

‘Aṣabiyyah, Religion and Regime Types: Re-reading Ibn Khaldūn

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Abstract: Ibn Khaldūn found a “causal determinative analytical tool” to explain development, progression and disintegration of *‘umrān* (lit. culture). He argued that *‘umrān* comes into existence as a result of five types of causes: (1) the “ultimate or first cause,” (2) final cause, (3) efficient cause, (4) formal cause, and (5) material cause. However, in Ibn Khaldūn’s scheme of analysis, the efficient cause of *‘umrān* and political institutions consists of two factors: (1) *‘aṣabiyyah* and (2) religion. Ibn Khaldūn believed that a meaningful investigation of the relationship between religion, *‘aṣabiyyah* and *‘umrān* is possible if investigation is narrowed down to the study of human nature. Hence, according to Ibn Khaldūn, what is true of human nature is also true of *‘umrān*. Stated differently, the rules applicable to human nature are applicable to *‘umrān* and political institutions.

Ibn Khaldūn’s prime objective was to study the underlying causes/factors of political and institutional transformations in a society.¹ He was interested in explaining the rise and fall of different regimes and the linkages between regime types and the realization of public interest. In his search to solve the puzzle, Ibn Khaldūn studied rational philosophy, Islamic jurisprudence and the existing formal or narrative Muslim historiography. Eventually, he found the solution to this puzzle in the society’s internal dynamics or *‘umrān* which in its wider sense includes types of governments and its affiliated political institutions. *‘Umrān*, according to most historians, is Ibn Khaldūn’s new science of society/history which in modern parlance is translated as culture.

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For the analysis of development, progression and disintegration of *‘umrān*, Ibn Khaldūn developed a “determinative analytical tool.” Historically, to Ibn Khaldūn, religion and *‘aṣabiyyah* are the underlying factors of political and institutional transformations. Additionally, religion and *‘aṣabiyyah* are also the underlying factors for the transformation of *‘umrān*. Ibn Khaldūn believed that a meaningful investigation of the relationship between religion, *‘aṣabiyyah* and *‘umrān* becomes possible if the investigation narrows down to the study of human nature. However, Ibn Khaldūn’s world view has influenced his analysis of human nature. What is Ibn Khaldūn’s world view? What is his conception of human nature and *‘umrān*? What is the relationship between religion, *‘aṣabiyyah* and political institutions? This study attempts to answer these questions.

World View

Ibn Khaldūn’s world view centred on his belief in the one and only Divine Being which is the First Cause of all causes. The principle of *tawhīd* (all-encompassing unity of Allah the most High) guided Ibn Khaldūn’s writings on politics, culture and society and influenced his views on the relationship between *‘umrān* and man, on the one hand, and *‘umrān* and the realm of intelligence, on the other. According to Ibn Khaldūn, the created world is composed of the perceptual-physical world (*‘ālam jismānī maḥsūs*) and the world of intelligence (*‘ālam ‘uqūl*). These two worlds are meaningfully related to each other which, in turn, is related to their Creator. Attempts to investigate the nature of the relationship between the two worlds, therefore, must focus on the nature of the relationship between God, revelation, prophecy, man, *‘umrān*, and other constituent components of both worlds.

A re-reading of Ibn Khaldūn’s writings makes it clear that in this scheme of analysis, God emerges as the Ultimate and Absolute Being. He has created all that belongs to the world of intelligences and the perceptual-physical world. He has also clearly defined the status and position as well as the nature of the relationships between/among them. He has created every component of the two worlds with distinct properties. He knows the true nature of every single element that belongs to the two worlds. Most importantly, He knows the nature—the internal and external make-up of man. Ibn Khaldūn believes

that human nature is originally good. God created man and bestowed on him all the essential characteristics. Man has been gifted with the ability to become the object of making and doing. Yet, He created man with a "bounded" nature of making and doing.

Man's capabilities would always be limited and incomplete. Man would need to complement this incomplete or bounded capability with another element, also divine in nature—revelation. God, therefore, constantly intervenes in history by sending revelations. He made man the medium through which He could constantly intervene in history. Revelations require the institution of prophecy. However, when the Prophet (SAS) is gone, the task of the interpretation and realization of God's purposes is done by man who believes in the message sent to him by God.

God has created man with the capability of interpreting the revealed message. He has also given him the capability of understanding by ways other than revelation. The two mediums of understanding are complementary and not contradictory. The rational faculty and revelation are intrinsically and permanently in harmony. God knows best the nature of both. Therefore, it is natural that revelation takes precedence over reason in that it is divine and has come to perfect man's understanding. Contradictions that may arise would need the redefinition of conclusions arrived at by reason. Therefore, experiential knowledge is bounded and perfected by revealed knowledge. Hence, experiential knowledge and revealed knowledge are not contradictory. In fact, experiential knowledge is essentially sanctioned by religion.

The implication of the world view as such for *ʿumrān* and, by extension, political institutions is as follows. It suggests that certain maxims and principles related to life are discernible through reason and the senses while another set of maxims are discernible through reason from revelation. This, in turn, implies that man can invent sets of rules and institutions but within the parameters approved by revelation. *ʿUmrān*, therefore, is based both on rational and revealed sources of knowledge. This being the case, it is necessary to examine human nature to understand the nature of the rational faculty of man and its ability or inability to attain perfect knowledge and, in particular, the true nature of *ʿumrān* without divine help.

Human Nature

According to Ibn Khaldūn, *‘umrān* and human nature are closely linked. *‘Umrān* is a human product. Therefore, the true knowledge and nature of *‘umrān* can become evident through a knowledge of the nature of man. Ibn Khaldūn, therefore, is the founder of the behavioural approach which became common only in the twentieth century.

According to Ibn Khaldūn, man's nature is composed of two dimensions: (1) physical and (2) non-physical. The non-physical dimension of human nature is composed of two faculties: the rational and the animal. All desires and low impulses belong to man's animal faculty. Ibn Khaldūn also refers to man's animal faculty as "innate faculties" or "innate capacities to desire."² However, reason or the rational faculty brings man nearer to truth and enables him to establish a 'link' between the two worlds. Therefore, the essential properties of man's rational faculty are: (1) mind or intellect (*quwwah nāṭiqah*), (2) reflection (*fikr*), and (3) deliberation (*rawiyyah*). The faculty of intellect, in turn, has two dimensions: the theoretical and the practical and "it is the practical which emerges first and is at the root of what man makes and does, which constitute culture." The practical dimension is further divided into two components: discerning reason (*‘aql tamyīzī*) and experiential reason (*‘aql tajrībī*). The former is the object of making and the latter is the object of doing.³ However, Ibn Khaldūn wrote, man's rational faculty and its all natural properties are gifted by God.

In addition to the rational faculty, wrote Ibn Khaldūn, man's innate faculties - the vegetative, the sensitive, and the appetitive - are also natural in that they are implanted in man's soul or internal make-up. These faculties interact positively or negatively with reason in what man creates. These "innate capacities to desire" include bodily appetite (*shahwah badaniyyah*) such as hunger, thirst, food, drink, comfort, anger (*ghaḍab*), vengeance (*intiqām*), desires for sexual intercourse and reproduction, and desire for affiliation (*suḥbah*) with other men who are related to him or who resemble him in certain ways. Elements of the human-animal faculty or desires manifest themselves at different time intervals. For instance, some manifest themselves before and some after the formation of communal life. Among the desires which are manifested after the formation of

communal life are the desires to obtain victory (*ghalabah*) and superiority (*ri'āṣah*) over others and the desire to overcome (*qahr*) others. *Qahr* moves those desiring victory to struggle for political supremacy and for establishing the state in which they intend to be leaders. Victory and superiority are in most cases sought to satisfy other desires, namely, glory and honour (*'izz, jah*), distinction or nobility (*sharaf, nasab*), and reputation (*bu'd al-sīṭ*). The satisfaction of these desires by some individuals in society gives rise to a new set of relations and feelings between those who have satisfied them and those who have not. These desires result in the formation of group feeling referred to as *aṣabiyyah*. Hence, *aṣabiyyah* is a natural and intrinsic tendency in man. *Aṣabiyyah* is, therefore, part of man's animal faculty. Some of its elements come into existence before while some other of its elements are formed after the formation of communal life.⁴

The rational faculty interacts with both the world of intelligences and man's animal faculty. It is natural that reason would be strong and dominate the lower human impulses. But as soon as man experiences or comes into contact with a luxurious life, his animal faculty reasserts itself. From then on, man's behaviour is not governed by his rational faculty only. Rational faculty is no longer nearer to the truth or true knowledge as it has been distanced from the world of intelligences. A human's reason is adulterated by his desires. While his rational faculty may inform him of the existence of the world of intelligences, it may not always be possible for it to know the content of the world of intelligence through the senses. It is natural that the senses may not be able to lead man to know everything. Here, man's rational faculty needs to be complemented with "supernatural help." This helps to complement man's rational faculty that could be communicated to him through numerous means of which "prophecy" is the most advanced medium.⁵ In this regard Muhsin Mahdi notes:

Prophecy is the most important of these phenomena because of its decisive role in the development of culture. The purpose of the prophet is primarily practical. He is sent to communicate a message (*tablīgh*) and instruct men in what is best for them and take pains to guide them. The Law initiated by him is designated to preserve and protect human society. Thus the appearance of a prophet and a Law in a community is liable to be of fundamental

cultural significance, since they can change its ideals and ways of life, and impose new attitudes and create new institutions. Although the explanation of the nature and powers of the prophet is not part of the object of the science of culture, this science should use the result of such explanation as a basic principle in its study of society and its development.⁶

The supernatural help communicated to man repulses the negative influence of the animal faculty on his rational faculty. It allows reason to reassert its perfection. With divine help, all innate capacities to desires that could become evident before or after the formation of communal life are naturally put under the control of an extra human source, namely religion. The natural shortcomings ingrained in human nature are overcome by the help of Divine Law. Thus, human perfection can be attained only by means of religion.

‘Umrān: A Conceptual Analysis

The network of interactions and the way men think and interact is called culture or what Ibn Khaldūn called the *‘umrān* of the society. Therefore, *‘umrān*/culture is a manifestation of thinking and the way members of the society behave. If man’s behavior influences his thinking, it also influences the events that result from his thinking. Therefore, a systematic investigation of events requires a systematic understanding of human culture. This is what Ibn Khaldūn means by the investigation of the nature and underlying causes of events. However, substantive analysis of these underlying causes of events depends on systematic investigation of the nature of man (discussed above). Stated differently, one must know the true nature or internal make up of the human being to know the true nature of *‘umrān* whose systematic study is essential for an analysis of history.

Muhsin Mahdi translates *‘umrān* as ‘culture’ and not civilization. According to him, almost all the meanings of the Arabic verb root—*‘a-m-r* and Latin *colo* from which *cultura* and English culture are derived manifest correspondence. He believes that translating *‘umrān* as civilization has the disadvantage of blurring the distinction between primitive and civilized cultures. He further argues that the term civilized culture, which is an advanced stage of culture, is also called *haḍārah* which etymologically corresponds to civilization.⁷ Mahdi argues:

It is perhaps useful to note here that *'umrān* does not usually apply to a single man as does culture in expressions like 'a cultured man'. Rather it means the cumulative social heritage (ideas, attitudes, and activities) of a group as objectified in institutions and conventionalized activities in a particular time and place. In this respect, its meaning is extremely close to that of culture as used in modern sociology and anthropology.... This does not mean, however, that Ibn Khaldūn had the same conception of the nature and causes of culture as that of modern social sciences.⁸

In addition to reinforcing the view that *'umrān* and culture possess many common properties, Mahdi's argument also suggests that Ibn Khaldūn's new science of society and modern social sciences are founded on epistemologically distinct sources of knowledge. This distinction, however, in terms of the source of knowledge is even more prominent in Ibn Khaldūn's view on the role religion plays in the construction of *'umrān* and, by extension, political institutions.

The term *'umrān* is derived from the trilateral verb *'a-m-r* meaning: (1) to live, inhabit, dwell, continue and remain in place; (2) to become inhabited, stocked and cultivated (with people, animals or plants), to be in good repair, i.e., the contrary of desolation, waste, or ruin; and (3) to cultivate, build, institute, promote, observe, visit, or aim at, a thing or a place. The first two usages of *'a-m-r*, Mahdi argues, describe material dimension while its third usage refers to both the material and non-material dimensions of social life.⁹ The term *'umrān*, therefore, is descriptive of concrete elements such as places or social conditions as well as abstract concepts and ideas. However, these usages of *'a-m-r* become meaningful if viewed in relation with living beings such as plants or human beings. Culture, therefore, grows and exists in places where people live. However, the manifestations of existence of culture in a particular place include: the place well cultivated, constructed, adorned, equipped, preserved, and in general in a flourishing state resulting from man's labour and industry and from the use of his intelligence and art. Therefore, the adjectives *amīr* and *ma'mūr* point to the various results of man's labour without further specification, and are equally applicable to land, a house, fortress, or market place, and indicate a flourishing state or a general state of prosperity. Mahdi argues that what is true of verbal adjectives is also true of the substantive *'umrān*.¹⁰

Technically, *‘umrān* refers to “diverse arts and institutions of social life and the modes pertaining to them, beginning from the moment man invents them through the exercise of his rational faculty and throughout the various stages of their development.”¹¹ *‘Umrān*, therefore, is “the habitual and conventionalized forms of social institutions and artistic productions.”¹² It includes habits, values, rules, mores, laws, practices and ideas and institutions (political, economic, scientific, social). The way *‘umrān* is defined here has two implications: (1) *‘Umrān* is experiential and a product of the human rational faculty. It is an ever evolving process. As *‘umrān* evolves, patterns of behaviour change which would result in social transformation. Ibn Khaldūn’s classification of society into primitive and advanced is based on this experiential component of *‘umrān*. (2) Religion is not experiential and, therefore, is not part of *‘umrān*. Religion is divine and is sent by God for the guidance of humanity. It is not something that can be contemplated by men. If religious values and myths have not evolved and are not the product of human knowledge, one could raise questions about their practicality. Ibn Khaldūn believed that religion directly as well as indirectly influences the evolution of *‘umrān*. Its medium, however, is man. He believed that this totality of human endeavours called *‘umrān* results from the interplay of four essential components of life: (1) man’s vegetative needs, (2) man’s animal appetites, (3) human reason, and (4) Divine Law.¹³

‘Umrān viewed in relation to human nature becomes subject to the same rules applied to human nature. The non-physical dimension of man’s internal make-up is governed by active interaction between his rational and animal faculties. The chances of the rational faculty being influenced by the animal faculty always exist. Rationality could be perfected through the divine help i.e. religion. And religion comes from God through prophets. Thus, religion is not a human product and, therefore, non-experiential. When man seeks perfection in divine Law, a case is made that *‘umrān* needs to be put under the auspices of Divine Law. One could, therefore, safely infer from Ibn Khaldūn’s discourse on religion and *‘umrān* that the rule of “bounded experientialism,” as applied to human nature, is also applicable to *‘umrān*. The *‘umrān* that comes into existence as a result of the harmonious interplay of human reason and religion, according to Ibn Khaldūn, may be described as advanced culture or civilized

culture and political institutions a part thereof as civilized in contradistinction to primitive culture and political institutions and part thereof which is the result of the interplay of man's rational and animal faculties. Primitive culture and political institutions and part thereof in Ibn Khaldūn's typology is the one devoid of the Light of God.

‘*Aṣabiyyah*, Religion and Political Institutions

Ibn Khaldūn bases his discussion of “religion” and ‘*aṣabiyyah* on one central assumption: that religion must be politicized or religion is meant to be politicized. This does not mean putting religion in the service of politics or using religion to justify or legitimize political activities. It also does not mean the co-existence of religion and politics as two separate entities. What Ibn Khaldūn meant was that all political activities such as political institutions, ideas, and values may reflect the divine design/plan for mankind. From the above assumption follows another assumption: that rational political order and its corollary, causal determinants, (e.g., ‘*aṣabiyyah*) may seek perfection through Divine Laws or religious directives. The two assumptions are congruent with Ibn Khaldūn's world view and his views on human nature and ‘*umrān* and reflect his desire of reasserting religion into political philosophy or rational political order. By the time Ibn Khaldūn wrote his *Prolegomena* and other discourses on culture and civilization, religious laws had lost its significance in influencing political activities both in the Muslim world and the Christian Europe under the influence of the renaissance that ushered the age of reason.¹⁴ Ibn Khaldūn felt compelled to advocate the formation of a moral order, a complete social order or political order with human forms and structures but based on the divine design. It is an order based on a comprehensive code regulating man's private and public opinions and actions.

In Ibn Khaldūn's historiography, political institutions constitute an integral part of ‘*umrān*. Ibn Khaldūn attributed a central role to politics in the construction of ‘*umrān*. The centrality of politics to ‘*umrān*, says Ibn Khaldūn, was due to the fact that ‘*umrān* was a material cause which could be actualized or come into existence only after the state (a formal cause) is formed. And the state comes into existence simultaneously with the formation of the ‘*aṣabiyyah*. Thus, ‘*umrān* is the product of the state which, in turn, is the result

of *‘aṣabiyyah* with its roots in human nature. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that, like *‘umrān*, political institutions viewed in relation to human nature could be subjected to all the rules applicable to that nature. Prominent among them is the principle of bounded experientialism. Like *‘umrān*, political institutions are experiential and could be subjected to religious laws. Experientialism in politics suggests that political institutions are formed by men. Their forms and characters are primarily human. Institution-building may be an ever evolving phenomenon. No rigid form of state or government could be historically valid. But, the evolving types of political institutions and the changes or reforms introduced therein should essentially conform to human nature. When man needs to surrender to religious laws to attain perfection, so does political institution building. *‘Aṣabiyyah* creates the state and, by extension, *‘umrān* and political institutions. Religious laws should guide *‘aṣabiyyah*.¹⁵

Ibn Khaldūn advocated neither “kingship” nor “imperial” forms of governance or state institutions. Ibn Khaldūn uses the term “regime of law” or “religious regime” (*siyāsah shar‘iyyah/siyāsah dīniyyah*) to describe types of governments and state institutions that may rule civilized society. A state is civilized if its institutions reflect and aim to attain the objectives provided by the divine design for mankind and a society is civilized if state institutions, created in the light of divine design, conform to divine laws. Historically, according to Ibn Khaldūn, the Great Imamate (*al-imāmat al-kubrā*) or Caliphate founded by the Rightly Guided caliphs almost conformed to his regime of law.¹⁶ According to Ibn Khaldūn, a regime of Law is often established by Prophets. Upon the demise of Prophet Muhammad (SAS), the Muslim society chose his successors who ruled Muslims according to the same Divine Laws promulgated by him. Ibn Khaldūn suggested that the revival of the regime of law may vary in form but not in substance or spirit. In other words, Muslims may not recreate political institutions experimented by the first four caliphs. They, however, need to introduce institutions leading to the attainment of identical purposes and objectives provided by religious laws. Ibn Khaldūn distinguishes the regime of law from “rational regimes” (*siyāsah ‘aqliyyah*) or “regimes devised by man’s practical reason without the light of God to help it.”¹⁷ Any form of government devoid of Divine Light falls within the ambit of a rational regime. The society governed by a rational

regime such as kingdoms and empires, therefore, is uncivilized society or a pre-political state of society. According to him, a king cannot be a true successor of a prophet while, a caliph is.

Notwithstanding the classification of the state into regime of law and rational regime, Ibn Khaldūn says that the life of the state and the life of civilization are co-extensive. A civilization follows the rise of a powerful state; it is limited in space by the extent of the state, it flourishes when the state is at the height of its power, and it disintegrates with the state's disintegration. Consequently, Ibn Khaldūn's study of the development of civilization is primarily a study of the development of a civilized state and an examination of the interaction of the other aspects of civilization within the state.

The state is a pointer indicating the existence of civilization. The problems of the creation of the state, the stages through which it passes, its various forms, and the causes of its decline, are, therefore, the central problems of Ibn Khaldūn's science of culture.¹⁸ Evidently, civilization exists when the state comes into existence. But the state institutions that can lead to civilized life and order also need to be civilized. Civilized state institutions are the ones, to Ibn Khaldūn, in which *ʿaṣabiyyah* and religion complement one another. The reason for such an intimate relationship between civilization and the state can be found in the nature of relationship between the state and culture. According to Ibn Khaldūn, in order to know the true nature of culture, we need to know the causes or the principles and elements that constitute it. For what comes to be, therefore, it is essential to know all its causes namely: (1) material, (2) formal, (3) efficient, and (4) final causes as well as (5) the Ultimate or First cause of all causes. Ibn Khaldūn, denying the possibility of the infinite number of causes, affirms that they all end in the First cause. In order to know, Ibn Khaldūn wrote, the nature of culture, then we may at least know its two causes: (1) material (*qābiliyyah*) cause and (2) formal (*sūrī*) cause.

The essential feature of material cause is that it exists in potency, but it may not mean that it may exist in actuality. It requires the help of formal cause; the elements that can give it shape and form. In this way material element acquires meaning and definition. It becomes a concrete entity. The formal cause of the culture, wrote Ibn Khaldūn, is the state. All other elements of culture, though possessing the

potential of existence, can exist as actual parts of the whole only when the state is created. Therefore, if culture is actualized through the existence of state, then a central argument must be made about the creation of the state. We must know how the state comes into existence. We must know, to use Ibn Khaldūn's line of thinking, the causes or principles that lead to the creation of the state. Then it becomes evident that whatever is considered as principles of the state, would positively or negatively affect the formation of culture. Stated otherwise, a culture may be called civilized if the society is civilized and uncivilized if the state is uncivilized.

In Ibn Khaldūn's view, *ʿaṣabiyyah* and religion are the principles upon which the state is established. However, the dominating role played by either religion or *ʿaṣabiyyah* fluctuates, resulting in a given type of regime. In order for the material (culture) and formal (state) causes to be actualized and result in the creation of the object (culture and state), they need an efficient cause (*faʿiliyyah*):

the cause to which a thing owes its actual existence, which includes its generation as well as the succeeding changes through which it is progressively actualized; it is existential cause which explains the actual existence of a being at the various stages of its development (e.g. from uncivilized/primitive passing through the terminal stage or the most civilized/advanced and ending in disintegration and decline of society/culture). It answers the question: How does a thing come to exist actually?¹⁹

The efficient cause that brings a state into existence has, in Ibn Khaldūn's writings, two dimensions: (1) *ʿaṣabiyyah* and (2) religion (both are essential elements of human nature). However, when Ibn Khaldūn viewed *ʿaṣabiyyah* as the efficient cause for the existence of the state, by state he means rational regimes. According to him, rational regimes are different from the regime of Law in that the former is devoid of divine light. Therefore, *ʿaṣabiyyah* viewed in interrelationship with religion acquires three distinct meanings.²⁰

The first is the natural *ʿaṣabiyyah* which refers to a group feeling of social bonds among the ruling elite generated by men's natural desires; socially institutionalized simple desire; and man's affection toward his fellow men, especially his blood relations.²¹ It gives concrete and institutionalized form to men's various kinds of desires and is the element/desire which exists in man that provokes him to

form a state and ensure its further development, through building institutions, ideas, etc., over various stages, and attend to the nature of changes within the state. *‘Aṣabiyyah* of this kind is overshadowed by the properties of the human animal faculty. Ancestral relationship seems to be considered the most important element of social bonds. This type of *‘aṣabiyyah* corresponds to human animal desires and would result in a rational regime whose end is the selfish interests of the ruling elite who may rule an empire, monarchy/kingship or even a degenerated form of modern democracy.

The end of the ruler referred to here is of course a mundane end. More specifically, it is the satisfaction of his lower desires or appetite (*shahwah*). Consequently, it is ultimately a rule according to appetite [This type of regime] functions rather as a mere tool to augment and buttress the selfish interests of the ruler.²²

The factors (causes) that could lead to development of such an intimate feeling of cooperation within the group or *‘aṣabiyyah* among some individuals in society are many. However, these factors are ingrained within and part of man's internal make-up.

Therefore, the formation of *‘aṣabiyyah*, according to Ibn Khaldūn, in society is natural. For instance, man by his natural faculty has the tendency and desire for affiliation (*suḥbah*) or desire to be compassionate toward, and to help and defend his immediate relations, a desire for living together in companionship and fellowship; of co-operating; of sharing the experiences of life and death by helping and defending those near to one and the desire that such feelings be reciprocated by one's friends. These are the basic desires which lead to the formation of human society and help sustain it. They are strongest when the family and one's immediate relations are concerned, and are the sources of strong solidarity in clans and tribes.

The opposite of the desire for affiliation is failing others (*takhadhul*), hatred, and the desire to harm. This is one of the natural sources of enmity and the desire to annihilate others.²³ While Ibn Khaldūn admits that these factors are interrelated and reinforce each other in developing *‘aṣabiyyah*, under no circumstances would common ancestry be considered as a permanent factor or cause for the development as well as endurance of cohesiveness within the group.²⁴ Absence of the glue of common ancestry as the catalyst for

development of group feeling, in Ibn Khaldūn's theory of *‘aṣabiyyah*, leads to its second meaning.

The second is the rational *‘aṣabiyyah* that refers to a group feeling of social bonds among the ruling elite generated by elements of men's rational faculty. *‘Aṣabiyyah* in this stage is raised above ancestral or blood ties. It is not overshadowed by men's animal desires. The type of government run by this type of ruling elite is considered rational. The reason being that they legitimize the conduct of public affairs on the ground of furthering the common good: "The primary concern of this regime is to attend to the common good in general and to attend to the interest of the ruler in so far it leads to the righteousness or correctness (*istiḳāmah*) of his rules, in particular."²⁵

Ibn Khaldūn believes that *‘aṣabiyyah* of this type, though not as good as *‘aṣabiyyah* governed by religion, is good. He seems to admit that man's rational faculty has the capability of perfecting itself by establishing relations with the meta-historical sources. Yet, in interaction with the human animal faculty, man's rational faculty is constantly susceptible to influences of the former. Hence, rational *‘aṣabiyyah* also becomes subject to the same rules applicable to human rational faculty, and *‘aṣabiyyah* needs to be put under constant supervision of another element external to the human being yet part of his nature. This element is religion. The interplay of *‘aṣabiyyah* and religion leads to the third type of *‘aṣabiyyah*, which is totally distinct from its other forms.

The third meaning of *‘aṣabiyyah* refers to a group feeling of social bond among the ruling elite generated by men's "inner faith or inner compulsion," a feeling developed in man but governed by Divine Light or Divine Law. This type of *‘aṣabiyyah* leads to the formation of the regime of Law. The first two types of *‘aṣabiyyah*, wrote Ibn Khaldūn, are instruments of creating state institutions whose ends are mundane. But the ends of state institutions established by elites governed by the third type of *‘aṣabiyyah* are both the mundane and the other worldly. Religion provides man with the power and force to struggle against the degeneration of the regime of Law into the rational regimes and its variant forms. Worded differently, religion suppresses and controls men's animal desires. It prevents transforming the regime of Law into the rational regime

and its variants. Here, Ibn Khaldūn attempted to answer one central question: what could prevent degeneration of solidarity and, in turn, perversion of the state from a good one to its degenerated form? Or what is the instrument that may enhance the chances of perpetuation of the regime of Law and prevent its degeneration into rational regimes? Classification of *‘aşabiyyah* into (1) natural, (2) rational in addition to reason, and (3) religious in addition to rational and natural and each category corresponding to a specific dimension of human nature and a given type of regime helped Ibn Khaldūn to provide adequate answers to the above questions.

The first kind of *‘aşabiyyah* corresponds to the animal aspect, the second kind of solidarity corresponds to the rational, and the third kind of solidarity corresponds to the religious dimensions of human nature. Since human nature, says Ibn Khaldūn, is perfected by religion, the third kind of solidarity is of the utmost significance for *‘umrān* and institution building because in this stage *‘aşabiyyah* “is strengthened by the inner compulsion to obey the Legislator (i.e., God) which rests on the belief in the truth of His message and the certainty of rewards promised in the world to come.”²⁶ Here, *‘aşabiyyah* is subjected to or placed under the control of religion. Divine religion provides guidance. *‘aşabiyyah* undergoes constant modification under the directives revealed to mankind by God.

Ibn Khaldūn says that men attempt to establish advanced cultural patterns and institutions. If they succeed in establishing one, it may not last long; the reason being that they suffer from the shortcomings natural to the rational and animal faculties of men. Therefore, in order to be able to found civilized patterns of relations and political institutions corresponding to civilized culture, they need an additional force to eliminate these shortcomings so that *‘aşabiyyah* endures and lasts long. As Muhsin Mahdi observes:

This force is religion. Religion, like any other social cause, needs solidarity [*‘aşabiyyah*] to establish it. It has, therefore, to rise and it usually does rise, among a group with strong solidarity [*‘aşabiyyah*] that propagates it by fighting for it. Once a religion is adopted and supported by such a group, it becomes a highly effective force. It creates a new loyalty: absolute belief in, and obedience to, the demands of the Law and the religious leader. This is the source of solidarity [*‘aşabiyyah*] superior to, and more lasting than, the solidarity [*‘aşabiyyah*] based merely upon

natural kingship and worldly desires. Religion does away with the competitiveness and envy resulting from pursuing worldly purposes, restrains its followers from immoral and unjust practices, commands them to obey their superiors, and establishes a Divine Law regulating their political life. Those who belief in it act from inner compulsion and are motivated by hope for the rewards it promises them in the world to come. Second to natural force in the creation of civilization, its commands are the most effective instruments for preserving it.²⁷

In this third stage, Ibn Khaldūn says, *‘aṣabiyyah* acquires a new dimension distinguishable from its other two types. *‘Aṣabiyyah* in its third stage could resemble “inner faith or inner compulsion”; a feeling developed in man governed by Divine Light or Divine Law. *‘Aṣabiyyah* is raised above the rational and animal faculties of men. Religion, in this stage, dominates and overshadows all kinds of human impulses and desires. “The result is a strong, united, virtuous, and obedient group which can conquer and rule nations greater, richer, and stronger in all other respects except that inner faith which distinguishes a religious community.”²⁸ After the inner faith declines, no other causes can prevent the degeneration of the regime of Law.

The law may remain, but once the inner impulse vanishes and the Law (e.g. religion) as a moving force in the hearts of men ceases to exist, the regime of Law as a dynamic reality ceases to exist. Natural solidarity [*‘aṣabiyyah*] re-emerges to assert itself, and unless a rational solidarity [*‘aṣabiyyah*] is substituted for the regime of Law, the latter is bound to degenerate into natural rule serving the lower impulses of whoever happens to have the stronger solidarity [*‘aṣabiyyah*].²⁹

The moment *‘aṣabiyyah* disintegrates, the state and culture disintegrate as well. In this way, the decline of civilization begins progressively.³⁰

Ibn Khaldūn says that the regime of Law is founded by the Prophet (SAS). However, if the regime is to continue, he must be succeeded by a ruler who is truly his successor. He calls the true successor of the Prophet (SAS) a caliph and not a king. He distinguishes a caliph from the prophet. Caliph, says Ibn Khaldūn, has no divine claim and was not designated by the Prophet (SAS) as the heterodox Shī‘ites assert.³¹ Ibn Khaldūn maintains that the office of the caliph

is not a necessity required by reason. It comes into existence through the consensus (*ijmā'*) of the community. However, the caliphate degenerated into kingship (i.e., the regime of Law has been transformed into the rational regime), which is in most part unjust. This degeneration is due to the fact that the king being overtaken by his desires of wealth and greed could hardly prevent himself from becoming the tyrant and harming the common interests of the ruled. The mundane and the religious, however, could co-exist in a rational regime but not in the regime of Law.

One efficient way, according to Ibn Khaldūn, to distinguish between a regime of Law and a rational regime and advanced culture/society and primitive culture/society would be to assess them in terms of their ends: the final cause. Knowledge of the final cause is significant in that it provides a reader in political philosophy with the standard by which he would be able to measure the degree of perfection or degeneration of the state. He would know whether the religion or *'aṣabiyyah* of the first type or second type has been operative in the creation of the state and its institutions. This affirms Ibn Khaldūn's view that religion and *'aṣabiyyah* are determinative causes for creation of the state, culture and society and their variant forms.

A state (regime of Law or rational regime), and culture (primitive or advanced) are not ends in themselves. Human beings do not create state and culture for their own sake. Men create a state and a culture for some specific ends such as moderation, perfection of man, public interest, happiness, *'adalah* (justice), goodness, etc. These ends are called the final cause because what human beings have so far produced are means to their attainment. But viewed in terms of the types of regimes that come into existence or are created by men, the content or substance of each of these ends varies from one regime to the next.

What is the specific end which a regime considers good? What is the measure of goodness realized in each regime? What may distinguish a 'virtuous' goodness from an 'imperfect' goodness?

The answer to these questions will give the historian a standard by which to judge the relative goodness of each regime, and whether a change from one regime to another is good or bad. With respect to the ends, says Ibn Khaldūn, of existing regimes

and the measure of goodness realized in each, three groups of regimes can be distinguished: (a) Primitive cultures whose end is mere life. (b) Civilized rational regimes whose end is the good of this world. (c) Civilized regimes of Law whose end is the good of this world and the next. [In other words] the end of the regime of Law is the preservation of life, the preservation and the proper enjoyment of the benefits of social life, and, in addition, the enjoyment of the good of the world to come.³²

The ends of various types of regimes could be categorized into two broad categories: (1) imperfect ends which are identified by men only, and (2) virtuous ends identified by men but approved by divine sanctions.

A state based on ends known through reason only without the active role of religious force is imperfect while its opposite is a virtuous state. An imperfect state is good if it is really ruled by reason, but it is difficult to separate reason from being influenced by the man's animal faculty or lower impulses. Though the rational faculty attempts to liberate itself towards moderation and the establishment of justice, it cannot do so absolutely because the animal faculty and desires in men would force them to act in the opposite direction. Principles provided by reasons are rational in so far they are not resulting from lower impulses. The reason cannot resist and eventually gives in to the temptation of the human animal faculty. Thus, rational principles ensure only the minimum conditions without which society could not continue to exist. Rational regimes lack many principles, the most evident of which is a Prophetic Law which defines man's duties toward God.

A Rational regime is devoid of the light of God. When enlightened by the light of God, at its best, human reason has envisaged a truly rational regime which is absolutely perfect and, therefore, nearer to the virtuous city. Here, Ibn Khaldūn resorts to religion—a force external to and which exists outside the human rational faculty—as the standard for prescribing the end of the state/society/culture. Thus, the Laws in the regime of Law are prescribed by the Lawgiver as He knows best the good of the many in the affairs of this world as well as the affairs of the world to come. In this way, Ibn Khaldūn succeeds in asserting the role God plays in the formation of culture and institution building. Thus, in this way God becomes the Ultimate Cause of all causes. This is the advanced society whose culture is

civilized and whose government is the Caliphate: a complete social order or political order based on a comprehensive code regulating man's private and public opinions and actions. It is the whole within which the various activities and institutions, including those relating to man's duties to God, exist or operate. In such an order, the mundane and religious affairs are not twin-brothers that could co-exist. Secularism is not the principle governing relationship between politics and political activities. Religion is politicized at best. All institutions are based in spirit on divine design for mankind. In such a community the mundane is subordinated to religious instructions.

Ibn Khaldūn argues that once a state comes into existence, then it naturally passes through five stages: (1) state based on solidarity and religion, (2) consolidation of rulers power and creation of absolute kingship; monopoly of power by absolute master or king, (3) stage of luxury and leisure, (4) contentment and peacefulness; rulers and the ruled become complacent and satisfied with the status quo and ignorant of the struggle of the founders of the state, and (5) the beginning of the decline and disintegration of the state. Ibn Khaldūn writes, indeed the decline of the state begins with the commencement of the second stage; the reason essentially being that an antithesis of the vital forces of solidarity and religion had started to form until their complete destruction through the successive stages.³³

Therefore, it is correct for Ibn Khaldūn to maintain that the development of political institutions such as the state and government and provisions of leadership are naturally ingrained in men's nature and, hence, political institutions, as an integral part of *‘umrān*, are also experiential. It is also true for Ibn Khaldūn to maintain that it is natural that the senses may not be able to lead man to know everything and, therefore, his rational faculty is complemented with "supernatural help."

Conclusion

Ibn Khaldūn, in search of a solution to and an analysis of the problem of the degeneration of a polity based on justice and moderation resorted to formal history, rational philosophy and even the study of Islamic jurisprudence. Eventually, he concluded that the analysis of *‘umrān* was a useful analytical tool. However, in his analysis of

‘*umrān*, he developed a causal analytical scheme, which, in turn, needed another explanatory analytical tool. Notwithstanding this, the implications of Ibn Khaldūn’s choice of the unit of analysis, approach, and conclusion drawn are many for institution-building.

He concluded that political institutions were subject to the principle of bounded experientialism. Ibn Khaldūn correctly believed that political institutions are fundamentally human in nature. Yet, they are not absolute, transcendental and sacrosanct. Therefore, the forms and structures of political institutions are bound by history. They could be, therefore, judged, amended and corrected by outside sources: supernatural help. While Ibn Khaldūn reaffirmed the close connection between religion and politics, his understanding of the nature of the relationship as such was fundamentally different from that of St. Augustine in the 4th century A.D. or Thomas Aquinas in the 14th century renaissance. In Ibn Khaldūn’s typology of sciences and knowledge, the co-existence of politics and religion side-by-side is beyond imagination. Science and religion, reason and revelation, are in great harmony. Both are sources of knowledge and it is natural for religion to perfect the shortcomings of rational conclusions. Reason is capable of acquiring correct knowledge. But it is equally capable of being overshadowed by its antithesis, man’s animal faculty. If man needs religion, so does ‘*umrān*. And what is true of man is also true of ‘*umrān* and what is true of ‘*umrān* is also true of political institution building. Therefore, the laws governing man also govern ‘*umrān* and political institutions.

Notes

1. This is a revised version of a paper presented in a seminar on “Ibn Khaldūn’s Historiography” organised by the Department of History and Civilization, International Islamic University Malaysia, 2003.
2. Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun’s Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 172.
3. ‘Abd al Rahmān bin Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutb al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1992), 104-107 & 110-128. This work has been translated in English by Franz Rosenthal, *Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967). See also Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn’s Philosophy of History*, 172-174; Anwar Amin Al-Mudamgha, *Ibn Khaldūn’s Socio-Historical Theory: A Study in the History of Ideas* (Michigan: University Microfilms, Monograph, 1971), 179-190.

4. Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, 136-149. See also Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History*, 178-179.
5. Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, 99-108.
6. Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History*, 193.
7. Ibid., 184. In the footnote of the above-cited reference, Muhsin Mahdi argues that the distinction between culture and civilization is blurred basically in works written on Ibn Khaldūn in French. However, such inconsistency does not appear in prominent works on Ibn Khaldūn in German which translate 'umrān and ḥaḍārah as Culture and Civilization, respectively.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 185-186.
11. Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History*, 186. See also Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, 36-37.
12. Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History*, 181.
13. Ibid., 190. See also Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, 36-43.
14. For details about Ibn Khaldūn's socio-political influence on the Muslim world and the West, see Anwar Amin Al-Mudamgha, *Ibn Khaldūn's Socio-Historical Theory*, 259-322.
15. Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, 166-170.
16. Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 15.
17. For details about the characteristics and examples of the regime of Law (*siyāsah shar'īyyah*) and rational regime (*siyāsah 'aqliyyah*) see, Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History*, 236-253.
18. Ibid., 204.
19. Ibid., 254.
20. 'Aṣabiyyah viewed in relation to 'umrān suggests group feeling among the members of society as a whole. 'Aṣabiyyah of this type, devoid of religion, is closer to the modern notion of nationalism. However, 'aṣabiyyah viewed in relation to political institutions and institution building suggests group feelings among the "ruling political elite."
21. Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, 136-139. See also Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History*, 254-264 and Anwar Amin Al-Mudamgha, *Ibn Khaldūn's Socio-Historical Theory*, 205- 217.
22. Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History*, 251. See also Ibn Khaldūn. *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*. 160-162.

23. Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History*, 177-178.
24. Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History*, 196-197. See also Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, 136-162.
25. Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History*, 248-279. See also Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, 139-144.
26. Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History*, 265. See also Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, 159-160.
27. *Ibid.*, 201.
28. *Ibid.*, 267-268. See also Anwar Amin Al-Mudamgha, *Ibn Khaldūn's Socio-Historical Theory*, 217.
29. *Ibid.*
30. For details see, Anwar Amin Al-Mudamgha, *Ibn Khaldūn's Socio-Historical Theory*, 240-258. See also Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, 163-171.
31. Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, 241.
32. Anwar Amin Al-Mudamgha, *Ibn Khaldūn's Socio-Historical Theory*, 276, 280. See also Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, 163-171.
33. See Anwar Amin Al-Mudamgha, *Ibn Khaldūn's Socio-Historical Theory*, 227-236, 204-209. See also Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, 164-166.