(ist) intellectuals and political leaders embraced the Khaldunian theory of the caliphate and his interpretation of the Quraysh question. Those who opposed the Ottoman caliphate, on the other hand, mostly ignored the Khaldunian approach—which was a discursive technique in itself—and focused exclusively on the Quraysh hadith. Unlike the anti-Ottoman camp, however, some (though not all) of the Ottoman supporters took the challenge posed by the Quraysh issue head-on, responding to it from the Khalidunian point of view. They tried to prove that the ruling contained in the hadith could not be applicable under current circumstances, and sometimes presented lengthy discussions of the problem.34

Among the pro-Ottoman intellectuals, Ismail Safayihi, the former Chief Justice of Tunisia, delved into a detailed discussion of the Quraysh hadith and presented a number of other hadiths as counter-evidence in his book entitled Warning [Muslim] Brothers against the Tactics of the Enemy, which he wrote during World War I.35 Reviewing the relevant Islamic literature with sophisticated argumentation in the manner of a classical scholar, he stated that the “Quraysh hadith” was no longer applicable due to the above-mentioned Khaldunian argument and the presence of say that there was continuity in this respect over six centuries, nor do I want to imply a paucity of ideological resources that Muslims could mobilize in the latter period. I only argue, within the confines of the article, that drawing on the Khaldunian theory of the caliphate was one of many discursive tools that pro-Ottoman actors used in their politico-ideological struggle against anti-caliphate movements, particularly Arab nationalists, during this period. Elsewhere I have identified twenty different discursive strategies (in the Foucaltian sense) and many other “discursive techniques” (more specific strategies that make up the former), which the actors deployed to justify or undermine the Ottoman caliphate during the late-19th and early 20th centuries (see N. Ardiç, Islam and the Politics of Secularism, [London, 2012]). Invoking Ibn Khaldun’s justification of caliphal rule was one such discursive technique.


33 Safayihi, İqaz al-Ikhwân, 55ff.
other hadiths that negated the notion of ethnicity as a prerequisite for the caliphate. In his argument on the Quraysh condition, Safayihi downplayed the role of genealogy in favor of asabiyya:

Although the Qurayshite descent is a precondition for the Caliphate, as stipulated by the majority of the ulama (jumhur), it is not a prerequisite that is always required. . . . Otherwise, being a Hashemite would be required, rather than being a Quraysh member. What is necessary is the power that comes from the genealogical strength. . . . In the past, this [power] was found in the Quraysh; [today, it is not]. Therefore, because the aim of the hadith is realized, it becomes valid and true for those rulers who lead Muslims after the Quraysh rule—even if they are not from the Quraysh.36

Citing a Qur’anic verse (49:13) that states that ethnic ties are unimportant in the eyes of God, Sheikh Safayihi concluded that the Quraysh hadith in fact also justified the rule by other dynasties that had enough power to unite Muslims.

Sheikh Tunusi, another North African scholar who was concerned about a rival caliph in the region claiming to be a descendant of the Prophet, cited a popular hadith as counter-evidence to that of the Quraysh hadith:37 “Obey your leader even if he is an Abyssinian slave with a small head.”38 He repeated it in a later pamphlet in the context of preconditions for the caliphate, the most important of which, he argued, was the ability/power to defend the rights of Muslims, which was at that time enjoyed only by the Ottomans.39 Similarly, Ismail Hakki, a prominent Turkish scholar and CUP member, cited the same hadith (“Obey your leader even if he is an Abyssinian slave . . .”) in his short discussion of the original Quraysh hadith, adding that some of the Companions of the Prophet and classical ulama also held his position.40 Similarly, in his book criticizing the British efforts to undermine the Ottoman caliphate, Hussein Kidwai, a lawyer, politician and member of the Muslim League of India and the Indian Caliphate Movement, referred to another version of the same hadith, saying that even if the leader was a former Abyssinian prisoner of war, he would enjoy the same status as a Meccan of pure Arab origins, as long as he was a Muslim leader.41

Finally, some pro-Ottoman actors brought up Ibn Khaldun’s interpretation of the Quraysh question in the context of the concept of justice as the fundamental element of the caliphal rule, which they emphasized to downplay the significance of the Quraysh condition. Resorting to the familiar discursive strategy of citing Qur’anic verses, they discussed “maintaining justice” as one of the basic characteristics and duties of the ideal Caliph. The idea in the classical theory of the caliphate that the main duty of a caliph was to maintain justice is based on a famous Qur’anic verse (16:90) that reads: “Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion.” In this context, Ismail Hakki refused the alleged requirement that caliphs must be a member of one of the Quraysh tribes in his discussion on “maintaining justice” as a basic element of an Islamic government. He cited a verse (Qur’an 42:13) that ordered the Muslim community not to be divided within itself, in order to support his argument—which he in turn derived from Ibn Khaldun, i.e., that the Quraysh requirement was originally devised to prevent divisions among Muslims, which no longer applied under the Ottoman caliphate. Hakki’s view of the Quraysh issue clearly favored asabiyya over genealogy:

The ummah has had no disagreement on the conditions [for holding the caliphate] of wisdom, justice, competence, and physical and mental well-being. These four are commonly agreed-upon conditions. There is a disagreement only on the Quraysh condition. As Ibn Khaldun explains, being from the Quraysh was stipulated [for the Caliph] in the early [periods of] Islam in order to prevent divisions. The Quraysh had power and prestige over other nations. They had an asabiyya strong enough to govern other people. . . . Later the Quraysh lost their strong asabiyya. Having a strong asabiyya to govern the ummah is not confined to the Quraysh. For this

36 Ibid., 59–60.
37 Tunusi, Sharkhu Dasais al-Fransees, 148.
39 Tunusi, Hilafer-i Muazzama-i Islamiye, 425.
reason, this condition is not required [to hold the caliphate].

During World War I, as discussed above, Britain and France had plans to install Arab caliphs whom they could control directly in their Muslim colonies. The pro-Arab propaganda, which was partly based on the principle of the Quraysh descent for the caliph, caused a fury among the pro-Ottoman actors, especially in North Africa and Arabia, where the Arab nationalist influences were most intensely felt. Among the Ottoman supporters who tried to counter this propaganda was the Tunisian-Egyptian intellectual Abdulaziz Jawish, who was also a high-ranking Teşkilat officer in North Africa. In his critique of the rival caliphs in the Arab world, Jawish accused the French of manipulating the Moroccan sultan in his claim for the caliphate. In his book, which was published in Istanbul by the Teşkilat-i Mahsusa in Arabic and translated into Turkish the same year, he also resorted to the hadith by the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa in Arabic and translated like the pagans of Mecca. From the French government, which was an enemy of African Muslims not to be taken in by false promises not to collaborate with pagans, and warned North Africa and Arabia, where the Arab nationalist influences were most intensely felt. Among the Ottoman supporters who tried to counter this propaganda was the Tunisian-Egyptian intellectual Abdulaziz Jawish, who was also a high-ranking Teşkilat officer in North Africa.43 In his critique of the rival caliphs in the Arab world, Jawish accused the French of manipulating the Moroccan sultan in his claim for the caliphate.44 In his book, which was published in Istanbul by the Teşkilat-i Mahsusa in Arabic and translated into Turkish the same year, he also resorted to the discursive strategy of discussing the Quraysh hadith in detail and citing other hadiths to counter it. For example, he referred to a hadith that orders Muslims not to collaborate with pagans, and warned North African Muslims not to be taken in by false promises from the French government, which was an enemy of Islam like the pagans of Mecca.46

The debate over Quraysh descent for the caliph, in which the Khaldunian theory of the caliphate was often invoked, was a relatively significant one until the end of World War I. After the war was over, the Quraysh question became part of an academic rather than political debate in the caliphal center in its waning years. Interestingly, even the secularists who wanted to get rid of the Ottoman caliphate did not support the Arab nationalist argument for the Quraysh condition. They probably thought that a Turkish caliph with no political power as a figure-head for an otherwise secular government would be preferable to an Arab caliph with a claim for temporal as well as religious authority. Thus, for example, in the debate between pro-caliphate modernists and anti-caliphate secularists in Istanbul, only the ulema brought up the Quraysh question, but both groups supported the well-known Ottoman view—borrowed from Ibn Khaldun, al-Baqillani, ʿAyni, and al-Jurjani—that what the Prophet had been referring to in the hadith was the Quraysh’s political power rather than its high status as an ethnic group. This interpretation was one of the few points on which the Islamist Hoca Şükrü and secularist Seyyid Bey agreed regarding the caliphate.47 However, Seyyid Bey was quick to add that the Ottoman caliphate was not a “true” caliphate, but a “fictitious” one, on other grounds. This was not because the Ottoman sultans were not the Prophet’s descendants, but because they were part of the illegitimate “Sultanic period” that had started thirty years after the death of the Prophet, and which was clearly indicated by another prophetic hadith.48

Conclusion

In this specific debate on the ethnic origins of the Caliph, Arab nationalists (e.g., al-Kawakibi and Rashid Rida) based their criticism of the Ottoman caliphate on its illegitimate genealogical basis, as required by the Quraysh hadith. In response, pro-Ottoman actors employed two discursive strategies. First, they reinterpreted the Quraysh hadith, primarily based on the Khaldunian approach emphasizing the asabiyya of the caliph rather than his ethnic/tribal background. In this way, they denied the applicability of the hadith under current political circumstances, and used it to support the Ottoman cause instead. Secondly, they cited counter-hadiths that stressed the illegitimacy of making a claim for the caliphate when there already was a caliph, pointing to Qur’anic verses that emphasized Muslim unity.

Invoking prophetic traditions on the preconditions for the caliphate was the primary discursive technique for both sides. The pro-Ottoman actors also frequently


48 This hadith read, “The Caliphate will last thirty years, then will come the bitter Sultanate.” See A. Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1312–13), V: 220, 221.
resorted to the famous “al-amr” verse (Qur’an, 5:59) that orders Muslims to obey God, the Prophet and “those vested with authority among [Muslims].” In their discursive struggle against the anti-caliphate movement, Ottoman supporters in Turkey, North Africa and India often relied on the Khaldunian interpretation of the Quraysh hadith, whereas Arab nationalists themselves mostly ignored Ibn Khaldun and emphasized the Quraysh condition instead.

In this political debate over the fate of the caliphate, then, Ibn Khaldun emerged as a central figure—a primary object of the pro-Ottoman discourse—and part of the discursive technique of invoking Islamic intellectual tradition in defense of the Ottoman caliphate. The analysis of this specific debate between Ottoman supporters and Arab nationalists also indicates, therefore, that Ibn Khaldun’s views were not only widely circulated and discussed in the intellectual circles of the Ottoman Empire, but also played a role in the political struggles that shaped the modern Middle East in the early twentieth century.