IBN KHALDŪN AND THE GOOD *MADĪNA*

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Abstract: Ibn Khaldūn's theory of the rise and decline of states, and the key concept of social solidarity, *‘aṣabiyya*, provides rich source material for elaborating normative or prescriptive discussions on the nature of a good polity or civilised society. This renders him extremely relevant to the study of modern societies, even those that lack the nomadic-sedentary dynamic that furnished the material for Ibn Khaldūn's original science of human society. Ibn Khaldūn's concepts of authority are of great relevance to the modern Muslim world, not least because of the prevalence today of *mulk tabī‘ī* or unbridled kingship in Muslim realms. In line with his overall science of human society was his interest in the relationship between education and society. The relevance of his outlook on education lies more in the area of the philosophy of education and displays timeless and universal applicability. Ibn Khaldūn covered the proper methods of teaching and learning and discussed learning capacity, memorisation, curriculum, teacher strictness and the breadth and depth of education.

The *madīna*, the form of social organisation which he saw all around him, was not all bad, in his view, but there was an inevitable movement towards degeneration and decay. In the early stages of the up cycle, the *madīna* displayed numerous political, economic and social dimensions that are worthy of emulation, and Ibn Khaldūn expounds on these in his discussions of the nature of authority, the role of the government in the economy, and the nature of education. Life in the *madīna* is founded on certain universal values such as the rule of law, justice, accountability, responsibility, and the quest for knowledge and truth. Unfortunately such values do not inform many modern societies of the Muslim world today and should be given more emphasis in our discussions on civilisational renewal. At the heart of the problem is perhaps education. Ibn Khaldūn's reflections on education take into account politics, language, city life and social class. He also dealt with the methods and procedures of education and can be seen to be an innovator in pedagogy. For Ibn Khaldūn, the way to the good *madīna* is through an holistic education that produces not just competent but moral individuals. This view implies an entire corpus of practical recommendations in the educational realm in Muslim nations today.

Introduction

Ibn Khaldūn is to be seen primarily as a resource for the theoretical and empirical study of the rise and decline of dynasties and the political economies that they controlled. The cyclical state formation theorised by Ibn Khaldūn was explained in terms of the dynamic and, indeed, dialectical relationship between two types of social organisation, that is, pastoral nomadic society (*‘umrān badawī*) and sedentary society (*‘umrān ḥaḍarī*).

Ibn Khaldūn's theory sought to understand the causes of the rise and decline of states. This he explained in terms of the essential differences in social organisation between *badawī* and *ḥaḍarī* social organisation. The differences between these two societal types are explained in terms of the differences in the mode of making a living (*al-ma'āsh*). The *badawī* adopt agriculture or animal husbandry as their principle mode of making a living and live in desert areas. There is a correspondence between the mode of making a living and wealth.¹ The principal mode of making a living for *ḥaḍarī* society was commerce and trade, but also includes agriculture. Sedentary people live in cities, towns and villages.²

The theory revolved around the term '*aṣabīyah*', Ibn Khaldūn's conceptualisation of social solidarity. According to the theory, social groupings with a fortified '*aṣabiyyah*' established rule over groups with a weak '*aṣabiyyah*'. '*Aṣabiyyah*' is a form of social solidarity founded on the belief of the members of the group that they share a common descent. Ibn Khaldūn believed that '*aṣabiyyah*' was more potent than other forms of social solidarity. The relatively greater degree of '*aṣabīyah*' among the nomads made them more closely-knit than sedentary people. This results in the greater degree of mutual support and aid among them, and the fear felt by their enemies.³ The nature of pastoral nomadic societies was such that their social organisation kept their '*aṣabīyah*' relatively more intact. However, even as the tribal group conquered and established its rule over the sedentary folk, settlement during the course of generations resulted in the erosion of their own '*aṣabiyyah*'. They become like the dynasty that they had conquered some generations ago, that is, politically and economically weak, disunited and vulnerable to conquest from the desert.

Clearly, the specifics of the theory do not apply to many modern societies which are not characterised by the '*umrān badawī*'- '*umrān ḥaḍarī*' dichotomy and for which pastoral nomadism is not a significant factor in their geopolitical make-up. However, there is a way in which Ibn Khaldūn is relevant to the study of modern societies, even those that lack the nomadic-sedentary dynamic that furnished the material for Ibn Khaldūn's original science of human society ('*ilm al-ijtimā' al-insānī*'). This has to do with the more normative or prescriptive discussions on the nature of a good polity or civilised society. Although Ibn Khaldūn did not discuss civilisation *per se*, his discussions on the features and characteristics of sedentary society give us some clues as to what he considered to be the desirable traits of the political, economic and social aspects of society.

Human Social Organisation and Civilisation

The term *ḥaḍar* or sedentary society as used by Ibn Khaldūn is etymologically related to the modern Arabic word for civilisation, that is, *ḥaḍāra*. Indeed, many of the traits of a progressive civilisation, those that are the targets of

efforts at civilisational renewal, and the values that underlie these traits, were treated by Ibn Khaldūn in his discussions on *'umrān ḥaḍarī*. Humans cannot do without the form of social organisation that the philosophers called the town (*madīna*).⁴ Sedentary society, which includes the *madīna*, was for Ibn Khaldūn an inferior form of social organisation as compared to nomadic society. But, it was nevertheless something necessary. It is interesting that we are employing as criteria for a good society traits that belong to a kind of social organisation that Ibn Khaldūn did not admire. In fact, he recognised many faults of sedentary society such as the low level of *'aṣabīyah*. However, the generational decline in the economic, political and social life of sedentary society, as described by Ibn Khaldūn, enables us to restate some Khaldunian views on the positive aspects of sedentary society. No attempt is made here to equate Ibn Khaldūn's views on what he considered to be the positive features of sedentary societies with modern notions of progress or development. What this paper does claim is that certain of Ibn Khaldūn's characterisations of sedentary society are founded on universal values of justice, equity and fairness. These remain relevant to modern societies.

As mentioned above, Ibn Khaldūn was critical of sedentary society and considered it to be an inferior form of social organisation in comparison to nomadic society. He said that nomadic people were better or more moral (*khayr*) than sedentary people. Sedentary people were more prone to evil because of the greater exposure to luxury and worldly success.⁵ This resulted in their souls being "colored with all kinds of blameworthy and evil qualities".⁶

The more of them they possess, the more remote do the ways and means of goodness become to them. Eventually they lose all sense of restraint. Many of them are found to use improper language in their gatherings as well as in the presence of their superiors and womenfolk. They are not deterred by any sense of restraint, because the bad custom of behaving openly in an improper manner in both words and deeds has taken hold of them.⁷

Ibn Khaldūn also stated that the *badw* were more disposed to courage than the people of the *ḥaḍar*. This was due to the relative indolence that characterised the latter's society.

They are sunk in well-being and luxury. They have entrusted defense of their property and their lives to the governor and ruler who rules them, and to the militia which has the task of guarding them. They find full assurance of safety in the walls that surround them, and the fortifications that protect them. No noise disturbs them, and no hunting occupies them. They are carefree and trusting, and have ceased to carry weapons. Successive generations have grown up in this way of life.⁸

Another weakness of sedentary people was their lesser degree of fortitude or self-reliance. Ibn Khaldūn argued that because sedentary people live under laws imposed on them, laws enforced by means of punishment, the sense of

humiliation develops in them, resulting in their becoming docile and unable to rely on themselves. This happens when the restraining influence is an outside force, such as laws. If, however, the restraining influence comes from within the individual it does not result in the loss of self-reliance.⁹

The Bedouin, on the other hand, lacking the facilities that sedentary people had, had greater fortitude. For example, they were forced to hunt and carry weapons for their self-defence:

They watch carefully all sides of the road. They take hurried naps only when they are together in company or when they are in the saddle. They pay attention to every faint barking and noise. They go alone into the desert, guided by their fortitude, putting their trust in themselves. Fortitude has become a character quality of theirs, and courage their nature. They use it whenever they are called upon or an alarm stirs them. When sedentary people mix with them in the desert or associate with them on a journey, they depend on them. They cannot do anything for themselves without them. This is an observed fact. (Their dependence extends) even to knowledge of the country, the (right) directions, watering places, and crossroads.¹⁰

Most important, however, was the stronger *‘aṣabīyah* that was to be found among the Bedouin. This was a severe disadvantage for sedentary society. The group which possessed the higher degree of *‘aṣabīyah* may attain kingship either by actually capturing dynasty or by influencing and assisting the rulers.

Kingship in a particular nation (*umma*) is perpetuated until its *‘aṣabīyah* declines.¹¹ Here are some examples that Ibn Khaldūn gave:

This can be illustrated by what happened among the nations. When the [kingship] of ‘Ād was wiped out, their brethren, the Thamūd, took over. They were succeeded, in turn, by their brethren, the Amalekites. The Amalekites were succeeded by their brethren, the Ḥimyar. The Ḥimyar were succeeded by their brethren, the Tubba’s, who belonged to the Ḥimyar. They, likewise, were succeeded, by the Adhwā’. Then, the Muḍar came to power.

The same was the case with the Persians. When the Kayyanid rule was wiped out, the Sassanians ruled after them. Eventually, God permitted them all to be destroyed by the Muslims.

The same was also the case with the Greeks. Their rule was wiped out and transferred to their brethren, the Rūm (Romans).

The same was the case with the Berbers in the Maghrib. When the rule of their first rulers, the Maghrāwah and the Kutāmah, was wiped out, it went to the Ṣinhājah. Then it went to the Veiled (Ṣinhājah), then to the Maṣmūdah, and then to the (still) remaining Zanātah groups.¹²

If Ibn Khaldūn had a largely negative outlook on the nature of sedentary society, there were still features of that type of social organisation that he recognised as necessary for its proper functioning, particularly during the early stages of a dynasty before the decline set in.

An example of the positive feature of sedentary society was nicely presented by Arthur Davis in an article on Ibn Khaldūn. Commenting on the Khaldunian cycle and how pastoral nomad, upon conquering a dynasty and settling in its towns, succumbed to sedentary culture and experienced an erosion of their *‘aṣabīyah* and fortitude, Davis illustrated the point with an example from Timur, whom Ibn Khaldūn had actually met.¹³

Moving southwest to base himself on Samarkand, Tamerlane gathered a vast empire in a very short period of time. He is the ruler, the conqueror who had the interesting habit of constructing pyramids with the skulls of his victims. He was a “toughie”.

By contrast, Tamerlane’s grandson, Uleg-Beg, became famous as an astronomer. He could measure the solar year with an error of less than one minute. For that he was known throughout Europe.¹⁴

Davis correctly understood the dynamic between the nomads and settled communities as a dialectical one¹⁵ in which the very conquest of the dynasty by tribal groups unleashed the process of the destruction of their social organisation. There was an in-built contradiction in the *badw-ḥaḍar* dynamic. However, although sedentary life weakened the social organisation of the Badawī conquerors, it is they who developed the arts, sciences and crafts upon being sedentarised.

Given that sedentary societies are a fact of life that we are, in Khaldunian terms, condemned to live in, what are their best features that we can adopt and strengthen? This will be discussed in what follows with respect to the political, economic and educational dimensions of sedentary society.

The Types of Authority in Ibn Khaldūn

Ibn Khaldūn said that when humans attain a certain level of social organisation, the natural tendency to aggression and injustice requires that there be a restraining influence placed on people. In other words, there is a need for people to be dominated by a type of authority. Here, the distinction that he made between two types of authority, that is, caliphate authority (*khilāfah*) and kingship (*mulk*) is important. The exercise of caliphate authority was such that it caused

the masses to act as required by religious insight into their interests into the other world as well as in this world. (The worldly interests) have bearing upon (the interests in the other world), since according to the Lawgiver (Muḥammad), all worldly conditions are to be considered in their relation to their value for the other world. Thus, (the caliphate) in reality substitutes for the Lawgiver (Muḥammad), in as much as it serves, like him, to protect the religion and to exercise (political) leadership of the world.¹⁶

The type of authority wielded in kingship differed significantly from that of caliphate authority:

We have also mentioned before that according to their nature, human beings need someone to act as a restraining influence and mediator in every social organisation, in order to keep the members from (fighting) with each other. That person must, by necessity, have superiority over the others in the matter of group feeling. If not, his power to (exercise a restraining influence) could not materialise.¹⁷

The main distinguishing factor between caliphate authority and kingship is the ability in kingship of the ruler to rule by force. But, kingship itself can be further broken down into types, depending on the nature of *‘aṣabīyah*. Ibn Khaldūn distinguished between two types of such authority, that is, *mulk siyāsī* or royal authority and *mulk tabī‘ī* or unbridled kingship.¹⁸ In royal authority, the nature of authority is such that it “causes the masses to act as required by intellectual (rational) insight into the means of furthering their worldly interests and avoiding anything that is harmful (in that respect).”¹⁹ Royal authority is characteristic of rule in which *‘aṣabiyyah* is strong. The power wielded by the ruler is founded on the acceptance of his legitimacy. If the preponderant element in the *‘aṣabiyyah* of the ruling group is strong kinship and blood ties, this makes for a solid basis of power of the state founded on the widespread acceptance of the ruler’s legitimacy.

But, as *‘aṣabiyyah* diminishes, that is, when the kinship element gradually gives way to those of alliance and clientship, another kind of kingship or *mulk* is established. This is what Ibn Khaldūn called *mulk tabī‘ī* or natural, unbridled kingship. Such kingship is founded on minimal authority and “causes the masses to act as required by purpose and desire [of the rulers]”.²⁰

Ibn Khaldūn’s conception of caliphate authority is derived from the Qur’an (*al-An’am* 6:165). “Khalifah”, from which the term caliphate is derived, connotes heir, successor or inheritor. In the politico-religious sense, it refers to heir, successor or inheritor of the Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh). Of course it was to man in general that the *amāna* (trust) was given (*al-Azhab* 33:72). But because social organisation inevitably results in disagreements a caliph who exercises a restraining influence through the *Sharī‘ah* is a necessity.²¹

During the Umayyad period, the authority of the *Sharī‘ah* began to decline. There was a transition to *mulk*. This concept too is from the Qur’an but here the reference is to absolute *mulk* that only Allah possesses (*al-Mulk* 67:1). Ibn Khaldūn used the Qur’anic *mulk* analogously in his political theory. The ruler who possesses *mulk* is the one who has the power to rule by force and does not necessarily hold allegiance to the *Sharī‘ah*. The concepts of *khilāfa* and *mulk* were utilised by scholars before Ibn Khaldūn, but it was Ibn Khaldūn who refined them and made them more suitable for use in modern social science. Although rooted in the Qur’an, Ibn Khaldūn’s conceptions of *khilāfa* and *mulk* were given shape and form by history. It was in history that Ibn Khaldūn observed the development of caliphate authority and kingship.

The caliphate period was described by Max Weber as one of charismatic leadership.²² This is not entirely accurate. The caliphate period as described by Ibn Khaldūn has a semblance of what Weber termed rational-legal authority. Weber defined rational-legal authority as being based on rational grounds, “resting on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands.”²³ Obedience is given to a legally established impersonal order. During the caliphate period obedience was not owed to the caliph as such (traditional authority) nor was his exceptional or exemplary character (charismatic authority) the only or most important aspect of his office. Obedience was owed to the divine order, the caliph being merely the representative of the Prophet (pbuh). This is similar to Weber’s rational-legal authority in which “members of the organisation, insofar as they obey a person in authority, do not owe this obedience to him as an individual, but to the impersonal order.”²⁴ Also, it was true in the caliphate period that the caliph himself was subject to the laws of the divine order in much the same way that the head of a modern state is “himself subject to an impersonal order by orienting his actions to it in his own dispositions and commands.”²⁵

After the caliphate period and the rise of the Umayyad dynasty we have Ibn Khaldūn’s transition to *mulk*, or what approaches Weber’s patrimonialism. Ibn Khaldūn’s description of injustice is elaborated in terms of the precarious position of the Muslim traders and landowners vis-à-vis the rulers, the arbitrary confiscation of money and property, and the imposition of forced labour and unfair taxes. These are all engendered by unbridled kingship corresponding to the “unpredictability and inconsistency on the part of court and local officials, and variously benevolence and disfavour on the part of the ruler and his servants.”²⁶

As can be seen from the comparison with Max Weber, Ibn Khaldūn’s concepts of authority are of great relevance to the modern Muslim world because of the prevalence today of *mulk tabīʿī*.

Ibn Khaldūn on Government and Business

In sedentary society the success of the management of the economy involving production, distribution, the creation of value, the determination of prices, the role of money, and the nature of public finance is dependent to a great extent on the nature of kingship. *Mulk tabīʿī* or unbridled kingship is the form that is most destructive to the political and economic life of people. It was in dynasties dominated by *mulk tabīʿī* that people were subject to arbitrary rule, frequently under threat of their property being confiscated and constantly suffering from other forms of injustice, like forced labour and the unfair imposition of duties and taxes. Ernest Gellner had pointed out that a Keynesian-type multiplier effect can be seen in Ibn Khaldūn’s explanation of the fall of a dynasty.²⁷ However, Keynes

blamed the middle class for failing to raise aggregate demand to an adequate level, Ibn Khaldūn, laid the blame on the governmental propensity to save at a time when private investment was weak:

Now, if the ruler holds on to property and revenue, or they are lost or not properly used by him, then the property in the possession of the ruler's entourage will be small. The gifts which they, in their turn, had been used to give to their entourage and people, stop, and all their expenditures are cut down. They constitute the greatest number of people (who make expenditures), and their expenditures provide more of the substance of trade than (the expenditures of) any other (group of people). Thus (when they stop spending), business slumps and commercial profits decline because of the shortage of capital. Revenues from the land tax decrease, because the land tax and taxation (in general) depend on cultural activity, commercial transactions, business prosperity, and the people's demand for gain and profit. It is the dynasty that suffers from the situation and that has a deficit, because under these circumstances the property of the ruler decreases in consequence of the decrease in revenues from the land tax. As we have stated, the dynasty is the greatest market, the mother and base of all trade. (It is the market that provides) the substance of income and expenditures (for trade). If government business slumps and the volume of trade is small, the dependent markets will naturally show the same symptoms, and to a greater degree. Furthermore, money circulates between subjects and ruler, moving back and forth. Now, if the ruler keeps it to himself, it is lost to the subjects.²⁸

As Gellner noted, this was “one of the most eloquent inflationary, expansionist, anti-Milton-Friedman pleas ever made.”²⁹

Ibn Khaldūn also explained that there is a relation between the political and economic aspects of the decline of a dynasty:

It should be known that at the beginning of the dynasty, taxation yields a large revenue from small assessments. At the end of the dynasty, taxation yields a small revenue from large assessments.

The reason for this is that when the dynasty follows the ways (*sunan*) of the religion, it imposes only such taxes as are stipulated by the religious law, such as charity taxes, the land tax, and the poll tax...When the dynasty continues in power and their rulers follow each other in succession, they become sophisticated. The Bedouin attitude and simplicity lose their significance, and the Bedouin qualities of moderation and restraint disappear. [Kingship] with its tyranny, and sedentary culture that stimulates sophistication, make their appearance. The people of the dynasty then acquire qualities of character related to cleverness. Their customs and needs become more varied because of the prosperity and luxury in which they are immersed. As a result, the individual imposts and assessments upon the subjects, agricultural laborers, farmers, and all the other taxpayers, increase. Every individual impost and assessment is greatly increased, in order to obtain a higher tax revenue.³⁰

As assessments exceed the limits required by the demands of equity, there is a decrease in productive activities and tax revenues. Individual taxes are then increased to compensate for the loss. This in turn creates a disincentive for productive activity. The final result is a downturn in the production, fiscal and political cycles of the dynasty.³¹

The characteristics of nomadic life that gave them the power to establish a dynasty, that is, an austere lifestyle, greater fortitude because of less reliance on law, and a stronger '*aṣabīyah*', all diminish once the nomads become sedentarised. An irreversible process of decline is set in motion once sedentarisation takes place.³² Ibn Khaldūn gave the example of the Umayyads:

At the beginning it reached as far as Spain, India, and China. The Umayyads had complete control of all the Arabs through the group feeling of 'Abd-Manaf. It was even possible for Sulayman b. 'Abd-al-Malik in Damascus to order the killing of 'Abd-al-'Aziz b. Musa b. Nusayr in Cordoba. He was killed, and (Sulayman's) order was not disobeyed. Then, luxury came to the Umayyads, and their group feeling was wiped out. (The Umayyads) were destroyed, and the 'Abbasids made their appearance. They curbed the Hashimites. They killed all the 'Alids (descendants of Abu Talib) and exiled them. In consequence, the group feeling of 'Abd Manaf dissolved and was wiped out. The Arabs grew audacious *vis-a-vis* (the 'Abbasids). People in the remote regions of the realm, such as the Aghlabids in Ifriqiyah and the inhabitants of Spain and others, gained control over them, and the dynasty split. Then, the Idrisids seceded in the Maghrib. The Berbers supported them, in obedience to their group feeling. Also, they were secure from capture by the soldiers or militiamen of the dynasty.

Men with a cause, for which they make propaganda, eventually secede. They gain control over border areas and remote regions. There, they are able to make propaganda for their cause and achieve royal authority. As a result, the dynasty splits. As the dynasty shrinks more and more, this process often continues until the center is reached. The inner circle, thereafter, weakens, because luxury undermines it. It perishes and dissolves. The whole divided dynasty weakens. Occasionally, it lingers on long after that. (The dynasty) can dispense with group feeling now, because it has colored the souls of its subject people with the habit of subservience and submission for so many long years that no one alive can think back to its beginning and origin. They cannot think of anything except being submissive to the ruler. Therefore, he can dispense with group strength. In order to establish his power, hired soldiers and mercenaries are sufficient. The submissiveness generally found in the human soul helps in this respect. Should anyone think of disobedience or secession - which hardly ever happens - the great mass would disapprove of him and oppose him. Thus, he would not be able to attempt such a thing, even if he should try very hard. In this situation, the dynasty is often more secure (than ever), as far as rebels and rivals are concerned, because the coloring of submissiveness and subservience is firmly established. Individuals would scarcely admit to themselves the least thought of opposition, and the idea of straying from

obedience would not enter anybody's mind. (The dynasty,) therefore, is safer (than ever) so far as the trouble and destruction that comes from groups and tribes are concerned. The dynasty may continue in this condition, but its substance dwindles, like natural heat in a body that lacks nourishment. Eventually, (the dynasty) reaches its destined time. "Each term has a book," and each dynasty has an end. God determines night and day.³³

For Ibn Khaldūn, the decline and fall of a state is not only a political or social-psychological phenomenon. It is also an economic phenomenon as there is an important role played by wealth.

As for the disintegration that comes through money, it should be known that at the beginning the dynasty has a desert attitude, as was mentioned before. It has the qualities of kindness to subjects, planned moderation in expenditures, and respect for other people's property. It avoids onerous taxation and the display of cunning or shrewdness in the collection of money and the accounting (required) from officials. Nothing at this time calls for extravagant expenditures. Therefore, the dynasty does not need much money.

Later comes domination and expansion. Royal authority flourishes. This calls for luxury. (Luxury) causes increased spending. The expenditures of the ruler, and of the people of the dynasty in general, grow. This (tendency) spreads to the urban population. It calls for increases in soldiers' allowances and in the salaries of the people of the dynasty. Extravagant expenditures mount. It spreads to the subjects, because people follow the religion (ways) and customs of the dynasty.

The ruler, then, must impose duties on articles sold in the markets, in order to improve his revenues. (He does so,) because he sees the luxury of the urban population testifying to their prosperity, and because he needs the money for the expenditures of his government and the salaries of his soldiers. Habits of luxury, then, further increase. The customs duties no longer pay for them. The dynasty, by this time, is flourishing in its power and its forceful hold over the subjects under its control. Its hand reaches out to seize some of the property of the subjects, either through customs duties, or through commercial transactions, or, in some cases, merely by hostile acts directed against (property holdings), on some pretext or even with none.

At this stage, the soldiers have already grown bold against the dynasty, because it has become weak and senile, as far as its group feeling is concerned. (The dynasty) expects that from them, and attempts to remedy and smooth over the situation through generous allowances and much spending for (the soldiers). It cannot get around that.

At this stage, the tax collectors in the dynasty have acquired much wealth, because vast revenues are in their hands and their position has widened in importance for this reason. Suspicions of having appropriated tax money, therefore, attach to them. It becomes common for one tax collector to denounce another, because of their mutual jealousy and envy. One after another is deprived of his money by confiscation and torture. Eventually, their wealth is gone, and they are ruined. The dynasty loses the pomp and magnificence it had possessed through them.³⁴

The luxurious lifestyle that appears at the early stages of the dynasty necessitates an increased government expenditure on salaries and allowances. Furthermore, with growing expectations of the military, the ruler has no choice but to increase taxes and duties. He also resorts to illegal means such as the confiscation of property in order to satisfy the army. As the dynasty becomes weaker in *'aṣabīyah* and the army becomes bolder in challenging the ruler, the state begins to fragment and eventually crumbles.³⁵

What lessons can be drawn from Ibn Khaldūn's discussions on the economy? There is a very important principle of taxation that underlies his account of the relationship between the ruler and the economy. Taxes collected should reflect an attitude of justice, fairness and equity. There should be a correspondence between the rate of taxes and the level of productivity. Taxes exacted should not exceed the ability to pay. The rule governing taxation should be strictly adhered to and preferences should not be extended to those who happen to be close to the ruler.³⁶ Inevitably, however, Ibn Khaldūn recognised that the yield from taxation would have the same life cycle as that of the dynasty:

After their prosperity is destroyed, the dynasty goes farther afield and approaches its other wealthy subjects. At this stage, feebleness has already afflicted its (former) might. (The dynasty) has become too weak to retain its power and forceful hold. The policy of the ruler, at this time, is to handle matters diplomatically by spending money. He considers this more advantageous than the sword, which is of little use. His need for money grows beyond what is needed for expenditures and soldiers' salaries. He never gets enough. Senility affects the dynasty more and more. The people of (other) regions grow bold against it.

At each of these stages, the strength of the dynasty crumbles. Eventually, it reaches complete ruin. It is open to domination by (any) aggressor. Anyone who wants to attack it can take it away from those who support it. If this does not occur, it will continue to dwindle and finally disappear - like the wick of a lamp when the oil is exhausted, and it goes out.³⁷

Ibn Khaldūn was also very much against the rulers being involved in business and trade:

Sometimes, the ruler himself may engage in commerce and agriculture, from desire to increase (his) revenues. He sees that merchants and farmers make (great) profits and have plenty of property. (He sees) that their gains correspond to the capital they invest. Therefore, he starts to acquire livestock and fields in order to cultivate them for profit, purchase goods, and (enter business and) expose himself to fluctuations of the market. He thinks that this will improve (his) revenues and increase (his) profits.

However, this is a great error. It causes harm to the subjects in many ways. First, farmers and merchants will find it difficult to buy livestock and merchandise and to procure cheaply the things that belong to (farming and commerce). The subjects have

(all) the same or approximately the same amount of wealth. Competition between them already exhausts, or comes close to exhausting, their financial resources. Now, when the ruler, who has so much more money than they, competes with them, scarcely a single 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 products and the available merchandise), if it occurs to him. (He can do it) by force, or by buying things up at the cheapest possible price. Further, there may be no one who would dare to bid against him.³⁸

As a result, the ruler would be able to force the seller into lowering the price. Also, the ruler may apply coercion in order to get merchants to buy agricultural products from him at higher prices, rather than rely on market conditions. This will result in the merchants and farmers exhausting their capital.³⁹ Even if the ruler were able to engage in profitable trade, his direct involvement in trade would result in a decline in tax revenue as it is unlikely duties would be levied on his commercial activities.⁴⁰

To sum up, Ibn Khaldūn would argue that the direct involvement of the government in business is a key factor that leads to the decline of the state, as that would distort the market and discourage private businesses from investment and trade. The crucial role of the government lay in the area of collecting taxes at a level that did not exceed the ability of merchants and producers to pay and that gave them the incentive to engage in productive activities. Ibn Khaldūn's views on the economy do not constitute an economic theory of development but rather a political economy of development. This is because his understanding of the economy and its growth is informed by the interplay of economic, political and social factors. They can be summed up in the "circle of justice." Ibn Khaldūn quotes from the book, *On Politics* that is attributed to Aristotle:

The world is a garden the fence of which is the dynasty. The dynasty is an authority through which life is given to proper behavior. Proper behavior is a policy directed by the ruler. The ruler is an institution supported by the soldiers. The soldiers are helpers who are maintained by money. Money is sustenance brought together by the subjects. The subjects are servants who are protected by justice. Justice is something familiar, and through it, the world persists. The world is a garden...⁴¹

Here it can be seen that the economy is intimately related to the authority of the state, its judicial institutions and the military. Needless to say, Ibn Khaldūn did not regard this as constituting a thorough analysis of the political economy. It is not that he found the ideas expressed in the "circle of justice" erroneous. But, he did state that such ideas lacked thoroughness and were expressed at too general a level. His goal was to provide a more exhaustive treatment of the topic based on explanation, proof and demonstrations.⁴²

Education for a Progressive Elite

Ibn Khaldūn's views on education must be contextualised to his own time in which the technology and media of teaching and learning differ greatly from our own times. The relevance of his outlook on education lies more in the area of the philosophy of education that has more of a timeless and universal applicability. Ibn Khaldūn covered the proper methods of teaching and learning and discussed learning capacity, memorisation, curriculum, teacher strictness and the breadth and depth of education. In line with his overall science of human society was his interest in the relationship between education and society. In this section, we are not able to elaborate on Ibn Khaldūn's philosophy of education. We will, however, discuss some of his views on scientific instruction. The main points of his views are enlisted in summary below:

1. The order in which subjects are introduced determines success in the outcome of learning;
2. The abundance of scholarly works constitutes an obstacle to learning;
3. The proliferation of handbooks providing abridgements is detrimental to learning;
4. Effective methods of instruction must be adhered to;
5. The study of auxiliary sciences should not be prolonged and extended;
6. Severe punishments should not be meted out to students;
7. Education is greatly enhanced by travel in quest of knowledge and meeting with scholars.

Ibn Khaldūn paid attention to the order in which subjects are introduced to students. The order would be determined by the circumstances of a particular society. He cited a point made by the judge, Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī, who suggested that the teaching of the Arabic language and poetry should precede that of other fields because of the degeneration of Arabic in those times. After that students should be introduced to arithmetic and Qur’anic studies. It was not advisable to teach the Qur’an at the beginning as students would be exposed to things that they did not understand. Before studying the Qur’an, they should be introduced to the principles of Islam, the principles of jurisprudence, the art of disputation (*jadāl*) and the sciences of *hadīth*. Although Ibn Khaldūn concurred with Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī's opinion, he was not optimistic that this advice would be heeded. It was customary for instruction to begin with the Qur’an because of the promise of rewards in the hereafter.⁴³

Another problem that Ibn Khaldūn identified was the tendency to make an excessive amount of scholarly works available to students. This obstructed the learning process. The excessive amount of material was exacerbated by the requirement to learn much technical terminology and methods employed in

this material. Giving the example of jurisprudence, Ibn Khaldūn said that this field has such a variety of methods that it would be far more efficient if students were expected to focus on specific topics. Ibn Khaldūn also opined that it was unnecessary for students to preoccupy themselves with trying to master the principles and details of philology. This would require an entire lifetime of study of a subject that is simply a tool and means for further studies.⁴⁴

Ibn Khaldūn was also against the excessive use of handbooks as instructional materials. As the handbooks contain summaries and abridgements of the contents and methods of a science, the learning process that the student undergoes is corrupted. The corruption (*fāsād*) of the learning process takes place because the student is confused by knowing the final results before he has learned about the process. Furthermore, students do not develop good scholarly habits from studying summaries and abridgements as opposed to studying the original works which requires more repetition, which Ibn Khaldūn regarded as a good learning habit.⁴⁵

Ibn Khaldūn also highlighted the problem of ineffective methods of instruction. In order for teaching to be effective, it had to proceed slowly and in stages. Instruction should begin with the introduction of the principles. In the course of this introduction, the teacher should gauge the student's ability to grasp what is taught and his ability to handle further readings. The process should then be repeated, taking the student to progressively higher levels. The teacher should not be providing summaries but complete commentaries and explanations. This will give the student a deeper grounding in the discipline. Ibn Khaldūn suggested that for instruction to be effective, the repetition should be threefold.

Ibn Khaldūn made a very important point here. He criticised teachers for exposing students to difficult and sophisticated scientific problems before they were ready to receive such instruction. Being exposed to the final results of a problem without fully comprehending the problem in the first place may result in their being discouraged by the learning process altogether. Ibn Khaldūn also added that the teacher should avoid allowing many breaks or long intervals between teaching sessions so as not to disrupt continuity in the learning process. Ibn Khaldūn also advised against exposing students to more than one discipline at the same time. Dividing the attention of students between disciplines would affect the ability to master a subject.⁴⁶

Yet another problem that Ibn Khaldūn identified was the prolongation of the study of the auxiliary sciences, that is, the sciences that are prerequisites to the study of the main sciences. The auxiliary sciences include Arabic philology, arithmetic and logic. They should only be studied only to the extent that they are needed as tools or methods in the main sciences. Prolonging instruction in them as if they were subjects in their own right would only serve to draw attention away from the more important disciplines.⁴⁷

Ibn Khaldūn was also against meting out severe punishment to students. To illustrate his point, he took as an example the meting out of harsh punishments to slaves and servants. Those subject to severe punishment tend to react by being lazy, dishonest and insincere in order to avoid further harsh treatment. Eventually such behaviours become routine and habitual. Under such circumstances, students would not be able to reach their human potentials.⁴⁸

Ibn Khaldūn highlighted the importance of personal relationship between the teacher and student as a vital part of the learning experience. He even encouraged students to travel so as to be able to meet the authoritative scholars of their time.⁴⁹

Above, we have only mentioned Ibn Khaldūn's ideas and advice on knowledge and the process of its acquisition. However, his views are still relevant only if we bear in mind that today we have mass education, as contrasted from Ibn Khaldūn's time when education was meant for the few. Thus many of his ideas concerning pedagogy apply to education for an elite. By elite, I am not referring to the social, economic or political elite, but rather those students who have exceptional interests and abilities and who show promise to be leading figures in their areas of specialisation. It is to these types of students that Ibn Khaldūn's ideas on pedagogy apply.

From Ibn Khaldūn's critique of the historical scholarship up to his time, we can gather what pedagogical goals are of importance to him, this obviously has to do with the search for truth. He criticised certain tendencies to be found in historical scholarship:

1. Gossip and invented reports were combined with true reports.
2. The reporting of historical events was often based on error (*al-ghalt*) and unlearned conjecture (*al-wahm*).
3. Those who lacked the requisite abilities were involved in research and writing.
4. Blind imitation (*al-taqlīd*) or the passing down of history from generation to generation was accepted without question.

Ibn Khaldūn advocated a theoretically speculative history, that is, a history that was concerned with the inner meaning (*bāṭin*) of history and examines the origins and causes of what was reported as the facts or what he terms the surface phenomena (*ẓāhir*) of history. A critical scholar would not be content to be a reporter (*al-nāqil*) who merely recorded and passed on the information or reports he collected. The critical mind would be interested in revealing the causes, the inner meanings of these events.⁵⁰

Ibn Khaldūn gave an example of blind imitation and a non-critical approach to the study of history from the story of the Prophet Musa (Moses) (pbuh) in the works of some well-known historians, including al-Mas'ūdī. They reported that the Prophet Musa (pbuh) had as many as 600,000 soldiers in the army of the

Israelites in the desert. The location was Egypt and Syria. The historians failed to ask the question as to whether the location in the report could have accommodated such a large army. Ibn Khaldūn also noted that such a large army would not be able to function as a unit. It was unlikely that any military commander would want to manage an army, the size of which extends beyond the fields of vision of the commanders. Bringing in a comparative perspective, Ibn Khaldūn noted that the Persians, who had a vastly larger empire than the Israelites, had only 200,000 men in their army. It stood to reason that if the army of the Israelites consisted of 600,000 men, they would have ruled over an area much larger than that of the Persians. As Ibn Khaldūn said, the size of a dynasty is proportionate to the size of its army.⁵¹

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

As we have stated, Ibn Khaldūn regarded nomadic society as superior to sedentary society. Nomads were more socially cohesive, had greater moral fibre and courage and were more observant of religious law. Sedentary people on the other hand, experienced a dissipation of their social cohesion, became obsessed with a life of luxury and permissiveness, and were less observant of religious law. When we speak of the good *madīna* in Khaldunian terms, there is a contradiction in that the nature of the *madīna*, as part of *‘umrān ḥaḍarī*, is such that its inhabitants were not good (*khayr*). As we noted above, Ibn Khaldūn considered the inhabitants of *‘umrān badawī* to be closer to being good than those of *‘umrān ḥaḍarī*. In much of the modern world, the majority of people are sedentary, living either in cities or villages. In fact, the trend is towards greater urbanisation. It is not possible to reverse the historical trend and become pastoral nomads. We are in a position where we have to make the best of our social organisation, the *madīna*, with all its faults as described by Ibn Khaldūn.

The *madīna* was not all bad. The problem was that there was an inevitable movement towards degeneration and decay. In the early stages of the up cycle, the *madīna* functioned well in terms of its political, economic and social dimensions. It is the characteristics of the *madīna*, in its early stages, that we may wish to consider for emulation. This paper has highlighted some aspects that can be considered worthy of emulation. These are the nature of authority, the role of the government in the economy, and the nature of education. These aspects of the life of the *madīna* are founded on certain universal values such as the rule of law, justice, accountability, responsibility, and the quest for knowledge and truth. Indeed such values do not inform many modern societies of the Muslim world today and should be given more emphasis in our discussions on civilisational renewal. For example, we saw from the comparison with Max Weber, that Ibn Khaldūn's concepts of authority continue to be of relevance to the modern Muslim

world. Unbridled kingship or *mulk tabīʿī* is still a dominant fact of political life. Muslim people are striving to achieve a kind of *mulk siyāsī*.

At the heart of the problem is perhaps education. Ibn Khaldūn's reflections on education take into account politics, language, city life and social class. He also dealt with the methods and procedures of education and can be seen to be an innovator in pedagogy. He had a more holistic view of education, approaching the topic not in the traditional manner, that is, as a philosopher, theologian, moralist or jurist, but rather as an historian and sociologist.⁵² The way to the good *madīna* is through an holistic education that produces not just competent but moral individuals.

- Ibn Khaldūn's discussions on the features and characteristics of sedentary society give us some clues as to what he considered to be the desirable traits of the political, economic and social aspects of society. Ibn Khaldūn's characterisations of sedentary society are founded on universal values of justice, equity and fairness. These remain relevant to modern societies. His thought and work should therefore be presented to students as an exploration of the nature of a good polity or civilised society, in which the focus is on contemporary challenges in governance.
- Ibn Khaldūn's description of injustice highlights vulnerability to arbitrary confiscation of money and property, and the imposition of forced labour and unfair taxes. These are all exacerbated by unbridled kingship and the "unpredictability and inconsistency on the part of court and local officials". As such Ibn Khaldūn offers contemporary societies a basis for understanding and addressing inequities in contemporary systems of governance, be they local, national, or global. We consider, therefore, that the study of Ibn Khaldūn should be made compulsory for any student of Islamic banking and finance.

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Notes

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- 8. *Muqaddimah*, I, 200 [I, 257].
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- 12. *Muqaddimah*, I, 240 [I, 298].
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