“Group Solidarity” In Spanish Military History During The Central Middle Ages

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Abstract
Traditional accounts of the overcoming of al-Andalus by northern Christians attribute this military triumph to some contested factors. These factors include superior Christian heavy cavalry; the political, ideological, and military support Castile could draw on with its ever growing links with the Christian world beyond the Pyrenees; and the concurrent growth of population and economic developments in the north from the tenth century onwards. Noting the limitations of such explanations and synthesizing theoretical perspectives, I present a fresh interpretation of Ibn Khaldun’s concept of ‘asabiyya to trace processes central to the military victories of the Christian north.

Keywords: group solidarity; ‘asabiyya; al-Andalus; Ibn Khaldun; disappearance of; Spanish military history.

Introduction
In the eighth century CE Muslim political power was virtually uncontested in Spain with only pockets of Christian power holding out in the distant and uninviting mountainous terrain of the north. This situation began to seriously change from the tenth century onwards as northern forces began to expand southwards. Considering the eventual expulsion of Jews and Muslims in the fifteenth century, in hindsight one might be tempted to see these early developments simply as a linear progression of greater Christian political unity that gradually came to dominate their ever dividing enemy. However, by the late tenth century this was not at all apparent, for at this point Umayyad Spain was at the zenith of its political and military might. It is true that this strength and unity soon gave way to the empire breaking up into competing political entities. If we take the “Christian north” and “Muslim south” (or al-Andalus) as shifting conceptual entities (boundaries shift back and forth) and as ideal types (there is no pure “Christian” or “Muslim” land and there is much mixing and cross-fertilization), we also note that during this period the Christian north grew in military strength and made major territorial gains. However, the political fortunes of the Christian north were just as turbulent as their southern counterparts when questions of royal succession arose upon the death of a royal power holder. In fact, the Muslim south did not remain fragmented either, not to speak of
increasing fragmentation. Apart from entering into political alliances with each other and with Christian forces in realpolitik fashion, two major infusions of powerful Muslim dynasties from North Africa served to unite all or most of them in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries. How then are we to understand the total victory of the Christian north over the Muslim south, which had become almost complete by the early thirteenth century?

To develop the problem further let us trace these developments more specifically. After the Muslim conquest of Spain in 711 CE, the Christian north had been relegated to the harsh mountains of the country of the Asturias. In the tenth century, the kingdom of Asturias had begun to push south, moving its royal city to Leon. However, in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, Umayyad Spain was at its mighty peak, with the likes of al-Mansur (978-1002) launching terrifying military campaigns to subdue the Christians of northern Spain. This situation was not to last long, and with the collapse of the Cordovan caliphate and the ensuing violent struggles in the early eleventh century, al-Andalus was split into more than twenty independent political entities known as the taifa states. These developments coincided with the southward territorial expansion from the Christian north, where Ferdinand I had succeeded in uniting Castile, Leon and Galicia. Before his death in 1065, Ferdinand had forced the taifas of Saragossa, Toledo and Seville to pay him annual tributes or parias. After a period of internecine conflict upon Ferdinand’s death, his son Alphonso VI was able to reunite Castile, Leon and Galicia again in 1072. In the third quarter of that century, even Granada, the best defended of taifas, was subjected to parias in return for protection. In his memoirs, ‘Abd Allah b. Buluggin (r. 1073-1090), the last Zirid prince of Granada, details how Alphonso used parias to weaken taifas and play off one taifa against another by shifting his alliances, till a taifa easily gave way to capture. Successfully deploying this scheme, Alphonso was able to take Toledo in 1085 with relatively little fighting. In desperation, the taifas made a united appeal to the new Berber power of North Africa: the Murabitun, led by their emir Yusuf ibn Tashufin.

Yusuf was able to score a decisive victory against Alphonso at Zallaqa in 1086, but unsatisfied by cooperation from the taifas he eventually decided to subdue them, successfully reuniting most of al-Andalus by 1091. With al-Andalus united, the Murabitun now focused on contesting with the north, scoring major victories into the early twelfth century. Yet as these events happened, Murabit Spain underwent a sudden and shattering collapse, splitting once again into taifas in 1109. The system of parias resumed, and in an almost identical repeat once again a Berber tribal confederation, the Almohads came to intervene in Muslim Spain. For yet another time the momentum shifted to the southern power. However, this period saw a complex series of internecine
conflicts in both Christian and Muslim realms, the latter having to deal with Murabit revolts in Spain as well as in North Africa. In 1197 the Almohad leader Yaqub ravaged Toledo and laid siege to Madrid; only troubles from the Murabitun in Tunisia forced him to offer a truce to the Castilians. In 1210, with papal influence and support the cause of reconquista gained renewed force in the Christian north, following which Alphonso VIII launched devastating attacks on Baeza, Jaen and Andujar. The battle near Jaen at Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212 is often presented as a key turning point, for in the battle Alphonso purportedly secured a decisive victory against Muhammad II and forced him to flee to North Africa. This victory was followed by succession struggles amongst the Almohads which led to the already familiar process of breakdown of Muslim Spain into taifas. The north continued to advance and all of Spain except Granada was brought under Christian control by 1249. The battle between Christian and Muslim Spain was essentially over at this point.

Works on medieval Spanish military history of this period are often highly detailed, tracing how frontiers shifted with changes in political fortunes and alliances in much greater intricacy than presented earlier. However, the much more difficult task of explaining these complex series of events and associated socioeconomic changes that led to the final Christian victory is less often addressed and continues to invite the attention of scholars. While political developments of the kind presented above are significant in and of themselves in furnishing answers, they are clearly not sufficient for they do not inform us about changing realities on the ground. Thus, Bernard Reilly identifies several factors that were key to the eventual triumph of the Christian north over the Muslim south. These included the inability of Muslim armies to answer Christian heavy cavalry and its shock tactics; the ever growing links of Castile with the Christian world beyond the Pyrenees, which brought in political, ideological, and military support; and most importantly, the concurrent growth of population and development of agriculture and trade in the north from the tenth century onwards—that had the dual effects of creating surplus wealth in towns and causing the emergence of local military and religious elites. The last factor has provided the strongest explanation of fate’s turning in favor of the Christian forces. These developments occurred along with the evolution of fueros (charters granted by Spanish kings to municipalities) making northern Spain a “society organized for war.”

The tactical and technological aspects of warfare, including the use of heavy shock cavalry by Christian armies identified by Reilly are much disputed. In the final contest, they may not have proved decisive. In fact, the seventeenth century Muslim scholar Ahmed ibn Muhammad al-Maqqari cites Ibn ‘Onayrah al-Makhzumi’s account to claim that al-Andalus had largely adopted the weapons
and tactics of the Christian north.\textsuperscript{22} Al-Makhzumi personally witnessed the fall of Majorca in 1258 and his account is reliable in its depiction. However, the Muslim south differed quite fundamentally not only in the way it was organized politically and economically but also in the patterns of its waxing and waning in power. The socioeconomic realities in the south were starkly different: the economy was mainly based on trade and crafts, leading to the development of urban lifestyles and prosperous towns and markets. As agriculture had continued to develop, city populations had declined, making absent the demographic pressures experienced in the north.\textsuperscript{23} In addition, these were polities that were organized along tribal and kinship lines which contrasted with homage in the Christian north. In effect, permanent political links between the urban centers of government and central governments were not institutionalized as they were in the north, as evidenced by the fueros.\textsuperscript{24} The fate of the Muslim south was therefore dependent on the rise and fall of dynasties bound together by tribe and kin. The dynamics of such developments were explained in intricate depth by Ibn Khaldun, the celebrated Berber scholar of the fourteenth century. The notion of ‘asabiyya is central to Ibn Khaldun’s explanation, and I shall be using it to offer an answer to the “big question” of how the Muslim south was overrun by the Christian north.

Prior explanations of how al-Andalus was eventually overcome do not convince us about the factor(s) that gave the Christian north a military edge over the Muslim south. The factors that are pointed out seem to balance out on both sides. For instance, as al-Makhzumi’s account shows, military technologies and customs diffused from the north to south, potentially neutralizing a mere technological advantage.\textsuperscript{25} Similarly, both sides could draw on international resources and religious sanctions for holy war. It is therefore difficult to understand how such factors were decisive in the end. Moreover, the arguments presented by prior scholars often rely on controversial assertions or meet counter-examples that weaken the argument. The fierce historical controversy about the superiority of northern cavalry (argument for technological superiority)\textsuperscript{26} is a case of the former and the wavering commitments of international military reinforcements coming in from Christian Europe (argument for growing international links) an instance of the latter.\textsuperscript{27} Even striking factors such as the emergence of unique military institutions in the Christian north are not easily related to long-term patterns of battlefield performance.

I do not mean to imply that either of these factors was insignificant in the eventual disappearance of al-Andalus. My contention is that they present problems as various isolated factors because they are not linked together theoretically. As I shall show, Ibn Khaldun’s notion of ‘asabiyya connects these factors together and links them with the battlefield. It offers us a lens with which to compare and contrast battlefield forces when isolated factors balance out. The notion relates demographic, political and economic changes to battlefield realities and vice versa. It allows us to trace the larger patterns of these developments and to understand how developments in the Christian north created pressures that eventually added up to overwhelm the Muslim south. Moreover, as an
explanatory category, ‘asabiyya is comprehensive and parsimonious, for unlike other explanations that address only part of the medieval era, it profoundly explains developments for the entire period—from the tenth to the thirteenth century or perhaps even more—that saw power shift to the Christian north. For instance, the growth of international links and the emergence of a “reconquista” consciousness in the Christian north happened much after military pressures had already shifted in the favour of the Christian north and the extraction of parias from the Muslim south had become regular and well established.28 ‘Asabiyya is highly instructive as it allows us to see how these pressures were built up in the first place. As we shall see, the notion also accounts for more odd factors of Spanish military history of the period, such as the extraordinary distances Spanish militias could cover.

The sources that I have used are well known to Iberianists and are readily available in translation. ‘Asabiyya offers a new paradigm for understanding historical developments that calls for a fresh interpretation of materials that are already known, and it is this new paradigm is my chief concern.29 In the context of prior scholarship on the matter, ‘asabiyya offers a better explanation, not the only or the final one. Other vantage points can offer different views on the same history that inform us of factors other than those addressed by ‘asabiyya which were crucial to developments.

Since I will be using a fourteenth-century Muslim scholar’s historical ontology to account for historical processes that modern scholars have missed, I am well aware of the need to contextualize such thought in the circumstances from which it arose before extending it to analyze cases from different circumstances. Indeed this is true for all interpretive frameworks, Western or otherwise. In his famous Provincializing Europe Dipesh Chakrabarty has convincingly shown the limitations of applying Marxist categories such as “capital” that arise in a European context to analyzing and interpreting societies such as India, a case where circumstances differ. Chakrabarty’s argument is not that categories such as “capital” born out of a European context are inapplicable to cases such as India, but that the potential limitations deriving from the foreignness of such concepts must be accounted for. In fact, Chakrabarty considers such categories critical for analyzing modern India even as they have to be modified to account for India’s differences.30 Much more can be said on this issue but for my purposes I wish to return to Ibn Khaldun and his notion of ‘asabiyya.

For Ibn Khaldun, the rise and fall of dynasties always follows the same pattern though several variations might occur at each stage of progress. A highly simplified version of this scheme is as follows. A simple yet tough desert people accustomed to harsh living conditions are initially brought together by their group cohesion, referred to as ‘asabiyya by Ibn Khaldun. This “group cohesion” is the fundamental quality that allows a group to successfully defend itself against another or gain ascendancy over it. Mutual aid and support of closely knit groups based on the compassion and affection of kinship proves critical; an individual on his own is not be able to offer fight in these circumstances.31 It is in the desert that people with the requisite close bonds emerge to subdue another folk, compelling the beaten to become their partners in a new civilizational cycle. The leader
of the desert dwellers establishes a state, setting the foundations of a new dynasty. The newfound state then expands its borders systematically, bringing new populations under its control and further augmenting its "civilization." As total labour increases significantly, some of it goes into arts, the crafts, sciences, the production of luxuries, and formal learning.\textsuperscript{32} Nevertheless, the rulers grow ever more distant from the challenging conditions of desert dwelling, and the formerly tough and lean people of the desert become spoilt to the degree that luxuries turn into necessities.\textsuperscript{33} Simultaneously, the dynasty grows proud and tries to monopolize power at the expense of other groups and individuals, leading to jealousies. The group cohesion decays. Shortly afterwards the rulers begin oppressing subjects with higher taxation, as a consequence of which civic and business optimism dwindles. Expectedly, rebellion is fomented. A decadent dynasty becomes unable to suppress rebellion, hires foreign mercenary troops, inevitably leading to the seizure of power by the mercenaries themselves or to revolt among the subjects.\textsuperscript{34} The chaos eventually concludes with conquest by some other group of desert dwellers that have not been touched by the comfort of city life. The entire process is said to transpire within three generations, or 120 years.\textsuperscript{35} The cycle might be extended through moral and religious reform, or it might be shortened as a result of contingent events. However, the final decline of civilizations can never be halted for good.

Prior Ibn Khaldun scholars—the likes of Al-Azmeh, Baali, Lacoste, Rozenthal and others—have spent much ink over what ‘asabiyya means. However, they either miss aspects of ‘asabiyya that I have caught hold of; or, noting that Ibn Khaldun himself does not define the notion, recognize the difficulty of understanding the exact nature and scope of ‘asabiyya and avoid giving a final word on the matter. In the former instance, scholars have tried to present their own definitions of ‘asabiyya by considering how Ibn Khaldun applies the notion to different cases. However, none of these definitions do justice to Ibn Khaldun’s original text. By not fully grasping the related real, imaginary and sociological aspects of ‘asabiyya that Ibn Khaldun presents, definitions by prior Ibn Khaldun scholars unnecessarily constrict or expand the notion and prevent its creative extension to new cases. In fact, these definitions end up introducing conceptual problems originally missing in the Muqadimmah.

For instance, Al-Azmeh strips the concept of ‘asabiyya of its richness and complexity by arguing that it derives from a pre-determined teleology that ends in the daula (the state) and that Ibn Khaldun’s argument for ‘asabiyya lacks sociological foundation.\textsuperscript{36} This contradicts Mahdi’s interpretation who finds the notion “elusive” and “for the most part sociological.”\textsuperscript{37} This glaring contradiction occurs because Al-Azmeh does not fully appreciate how Ibn Khaldun relates different living contexts to the sociological conditioning of individuals and groups. On the other hand, Baali uses ‘asabiyya for group cohesion arising from tribal contexts; a cohesion that inevitably declines as it shifts to urban contexts. Elaborating on his interpretation, Baali notes that ‘asabiyya is not limited to nomadism and notes the imaginary aspect of ‘asabiyya. However, he fails to develop these
observations further and ends up over-extending the notion of ‘asabiyya, problematically equating it with Durkhemian “social solidarity” and Machiavelli’s “virtu”. The latter notion influences Lacoste as well, who considers ‘asabiyya inseparable from the phenomenon of tribalism and ends up defining ‘asabiyya as the “effect” of the tribal chieftain’s leadership qualities (virtu) on his following of tribesmen. Even though these definitions capture part of Ibn Khaldun’s thought, they end up reading notions of Western theorists into Ibn Khaldun’s text and limit or distort its full implications. Even Rozenthal’s definition of ‘asabiyya as “man's innate need to belong and to give political support” is guilty of introducing notions of human nature that distort Ibn Khaldun’s term. In the original text Ibn Khaldun does not present “belonging” and the “giving of political support” as innate human tendencies.

Simply put, ‘asabiyya in Ibn Khaldun’s text is the group cohesion that results from the sociological conditioning of militant individuals and groups. The emergence, sustenance, strengthening and weakening of ‘asabiyya—in effect, the life cycle of ‘asabiyya—is the consequence of how innate human potentials, ideals, beliefs and values, and (most importantly of all) living conditions interact to condition militant individuals and groups. Conditions of life in the desert are the polar opposites of those in city, and these sociological differences end up producing individuals and groups that are just as starkly different. The relationship between living contexts and how they differently condition militant individuals and groups is the most important aspect of ‘asabiyya that prior scholars have missed, and the complexity of this relationship and the resultant conditioning explains why Ibn Khaldun could use it in varying contexts.

The passage in which Ibn Khaldun relates these conditions to the realization of these qualities in Bedouins is crucial for appreciating what the process of conditioning involves. Ibn Khaldun explains how the lack of walls and gates exposes Bedouins to constant threats, because of which they have to arrange for their own defense. The perpetual concern with being attacked is first and foremost a psychological pressure, and leads to a mental habit of vigilance and self-reliance. The mind is exercised, trained and disciplined such that it is attentive to even the “most distant barking or noise.” Bodily exercise, training and disciplining happens simultaneously with that of the mind: Bedouins always carry weapons, watch carefully on all sides of the road and take quick naps only when they are in groups or when they are riding. The praiseworthy attributes of courage, fortitude and self-reliance are in fact the net emotional effects of this psychological and bodily conditioning of Bedouins. Sociological conditioning in Ibn Khaldun’s thought therefore has the three aspects of mind (psychological), body (physical) and heart (emotions).
Although the domination of shaykhs and leaders is significant for leading tribesman and directing them, it is not what generates their ‘asabiyya. It is clear from Ibn Khaldun’s text that it is mutual love and compassion and a shared socialization that makes a group cohere together in the face of mortal threats. In the heat of battle, without mutual love and compassion and a shared socialization, individuals would try to flee and save themselves instead of sticking together. This gelling together of individuals is what is meant by group cohesion. Noting that the innate human potential for love is strongest towards blood relations and relatives, it is only among “closely knit groups of common descent” that defense and protection are successful in harsh tribal contexts.48 However, as we shall see, Ibn Khaldun sophisticates this further and does not limit ‘asabiyya to blood relations.

Even a quick recollection of the patterns of how the Muslim south waxed and waned in power would show how well Ibn Khaldun’s theory corresponds with historical developments in Muslim Spain. In fact he was familiar with the Spanish cases in elaborate detail and mentioned them in his Muqaddimah while explaining his theory.49 Nevertheless, unmodified, Ibn Khaldun’s theory of dynastic rise and fall can be barely applied to the Christian north. For one, the very existence of urban towns and centers of luxury in the Christian north is considered suspect. About 1000 CE, northern “cities” were effectively cult centers organized around cathedrals and monasteries.50 Even though kinship groups and their ‘asabiyyas were as essential in the formation of northern states as in the south, this key difference in the organization of societies is my starting point for thinking about how the Christian north differed in its own civilizational cycle (in the sense of rise and fall of dynasties). It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze the dynamics of dynastic fortunes in Christian Iberia but what is important to note is that succession was as turbulent as any other part of the world. What is key to note from Ibn Khaldun in the context of the military contest between Muslim and Christian Spain (as opposed to dynastic rise and fall) is the relative strength and clash of rival Muslim and Christian ‘asabiyyas. Here follows my answer to the “big question” I have asked. While ‘asabiyyas in the Muslim south of the period in question were fostered mainly in the harsh tribal contexts of North Africa, those in the Christian north emerged out of bands of marauding and competing Christian townsmen. These townsmen, exemplified by the renowned el Cid, raided and plundered deep into Muslim territories, extracted parias, entered into alliances and fought with others from similar circumstances who had, like themselves, allied with one count or another, or even some royal personage. Demographic pressures from an increasing population along with socioeconomic developments described earlier ensured that this situation persisted, only to be increasingly institutionalized in legal form in the fueros, linking these bands with central authorities. In the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, Alphonso VIII pitted the ‘asabiyyas of such bands against a Muslim force whose ‘asabiyya(s) had considerably weakened. I shall now develop these propositions and argue them in finer detail.
1. The General Emergence of ‘Asabiyya

‘Asabiyya, as understood by Ibn Khaldun, is not something inherent in a group merely by fact of common descent and lineage, as in tribes. He explains

Client relationships and contacts with slaves or allies have the same effect as (common descent). The consequences of common descent, though natural, still are something imaginary. The real thing to bring about the feeling of close contact is social intercourse, friendly association, long familiarity, and the companionship that results from growing up together, having the same wet nurse, and sharing the other circumstances of death and life (emphasis mine).^51

Thus as a concept ‘asabiyya is not limited to the tribal context. What it requires is a shared socialization along with common “circumstances of death and life.” In my reading of Ibn Khaldun, the most potent of these circumstances is the need for violence, for defense or for attack, which is made effective by mutual aid and support—hence “wild” and “natural” conditions such as those of the desert offer the strong natural conditions for the emergence of ‘asabiyya where violence is key to survival and domination. But what might be said of ‘asabiyya in the non-Muslim European context that concerns us?

Commenting on the warfare of the period in the Anglo-Saxon and Norman context, Stephen Morillo argues that the so-called “age of cavalry” was not an age that brought in new technologies that would provide mounted warfare an advantage over infantry. Instead, it was an age of “bad infantry” because infantry requires resources from a strong central authority to make it an effective battlefield force, as in the times of the Romans. The main offensive tactic of heavy cavalry was to break up infantry formations, the psychological aim of a terrifying frontal charge. To counter this required infantry to possess a high degree of confidence, discipline and cohesion. How might this be achieved? Morillo writes

The answer is deceptively simple: trust. Each man in the formation must trust his neighbor not to run away. How is trust achieved? It may be a result of the social origins of the formation: neighbours, either from a polis, a canton, or some other small polity, may know and trust each other from long association on and off the battlefield. But practice and experience is crucial even for such naturally cohesive groups; it is far more necessary for formations drawn from more heterogeneous backgrounds. Normally, an infantry unit gains cohesion through drill, and through experience.^52

The rise of heavy cavalry, according to Morillo, was therefore a consequence of weak central authority. Heavy cavalry was much more expensive to train than infantry because of higher upkeep costs associated with mounted warfare. As a result, cavalry units of this period were much smaller than infantry units of other periods. The increasing control of resources by local warrior elites allowed this to materialize. This process was endemic to much of Europe and even beyond, and Spain was no exception, although it had its own idiosyncrasies.
... Rural warrior elites were in fact a common feature of many traditional civilizations. Sons of such classes were raised to the military lifestyle, trained in small groups built from the social connections among the class and exercised military force in the interest of maintaining their own position in the hierarchy of power. While a central authority could often harness the skills and energies of this elite to its own military and policy ends, it could just as easily find itself at odds with the same class, especially over the form and distribution of power. Consequently, such an elite (and the effective cavalry which it formed) could easily exist outside the context of a strong central authority.\(^{53}\)

In each of these cases, cohesion between warriors is absolutely critical, although the specific ways in which cohesion may be acquired and deployed can differ. An analogy might be made to liquid (cohesion) that can take the shape of different vessels (fighting circumstances). Each fighting circumstance requires trust, coordination, mutual aid and support- consequences which are identical to Ibn Khaldun’s notion of ‘asabiyya. We might therefore equate Morillo’s notions of “trust” and “social connections” with ‘asabiyya, noting that “trust” in the military context is different from the everyday sense in which moderns deploy the notion. Unlike our everyday context what is involved in warfare is a question of life and death which triggers long evolved human capacities for group defense and survival. Nevertheless, Morillo’s choice of “trust” inevitably retains elements of the everyday sense in which people have faith in each other to behave in certain expected ways. Such everyday expectations are much more conscious than those built up through common experiences in violent struggles and might be based on “utilitarian” considerations (exemplified in the proposition that “I trust that you will keep my secret as I will keep yours). Warfare affords less time for such considerations, and in general, the more individual consciousnesses are subdued to act through the body in coordination with the fighting group, the more effective the fighting group is. It is not surprising then that the “group cohesion” or ‘asabiyya of violence encompasses participants totally, in the sense that their minds, hearts and bodies are all to be brought in unison.\(^{54}\) The term ‘asabiyya does not carry the everyday connotations of trust and is directly based on violent contexts in Ibn Khaldun’s theory. I therefore choose to use ‘asabiyya to refer to the same phenomenon in Arab, North African and European contexts of the period in question. The factors that lead to the emergence of ‘asabiyya in each case are identical: a shared socialization and common struggles, particularly the experiences of fighting together.

2. ‘Asabiyya(s) and Muslim Spain
I have already outlined developments in Muslim Spain; here I furnish some instances to illustrate the workings of ‘asabiyya. ‘Abd Allah, the last Zirid prince of Granada that I mentioned earlier, describes the situation of the taifas in the late eleventh century in the following words:

The princes of al-Andalus at that time witnessed such insubordination on the part of their subjects, who refused to meet their tax obligations at a time when their masters
[the Almoravids] needed money to meet their expenses, that they [the princes] became worried and suspicious. For the princes were under an obligation to provide an army every year as well as extending many necessary courtesies to the Almoravids and proffering continual presents. Should they fail to carry out any of these obligations, it would go hard with them [the Almoravids]. But here were their subjects refusing to make the necessary contributions to meet the obligations. In these circumstances, the princes had no option but to put up with their lot, in which case the result would be culpable reproach. Or else they would refuse to honour their obligations, in which case the consequence would be their extermination, as was in fact to happen later.55

It can be clearly seen that at this point the taifa princes had no groups to call on for their support as they became increasingly isolated. Their ‘asabiyya had weakened to a degree that they could not resist Almoravid demands for tribute payment. This is a development which Ibn Khaldun considers to signal the end of a dynasty.56

The rise of the Almohads in the twelfth century offers another case in point. They were successful against Christian forces when there was a lull in troubles in North Africa which allowed them to effectively focus their energies in Spain. Despite the strength of the Christian forces of the period which had by that point incorporated large populations by now and were well organized for war, the momentum lay on the side of the Almohads. Instead of mere political forces of the period which had by that point incorporated large populations by now and were well organized for war, the momentum lay on the side of the Almohads. Instead of mere political unity, this can be seen to be a consequence of their strong ‘asabiyya, which was strongest as it was in its earliest stages in Ibn Khaldun’s cycle. By “mere political unity” I refer to simplistic explanations that just mention the fact of unity without explaining what kind of relationships it entails. Almohad ‘asabiyya, on the other hand, was based on the relationships of kin and tribe developed in the harsh desert conditions of Ibn Khaldun’s civilizational cycle. In military contest, this ‘asabiyya proved stronger than that of their counterparts. However, by the time of the third Almohad generation in 1212, when the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa took place, the process of decay (weakening ‘asabiyya and easier lifestyles) had well set in, as predicted by Ibn Khaldun. The repeat of similar events in al-Andalus—of military defeat at Las Navas de Tolosa, breakup into taifas, dependence on other groups for protection, insubordination of subject populations, and so on—was therefore no accident. The significance of individual events such as the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa may be rightfully challenged by historians, but as part of a series of events that follow a systemic pattern, such events are landmarks that allude to broader underlying changes.

3. ‘Asabiyya(s) and Christian Spain
Population growth and development of agriculture from the tenth century onwards had led to the rise of marauding Christian warriors based in municipalities, as mentioned earlier. In order to obtain coveted gold, Christians in the mid-eleventh century would subject taifas to the “protection racket” of parias.57 As a society organized for frontier warfare with Muslims, Iberian nobility developed
attributes hard to locate elsewhere in Europe. Constant war allowed commoners admission to the nobility in lieu of their service as mounted warriors. Those able to maintain a horse and armour and take advantage of such opportunities became the caballeros villanos (commoner knights), officially recognized as nobility by the tenth and eleventh centuries. This is the drama of the Cid, who fights his way to honor and prestige in opposition to obnoxious men of noble lineage. Commenting on this phenomenon, James Powers writes:

… For the most crucial single battle of the Reconquest, Las Navas de Tolosa, King Alphonso VIII had at his disposal in 1212 the militias of Avila, Segovia, Medina del Campo, and Toledo (and probably more). In 1214 King Philippe II utilized the militias of Corbie, Amiens, Beauvais, Compiegne, and Arras in the most crucial event in the development of the French monarchy, the battle of Bouvines. Yet in the French examples the distances were not the same. The combats within the Papal States, Tuscany, and the Lombard League rarely required the town militia to serve much beyond a 100-kilometer radius of the home city. To Bouvines, the French militias had to travel between 50 and 150 kilometers and were so exhausted from their effort that they did not perform well in the battle itself. By contrast, Avila and Segovia had to dispatch their militias 400 kilometers to perform at Lucena, and the militias that served Alphonso VIII at Las Navas traveled more than twice as far across hostile country as any French militia at Bouvines. Whatever the level of Castilian performance there, the chronicles made no reference to their exhaustion. It is their extraordinary range and their capability for audacious independent action that give the Iberian militias an aura of fascination as a historical phenomenon.

What kind of activities led to the rise of such militias? An analysis of the much detailed Historia Roderici reveals that much of the warfare of the period involved siege, plunder and extortion. Giving an account of the Cid’s assault on Valencia, the chronicle reads as follows

In the month of July, at harvest time, Rodrigo encamped beside Valencia. He began to devastate their crops with his horses and to destroy their houses which were outside the walls. When the inhabitants of Valencia saw this they sent envoys to him there, asking and indeed beseeching him to be peaceable towards them and to allow the Moabites to live with them…

Similar accounts can be found in the Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris, in which king Alfonso VII himself is involved in similar activities, bringing the services of local militia to bear on a much grander scale.

From there, the king struck camp and began to advance across the plain of Cordoba, raiding to the left and right. He occupied all that land and plundered it, burning it as he went and taking many prisoners… It was in the time of wheat harvest, so he burnt up all their fields and had all the vines, olive groves and fig trees cut down.
Far from being a weakening of existing central authority, this cooperation between royal authority and local warriors was intrinsic to the formation of new territorial kingdoms, and most likely the only possible way to create one.\textsuperscript{62} Thus local counts had significant resources at their disposal to act adventurously and royal houses often chose to cultivate stronger ties with them through marriage alliances. The Cid, portrayed in chronicles and literature as the unflinchingly loyal vassal nevertheless upset the king by plundering those that had been offered official protection in lieu of their payment of parias. Throughout the Historia Roderici, the relationship between the Cid and Alphonso VI remains tense. To put it in Khaldunian terms, managing the ‘asabiyyas of different local groups and disciplining them for a united cause was highly taxing, as each group with its own ‘asabiyya had interests of its own.

Efforts directed against Muslims were only part of the warring activities of the likes of the Cid. More often the concern lay with competing rural elite, a fact attested by the special attention given by the Historia Roderici to the Cid’s battles against noble counts and Count Berenguer in particular.\textsuperscript{63} Since chronicle sources tend to glorify individuals as opposed to groups, the groups that coalesced as a result of this fighting are barely visible. However on some occasions we might find evidence of this strong ‘asabiyya, as in the following case

\[ \begin{array}{l}
\text{… while fighting valiantly, Rodrigo fell from his horse and was immediately struck and wounded on the ground. But his soldiers did not give up the fight: they battled on courageously until they had defeated and bravely overcome the count and all his army.}\textsuperscript{64}
\end{array} \]

The ‘asabiyya of this group is seen to manifest itself in the treatment of spoils of war. Presented with tempting individual opportunities, members of the group subordinated their individual interests in the following manner

\[ \begin{array}{l}
\text{They seized all the plunder they could find there - many vessels of gold and silver, precious textiles, mules, horses, palfreys, spears, coats of mail, shields and all objects of worth whatsoever they could find. All of it they faithfully brought and presented to Rodrigo.}\textsuperscript{64}
\end{array} \]

Despite their likely strong ‘asabiyya, the Cid experienced desertions on more than one occasion.\textsuperscript{65} Nevertheless, this seems to have been only a minor setback, and in all likelihood he maintained his core group of warriors bound together by their strong ‘asabiyya. Otherwise, with a relatively smaller force we should have seen some change in the Cid’s fortunes, which was not the case—the Cid continued to score victories everywhere with his band of raiders.

Earlier, I mentioned how the ‘asabiyya of warring groups involves bringing the minds, hearts and bodies of the group in unison. Thus, warrior ethos, reflected in literary productions particular to such groups would reflect how strong their ‘asabiyya was, or at least give us some sense of its nature. There is literary evidence to suggest that the ethos of individual subordination to the group that we have noted above in the case of the distributions of spoils of war persisted into the next centuries.
Much fictionalized and written most likely nearly a century after the Cid’s death, the Poem of the Cid can be read as reflecting early thirteenth century realities and values associated with praiseworthy conduct:

His knights then arrived with the loot they had collected and handed it over to the Cid as if it meant nothing to them.66

4. In Conclusion: Muslim and Christian ‘Asabiyya(s)

It is difficult, and beyond the scope of this paper to estimate the relative strengths of Christian and Muslim ‘asabiyyas, each arising out of different contexts and underpinned by different relationships. All that we may note is that Christian ‘asabiyyas had a more sustainable basis in the pressures of population, sufficient surplus wealth in rural areas to sustain a mounted warrior elite, a culture of marauding and the institutions of vassalage. Muslim ‘asabiyya was contrasted in that it grew from tough tribal contexts outside Spain, in North Africa. As these Muslim powers assigned their kin to positions of authority and settled in the urban towns of al-Andalus, their ‘asabiyya began to weaken. By the third and fourth generations, as postulated by Ibn Khaldun, the original bonds of the closely knit group had faded away. From this perspective, Muhammad II’s forces at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa were quite vulnerable. Al-Marrakushi’s account of the defeat written in 1224 is instructive:

The Commander of the Faithful left Jaen and encountered Alfonso at a place called al-‘Iqab, near the castle called Hisn Salim. Alphonso drew up his army, arranged his men and launched a surprise attack on the Muslims, who were not prepared for battle. They were defeated, and a great number of the Almohads were killed. The main reason for this defeat was the divisions in the hearts of the Almohads. In the time of Abu Yusuf Ya'qub they drew their pay every four months without fail. But in the time of this Abu ‘Abd-Allah, and especially during this particular campaign, their payment was in arrears. They attributed this to the viziers, and rebelled in disgust. I have heard from several of them that they did not draw their swords nor train their spears, nor did they take any part in the preparations for battle. With this in mind, they fled at the first assault of the Franks.67

As the account shows, whereas the Christian side exhibits the familiar cunning, aggression and shock tactics associated with its mounted elite, Muslim warriors fought with a weak ‘asabiyya effectively as dispirited mercenaries. The match of ‘asabiyyas was clearly out of balance.

(6825 words)

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