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IBN KHALDŪN'S BIOGRAPHY: UNVEILING GLOBAL HISTORY AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF MODERN CIVILIZATION

Ahmad Murad Merican¹

Abstract

Ibn Khaldūn and his Muqaddimah is a continuing project on the European intellectual map. For a long time, most of his works was studied by the French. The same cannot be said of the Malaysian intellectual Malaysian landscape. Ibn Khaldūn, of course, makes an attractive option for academic courses and readings in a variety of disciplines. This essay attempts to recast Ibn Khaldūn in the Malaysian intellectual landscape viz discourses on global history and approaching the study of civilization from a sociological and historical perspective. The sentiment echoes more of the Western engagement with the polymath. Malaysian university campuses are ambivalent. The Khaldunian corpus is almost non existent. The West has attempted to modernize Ibn Khaldūn. Some have construed this as “denaturing” him, accusing the thinker of “anticipatory plagiarism.” The Muslim world has been subdued in defending such accusations against him. There is no worthy defence. This essay uses the framework from Robert Irwin in his Ibn Khaldun: An Intellectual Biography. We ask who was Ibn Khaldūn writing for? For the state and authority? Or for himself? Some of the earliest beneficiaries of the Khaldunian corpus was the Ottoman state. This essay notes the disconnect between Ibn Khaldūn and the practice of modern history and social science. The Muqaddimah has largely been ignored as course or as text in the various social science disciplines. The corpus is not seen as providing an alternative form of knowledge. Irwin, however, provides a critical examination of Ibn Khaldūn's magnum opus, and the political and intellectual climate that he thrived on. As a scholar, Ibn Khaldūn was partisan and certainly close to political

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institutions. Objective and universal knowledge is not blind to the human condition. Even when deciding to take a reprieve in writing, he sought the protection of a powerful tribe in the hinterland, the Awlad 'Arif in what is now western Algeria. This essay serves as a contribution to the discourse on the Khaldunian history and sociology.

Keywords: European ideas, global history, Khaldunian corpus, modern civilization, social science.

Introduction

This essay is based on Robert Irwin's book, *Ibn Khaldun: An Intellectual Biography*.² Towards the end of the book, Irwin sheds light on scholars who had studied Ibn Khaldūn in their own image, some recognizing him as a fellow traveller. To be sure the study of Ibn Khaldūn has intensified over the decades. In part this may be because of the hunger of political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, ethnologists, and economists to find an intellectual ancestor for what they practice.

Irwin however was perplexed and warns on the dangers of "this sort of ancestor worship." He was concerned with the keenness of modern Western Christians or secular thinkers to legitimize their thinking by drawing on the writings "of a strict Muslim who lived in the fourteenth century." He remarks that awarding Ibn Khaldūn "a gold star for modernity is odd," and "most curious." Irwin admits that Ibn Khaldūn's "ways of thinking are very different from my own," separated by some 600 years. Surely, Ibn Khaldūn makes an attractive option for academic courses and readings. This sentiment echoes more of the Western engagement with Ibn Khaldūn. Malaysian university campuses are ambivalent. The Khaldūnian scholarship is almost non-existent. Perspectives on history and sociology for example are much a product of the Euro-American sphere and tradition, but strangely nonchalant of the Western

² Robert Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018).

Khaldunian corpus. The Western has attempted to modernize Ibn Khaldūn. Some have construed the attempt as “denaturing” him. Ibn Khaldūn has been accused of “anticipatory plagiarism” – a prejudiced view of the polymath rendering an injustice to his corpus. Where is the Muslim world in defending such accusations against him?

We ask, who was Ibn Khaldūn writing for? Irwin expresses scepticism. Certainly not to the ruler of Tunis and to the Sultan of Egypt to whom he had dedicated copies of the *Muqaddimah*. It does not seem to Irwin that he wrote the book as a guide to a ruler. It was also unlikely that Ibn Khaldūn was seeking readers among his fellow jurists and teachers. He had a rather low opinion of them. He also was suspicious of merchants and shopkeepers. He dealt with the Arabs and Berbers who could not read. Irwin suspects that Ibn Khaldūn's audience was himself. Or it could be our problem with engaging with his organized chaos. A glaring inconsistency coming out of the *Muqaddimah* was whether the Mamluk system was immune from the historical cycle of decay, or otherwise. Or on whether his cyclical theory applied outside the Maghreb. To the scholar and the student, Ibn Khaldūn contradicts himself in the *Muqaddimah*. As in any system of thought of some magnitude, this should not be conceived as a problem. Even modern interpretations of Ibn Khaldūn, both at the academic and policy levels evoke our own contradictory dynamics of the Khaldūnian sense.

Irwin is senior research associate at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London and a former lecturer at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. In the book, *Ibn Khaldun: An Intellectual Biography* (2018) he “deconstructs” Ibn Khaldūn into 11 chapters. Preceding the chapters is a chronology of Ibn Khaldūn's life. He titled the chapters as follows: Ibn Khaldūn among the Ruins (Chapter One), The Game of Thrones in Fourteenth Century North Africa (Chapter Two), The Nomad, Their Virtues and Their Place in History (Chapter Three), Underpinning the Methodology of the *Muqaddimah*: Philosophy, Theology and Jurisprudence (Chapter Four), Ibn Khaldūn's Sojourn among the Mamluks in Egypt (Chapter Five), The Sufi Mystic (Chapter Six), Messages from the Dark Side (Chapter Seven), Economics before Economics Had Been Invented

(Chapter Eight), What Ibn Khaldūn Did for a Living: Teaching and Writing (Chapter Nine), The Strange Afterlife of the *Muqaddimah* (Chapter Ten), and Ending Up (Chapter Eleven). Under the Bibliography section, Irwin provides bibliographic notes on Ibn Khaldūn's writings and their translations, followed by a general bibliography of sources used and relevant to the book.

Rediscovering the *Muqaddimah*

Although the core of the *Muqaddimah* had been written in Qal'at Banu Salama, in the Maghreb where Ibn Khaldūn was self-exiled for four years, the work was still being revised as late as 1404, the year before his death on 16 March 1406. It was in Egypt that he wrote his autobiography, *Al-Ta'rif bi Ibn Khaldūn wa riḥlatihi sharqan wa gharban* (Presenting Ibn Khaldūn and His Journeys in the East and West). He was then among the Mamluks.

In the *Ta'rif*, apart from establishing his academic credentials Ibn Khaldūn perhaps intended to use incidents from his own life in order to illustrate how history worked. On this, Irwin seems to be perplexed: "if so, it is not obvious what lessons should be taken from that history, much of which consists of a narrative of Mamluk infighting." In Egypt, Ibn Khaldūn was an outsider "with idiosyncratic ideas about history."

Among the earliest admirers of the *Muqaddimah* were the Ottoman Turks. Ibn Khaldūn did not create a school of "Khaldūnian historians" where his work was all but forgotten in the Arab world. But it was at Istanbul that we find copies of the manuscript – after Selim's conquest of Mamluk Egypt in 1517.³ Turkish intelligentsia Katib Celebi in 1653 had outlined the organic life cycle of regimes: rise, stagnation and decline on the Khaldunian pattern. Celebi was concerned with fate of the Ottoman Empire – it was showing early symptoms of old age.

Celebi was followed by a historian, who was also his disciple called Na'ima (? –1716). He opened a discussion of the rise and fall of societies, paying a glowing tribute to Ibn Khaldūn as "the greatest of all historians." Subsequently the world saw the emergence of the

³ Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun*, 162.

Khaldūnian “universal history” with the discovery and promotion of the *Muqaddimah* in the West, between the 17th and the 18th centuries. One Austrian scholar and translator, Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774-1856) called Ibn Khaldūn “an Arab Montesquieu.” And citing Al-Tahtawi, an Egyptian who was studying in Paris in the 1820s, the French Montesquieu “is known as the European Ibn Khaldūn.”

Irwin informs us that Arab intellectuals belatedly rediscover Ibn Khaldūn in the 19th and 20th centuries made possible by European publications. Significantly the *Muqaddimah* can be seen as a Western cultural reexport to the Arab World. He explains that the Arab rediscovery of Ibn Khaldūn is part of the background to the Nahda, or Arab renaissance of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and also a product of that renaissance. The cultural revival drew variously upon secularism, nationalism, and Islamic revivalism. In part, it was a reaction against European colonialism, but it was also the case that this renaissance drew on Western values and genre.

Scholars and students in colonialism and intellectual history would want to begin with Chapter 10. This was where Europe met Ibn Khaldūn. This is where we find that the *Muqaddimah* and the *Ibrar* were “used” as instruments to assist the French colonial project in North Africa. Indeed, the books were appropriated, and misinterpreted by French academics teaching in Algiers and Oran. One such instance was by Émil-Félix Gautier (1864-1940), who taught in the University of Algiers for over thirty years. He was a geographer who sought to make links between geology and history. He posed the question: how far was it that after the fall of the Roman Empire, North Africa was never again united? Gautier blamed it on the Arabs, equating Arab with nomad and nomad with nihilist destroyer. He has misinterpreted the use of “Arab” by Ibn Khaldūn. To Gautier, the Arabs are nomads, with no sense of country, only of lineage.

To the West, Ibn Khaldūn had a Western view of history, there was a “perfume of the Renaissance” about him. Gautier and several other scholars after him wanted to reveal Ibn Khaldūn as “a modern Frenchman and one, moreover, who would have approved of the French empire in North Africa.” Another French academic, William Marçais (1872-1956), who taught in Algeria and who was an

enthusiastic supporter of French colonialism, deployed his scholarship to disparage both Arab and Berber culture.

Modern social science is ambivalent, perhaps significantly sceptical on the works of Ibn Khaldūn. Scholars from both East and West share a common position placing his corpus on society and civilization on the basis of morality and religion; not with certainty founded on a sociological basis. There appears to be a disconnect between Ibn Khaldūn and the practice of modern social science. The rhetoric does not match the corpus.

Modern Social Science and History

We have not given Ibn Khaldūn and his *Muqaddimah* its rightful and proper place in the modern campus. We proclaim the significance of Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddimah* to knowledge, society and civilization – in understanding the disciplines of history, and the various human sciences, but we scantily study him in the modern context. We have not integrated the *Muqaddimah* as course or as text in the various social science disciplines. The social science corpus has been silent on his perspective and scholarship. Social science in Malaysia, for example, has certainly made reference to him, but only to studies on civilization; and even than providing a hagiographic narrative. He has not been located as providing an alternative form of knowledge; and certainly, far from critically examining his *magnum opus*, the political and intellectual climate that he thrived on. The rhetoric on Ibn Khaldūn has made pale reference to societal experience outside the realm of the desert and that of mainstream social science, uncertain as to how we can theorize a society (and civilization) outside conditions of the desert; and of the Occident.

The *Muqaddimah* comes close to becoming a comprehensive encyclopaedia. It was indeed produced in an age where encyclopaedias were in fashion in the Arab world, particularly in Mamluk Egypt and Syria. Irwin gives the example of the *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab* (The Heart's Desire in the Arts of Culture). The work is a vast guide to the cosmos, humans and their government, literature, animals, plants, and history. Of the encyclopaedia's 31 volumes, 21 are devoted to history.

Cognizant of the galaxy of Ibn Khaldūn writings, we must note

that oral transmission of knowledge is primary. Rather than praise books as vehicles for the transmission of knowledge, Ibn Khaldūn wrote about them as if they were a veil that the student had to strip away in order to properly understand what he was studying. Commentary has been piled upon commentary and he regarded the profusion of commentaries and abridgements as an actual obstacle to scholarship.⁴

Irwin appears to be sceptical on Ibn Khaldūn, and at the same time honest. And even especially in the first two chapters, he was too harsh on the polymath, thinker, and historian. In the last chapter he admits he does not understand the man. The early part of Irwin's narrative resonates a dreary, dark, and gloomy Khaldunian experience. We are dragged into decay in an unexpected way. Irwin's penetrating insights places history and Ibn Khaldūn who experienced it into a brilliantly honest context. It opens vistas for a fresh understanding on our society, politics, and modern thought. *Ibn Khaldūn* unravels a shift in our conception of the social sciences. The *Muqaddimah* enhances our notion for an integrated social science. Ibn Khaldūn's work is only waiting for Muslims, and those who cry against a Eurocentric social science to revamp its epistemology. We have not done justice to his corpus. Even in Islamic-oriented universities, Ibn Khaldūn has not been optimally explored, interpreted and positioned in its proper framework and perspective. We have discarded the Divine and the conformity to religious laws in the study of human society. Ibn Khaldūn's work thus provides the basis for de-secularizing the social science corpus. It also provides a suitable grounding for debates on facts and factuality within the matrix of the segregation of human and revealed Knowledge. Ibn Khaldūn's corpus does not make a distinction between the two.

The study of sociology, history and the rest of the social sciences are devoid of the Khaldunian reservoir. There are no subjects on Ibn Khaldūn in the Malaysian academic social science landscape. His *Muqaddimah* is not made as a text in the sociology, anthropology, history or communication departments. And there are no attempts to place the *Muqaddimah* as an alternative text. There is a blinkered view of Ibn Khaldūn and his works in reviewing the

⁴Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun*, 155.

social science curriculum for example. The *Muqaddimah* has to be central in the process. It can be seen as a modern text.

In Irwin's book, we certainly find history as a field much contested. We find the *Muqaddimah* full of ideas about the nature of history and society. It was perhaps because of this that the writer deems it appropriate to portray Ibn Khaldūn as complex. Today, Ibn Khaldūn is referred to as a philosopher of history and as a writer of history. Significantly he does not seem to have regarded history as a separate discipline and so the study and writing of history was not included in his discussion of the sciences.

Rosenthal's translation of the foreword to the *Muqaddimah* reads as such:

The inner meaning of history...involves speculation and an attempt to get at the truth, subtle explanation of the causes and origin of existing things, and deep knowledge of how and why of events. (History), therefore, is firmly rooted in philosophy. It deserves to be accounted a branch of (philosophy).⁵

Here it seems that Ibn Khaldūn is announcing without any ambiguity that he is a philosopher and that the *Muqaddimah* should be considered a work of philosophy. Irwin renders the meaning of philosophy as appropriated by Rosenthal is not the Arabic *falāṣifah* and *faylasuf* but bearing the meaning of *ḥikmah*, what is called wisdom in English. *Ḥikmah* described the sciences that did not derive from the Qur'an and hadith. *Ḥikmah* was also used to describe a body of literature that offered aphorisms, wise counsel, and improving examples taken from the lives of kings, sages and philosophers. The *Muqaddimah* has a saying attributed to the Prophet: "In poetry there is wisdom (*ḥikmah*)."⁵ *Ḥikmah* overlaps with *naṣīḥah*, advice literature that was nominally at least, addressed to kings. According to a hadith: "To give advice (*naṣīḥah*) is religion (*dīn*)."⁶ There is the *Risāla* (letter).

⁵ Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun*, 65.

Influence on Ibn Khaldūn

Author Robert Irwin, while describing Ibn Khaldūn as being preoccupied with the general laws that underlaid historical processes, compares him with a contemporary scholar. Lisān al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-Khaṭīb (1313-74) was one of the scholar-politicians of the day. From Granada, Ibn al-Khaṭīb moved to Fez. There Ibn Khaldūn and al-Khaṭīb met and became friends.

In his lifetime, al-Khaṭīb was famous, more than Ibn Khaldūn. Irwin describes al-Khaṭīb as “more powerful, more productive than Ibn Khaldūn, and for centuries his fame would outshine that of his younger contemporary.” Irwin tells us that al-Khaṭīb was perhaps the single most influential person in Ibn Khaldūn's life. Lisān al-Dīn, “Tongue of the Religion” was an honorific bestowed on the man as a tribute to his eloquence. He produced more than 60 books in a variety of genres.

From al-Khaṭīb, we learned on the virtues of history. He believed in history as a source of good examples, and claimed that if it were not for history, virtue would die with its possessors. He wrote history in the flowery style. His chronicles were peppered with poetry. Irwin makes a useful comparison between Ibn Khaldūn and al-Khaṭīb. The latter preferred to focus on dramatic incidents and individual personalities and motivations. He wrote a history of Granada but left it unfinished. The chronicle of the reigns of rulers who had been minors when they came to their thrones expanded into a universal history *A'māl al-a'lām* (Deeds of the Great). Al-Khaṭīb argued that all dynasties were in the long run doomed by corruption, greed, and ambition. History was a vicious cycle of usurpation and dispositions.

Both were gloomily aware of ruins, and the moral and political messages that they seem to carry. The idea of change and decay has always been associated with Ibn Khaldūn. That notion is the basis of al-Khaṭīb's assumptions. He drew many things from the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ibn Sabʿīn, two thirteenth-century Andalusian Sufis. In 1364, Ibn Khaldūn was sent on a diplomatic mission to Seville where he met with Pedro the Cruel, the King of Castille. Seville was the home of Ibn Khaldūn's ancestors.

There Pedro offered him a place at court and the return of his

family lands, “if only he would convert to Christianity.” Ibn Khaldūn refused and returned to Granada. He left Andalusia in 1365 to reengage in the “dangers of North African politics,” as described by Irwin, who seems to have forgotten that what would hundred years later, that of Europe would be catastrophic for centuries to come. And something that the scholar must note, that Ibn Khaldūn was partisan in his pursuits and vocation. He was involved in intrigues and conspiracies.

In the early chapters, Irwin interspersed the life and thoughts of Ibn Khaldūn with the subject of history. Based on the dynamics of life in North Africa, Irwin remarks that the narrative of that history is a twisted and violent of contested thrones, betrayals, exiles, imprisonments, and murders. Yet little of these were featured in the *Muqaddimah*. But the historian who was to write so much about nomads was himself a nomad. It was suggested that Ibn Khaldūn wrote the *Muqaddimah* “in order to understand why he was a political failure.” Irwin suggests that Ibn Khaldūn be compared to Machiavelli and to Edward Hyde, where both of whom had played an active role in politics and who then wrote histories when their careers were in eclipse. He cites Chapter 6 of the *Muqaddimah* where Ibn Khaldūn devoted a couple of pages to explaining why scholars were unfamiliar with politics. Ibn Khaldūn had argued that the scholars’ penchant for abstract thought and generalizations, as well as their searching for analogies, detached them from the detailed realities of political situations.

Nomads, Politics, and ‘Asabiyya

Chapter 3 of Irwin’s work introduces us to human societies in history. Titled “The Nomads, Their Virtues, and Their Place in History,” Irwin began with the message of birth and decay, pointing out to the heart of the *Muqaddimah*. It is this cycle of creation and destruction that Ibn Khaldūn is best known for. Many modern-day discourses on society, history and politics were inspired by this idea. It was perhaps because of the timing of the writing of *Muqaddimah* – worked on during his retirement – that the idea later becomes one of the most powerful in the study of sociology and the social sciences.

Ibn Khaldūn was always close to political institutions. Even

when deciding to take a reprieve in writing, he sought the protection of a powerful tribe in the hinterland, the Awlad 'Arif in what is now western Algeria. The Merinid ruler welcomed Ibn Khaldūn and lent him a castle Qal'at Banu Salama, where he could live with his family and work remote from distractions. Ibn Khaldūn was then forty-five years old. Even the fortress no longer exists and "today there is only a village of drystone buildings." The Qal'at was named after the Maraboutic family – where "marabout" came to be later used to describe hermits who had withdrawn from civilization to find sanctity in the wilderness. The castle was far from libraries and intellectual companionship. He was to be there for the next four years before returning to Tunis "where he could check his facts in city's libraries and where he would be tempted to meddle in politics once more."

Irwin describes that Ibn Khaldūn's focus during that period was specifically "on how God worked in the world through social processes." His empirical focus in internalizing the vision of history was the Berber and Arab tribes of North Africa. Hence, he expanded into a comprehensive account on civilization and social organization. Ibn Khaldūn is what we would simply call by today's standards, "a scholar with practical experience." He was not only involved in repeated negotiation with tribesmen and "bribing them to fight." Ibn Khaldūn sometimes also led them into battle. So, when he wrote about the nomads, he did not do so as an armchair theoretician. He knew the *badawi* well, a term he often uses in the sense of dweller in the countryside.

It was suggested that Ibn Khaldūn regarded the desert as "a reservoir of civilization" – that of the Arabs. The environment shaped the behaviour of the Bedouins. On a similar note, drawing on that analogy, the *Tanah Air* – the fluidity, and interstices between land and water in the geography of the Malay Archipelago serves as a reservoir of Malay civilization – the *Rumpun Melayu* – who inhabit and had define society, history, and civilization in the *rantau*.

Perhaps the most famous central thesis of the *Muqaddimah* is that in the harsh conditions of desert life, tribal groups of necessity develop a special kind of group solidarity. Ibn Khaldūn called this '*asabiyya*. According to Irwin, the word appears over 500 times in

the *Muqaddimah*. At this juncture, it would be instructive to explain the word. The root verb *'asaba* means “he twisted [a thing]” and *'usbah* means “a party of men who league together to defend one another.” *'Asabiyya* was defined in medieval Arabic dictionaries as “a strong attachment, which holds several persons closely united by the same interest or the same opinion.” Irwin speculates perhaps Ibn Khaldūn envisaged *'asabiyya* as evoking the way in which the mutually dependent lives of desert-dwelling tribesmen were so tightly intertwined. It was also suggested that reference may have been to the coloured turbans or headbands worn as a sign of tribal or party allegiance: *ta'assaba* means “he bound a turban or fillet round his head.”

Modern scholars have also described Ibn Khaldūn as an ethnographer. Irwin was ambivalent. From today's perspective it may be argued that he was in a restricted sense. Perhaps not in terms of rituals, modes of dress, or diet. What we can learn is broadly the bonds of solidarity within a nomadic tribe, in a desert environment. As we would gather, *'asabiyya* seems to have a life of its own, configuring on power for its constituents – connotations of dynamism and élan vital. The *Muqaddimah* said that the leader who controlled an *'asabiyya* group of sufficient strength and importance might succeed in founding a dynasty and in winning *mulk* (kingship) for himself and his family. An important thing to note is that kinship may not necessarily come from tribesmen, but also from clients outside who could also be bonded within the tribe.

'Asabiyya would be lost within “three, maybe four” generations. Decay starts to appear. The cycle of (re)birth continues. The tribe is both an alternative to the state and its image, its limitation, and the seed of a new state. To Ibn Khaldūn, barbarism and religion are sources of empire. Religion could and should serve as the cement of empires. Irwin reasons that Ibn Khaldūn's theoretical historical model seem to work quite well during the early years of Islam and the Rightful Caliphs, as well as for much of the history of North Africa in the 12th century. He questions whether Ibn Khaldūn's cyclical model works for other times and other places. Irwin is of the opinion that Ibn Khaldūn did not have the intention to have his cyclical theory to be universally applicable.

Irwin describes Ibn Khaldūn as unusual in his enthusiasm for the tribal *'asabiyya*. One would argue tribalism as the curse in the Arab nations. He cautions us on overstressing the concept (of *'asabiyya*). In his narrative, Irwin strips the Arab psyche. The *Jahili* poets of Arabia had celebrated the austerity and danger of life in the desert. The Arab has no knowledge or interest "in cushions, silks, fine food, or kingly pretensions." This attitude had carried over into the Islamic era. Arab life was rude. The world and its luxuries were alien to the Arabs. Irwin believes that the kind of moralizing in the Arab narrative, "more than a newly invented sociology," that has inspired Ibn Khaldūn's engine of history.

Irwin finds that in reading the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldūn's use of language was somewhat slippery. He takes exception to terms customarily rendered in English as "Bedouin" and "Arab." *Badawi* can be translated as "Bedouin" or "nomad," *badawa* as "desert life" or "desert attitude," and *badw* as "desert." Irwin cites Rosenthal as arguing that Ibn Khaldūn's Bedouin did not have to be nomadic; they just have to live at some distance from a town. Non-nomadic peasants who lived in the countryside could be considered to be *badawis* and *'umrān Badawi* refers to the culture of the countryside and not just that of the desert. There is not hard and fast distinction.

Similarly, when Ibn Khaldūn used the word "Arab", its sense depended on the context. The first meaning refers to those who were racially Arab. While proud of his Arab origins, he often used the word pejoratively to refer to Arabs who were nomadic invaders. To him, these Arabs had a "savage nature" and were "people who plunder and cause damage." There is some bifurcation in Ibn Khaldūn – he deplored the savagery and destructiveness of the nomadic Arabs, and yet at the same time he praised their courage, austerity, and their loyalty to one another.

On the Berbers, Ibn Khaldūn was full of praise for them. A chapter of the *Ibrār* was devoted to the "Virtues and noble qualities of the Berbers." Ibn Khaldūn described them as "a powerful, formidable, brave and numerous. He put them on par to the Arabs, Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. Berbers are indigenous inhabitants of North Africa, found across the region from the Atlantic coast to Egypt. Most Berbers now are found in what is now Morocco.

The term “Berber” derived from the Latin “barbari,” meant “outsider” and was imposed on the inhabitants by the Romans. The Berber language is Hamitic, but composed their written histories and legends in Arabic. The Berber put up a lot of resistance to the Arabs in North Africa in the 7th and 8th centuries. By the 14th century, they were Islamized, and many spoke Arabic, especially in the cities.

Genealogies and Alternating Dynasties

One of Ibn Khaldūn’s consistent preoccupations is genealogy (*‘ilm al-nasab*). It was the speciality of the nomadic Arabs, as compared to those in the cities. He was aware that some genealogies were invented traditions. What is important is that lineages, real or invented, served to reinforce *‘asabiyya*. Ibn Khaldūn recognized that genealogies were constructed to fit social needs. They were usually designed to incorporate separate groups within a single tribal confederacy, rather than to exclude groups from that confederacy. While it was argued that tribal genealogies were works of fiction, Ibn Khaldūn’s own lineage may have been fabricated at some earlier date in Muslim Spain. The “un” ending was said to be commonly added to the names of Christian converts to Islam in Andalusia. The scholar of Islam on the history of south Arabia claimed he did not find any references to the Banu Khaldūn in that region.

It must also be noted that the *Muqaddimah* does not restrict itself to strictly historical issues. Irwin reminds us that in parts it should be classed among those works that are known as “mirrors for princes” (*nasihat al-muluk*). Chapter 3 of the *Muqaddimah* is devoted to dynasties, royal authority, the caliphate, government ranks and all that is associated with government and governance. In the chapter, Ibn Khaldūn included the complete text of a letter written in 821 by Tahir Ibn al-Husayn, a General in the service of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliph al-Ma’mūn, to his son instructing him on how rulers and governors should conduct their affairs. Irwin cites a modern scholar as describing the letter as “a sophisticated theoretical exposition of the ethos of rulership and the qualities of the perfect ruler, tightly constructed and unadorned by historical examples or anecdotes, and emphasizes the ruler’s dependence on God and on Islamic religion as the mainspring of all his doings.”

There was also a heavy reliance on a compendium titled *Sirr al-Asrār* (Secret of Secrets), believed to be a letter composed by Aristotle for the guidance of Alexander the Macedonian, although it was said that the letter might have been put together as late as the 10th century. It is quite well known in European history that Alexander had listened to scholarly advice. According to the *Sirr al-Asrar*, Aristotle gained his wisdom from the Persians and the Indians. The work was encyclopaedic in scope. It covered topics in physiognomy, astrology, alchemy, magic, and medicine. The core centres on guidance and good conduct. The work, popular in the Islamic world, was translated as *Secretum Secretorum* in Christendom. It was just as popular.

It is instructive to note on the *‘Ibrār*, the *Kitāb al-‘ibar wa diwān al-mubtada wa’l-khabar* (The Book of Warning and Collection of New Things and Historical Information). Running more than 3,000 pages, it is a history of tribes and the dynasties produced by some of the tribes. As Ibn Khaldūn worked on the *‘Ibrar*, he extended its scope to include not just Berbers, but also Arab dynasties, in the East as well as in the West, the Seljuq Turks, Mongols, Mamluks, Persians, Jews and Franks. It lacks the universalist scope of al-Mas’udi’s *Muruj al-Dhahab*, as Irwin points out.

Ibn Khaldūn is associated with the general laws of history. Irwin in the chapter on the Nomads, chooses to compare and contrast the approaches of Ibn Khaldūn to his French contemporary chronicler Jean Froissart (1337–1404). Froissart gained much of his information from interviewing the protagonists in the great events of his lifetime. He started writing his *Chroniques*, a record of aristocratic chivalry and warfare in the 1360s. Its standard edition runs to 15 volumes. The Hundred Years War between England and France dominated Froissart’s narrative – detailing battles, skirmishes, and sieges. A dialogical reading of his work reveals barbarism, treachery, and cruelty – notably the massacre carried out by the Black Prince after the capture of Limoges in 1370. Note that Froissart set out to celebrate chivalry, courtesy, and bravery. Compared to Froissart’s, Ibn Khaldūn’s “narrative is uniformly colourless.” Froissart relied heavily on dialogue in his narrative, Ibn Khaldūn did not. Froissart

did not reflect on the deeper meaning of behaviour and events. Ibn Khaldūn analysed, theorized, and produced generalizations. The empirical basis of his writings perhaps gave the “appearance of modernity,” Irwin suggested.

In Chapter 4 titled “Underpinning the Methodology of the *Muqaddimah*: Philosophy, Theology and Jurisprudence” Irwin delves on *ḥikmah* (wisdom). He cites Ibn Khaldūn as declaring “It should be known the opinion the philosophers hold is wrong in all its aspects.”⁶ But during his lifetime, no one called him a philosopher. Philosophy did not flourish in the 14th century Maghreb since the Merinid rulers and clerics did not favor it, and it was not in the syllabus of the madrasas.

Irwin tells us Ibn Khaldūn’s encounter with the thoughts of Averroes (Ibn Rushd) as he was known in medieval Europe, and al-Ghazālī. Averroes was read in the universities of Christian Europe; but had little influence in the Muslim world. Averroes refuted al-Ghazālī in *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Al-Ghazālī’s arguments remain influential in Ibn Khaldūn. But what Ibn Khaldūn took from Averroes was not a philosophic doctrine. Irwin identifies it as a mood – pessimism. Averroes believed that

good government of a city would in the long run be doomed by the lust of the important men for power and money and thus degenerate into tyranny...The *fitna*, the struggle that broke out between ‘Alī and Mu’awiyah in 656, was the watershed.⁷

This chapter recalls the gloomy vision of history as expounded by al-Khaṭīb and the Egyptian historian al-Maqrizī. This pessimism can be seen in Qur’anic declaration that every regime was ultimately doomed: “To every nation a term; when their term comes, they shall not put it back by a single hour nor put it forward” (Qur’ān 7:34). Here Irwin belabours on Bernard Lewis’ “Islamic Concepts on Revolution” (1993) in reminding us on the implicit meaning behind Arabic political vocabularies. *Dawlah* (linked to the Bahasa Melayu word “Daulat”) means “dynasty.” Lewis explained that the basic

⁶ Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun*, 67.

⁷ Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun*, 70.

meaning of the root d-w-l, which also occurs in other Semitic languages, is 'to turn' or to 'alternate.' The Qur'an says "These [happy and unhappy] days, we cause them to alternate (*nudawiluha*) among men." It also had the sense of "turn" as in a turn in rule or office.

Hence, when the 'Abbāsīd caliphs replaced the Umayyads, it was described as their turn, or *dawlah*, and hence by extension *dawlah* came also to mean dynasty. Implicit in the word that the turn will be of limited duration and then it will be the turn of another dynasty. Lewis suggested the possibility of cyclical theories of politics, derived from Greek or Persian sources, may have contributed to the use of the word *dawlah*. In relation to this, Ibn Khaldūn discussed the calculations of 9th century astrologer and polymath al-Kindī regarding the predestined end of the 'Abbāsīd dynasty. Allegedly al-Kindī had predicted that its fall and the destruction of Baghdad would take place in the thirteenth century. Al-Kindī's *Risāla fī mulk al-'Arab*, a treatise that predicted the end of the caliphate, and was one of the first treatises to use *dawla* in the sense of dynasty. In a similar vein, the authors of the 10th century encyclopaedia, the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Letters of the Brethren of Purity), argued that *dawla* passed from dynasty to dynasty or nation to nation every 240 years.

Ibn Khaldūn was conscious of the successive failures of dynasties. He saw that the glory days of the Arabs were over and the Berbers and Turks were taking over (the impending dominance of the Ottomans). Irwin cites historian Patricia Crone in drawing attention to the parallel between Ibn Khaldūn's cyclical theory of history and that of Confucian thinkers. He also explains Polybius (203-120 BC), a Greek chronicler of the decline of Greece and of Rome's rise to power. Polybius sketched out a cyclical historical sequence in which monarchy was followed by aristocracy, and then by democracy, before a monarchy could be established again, and so the cycle recommenced. Greek and Roman who thought about history were encouraged by organic metaphors to post the decline of states and civilizations. The Neapolitan priest Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) was steeped in such readings.

Vico and Spengler

Irwin compares Ibn Khaldūn to Vico. The latter published *La scienza nuova* in three versions between 1725 and 1744. Vico was described as a man born out of his time “neither more nor less than the nineteenth century in embryo.” Vico believed that it was possible to discover the general laws underlying historical processes. He drew his study of law, to inform his theories about history. To Vico, history had a religious impetus. Vico’s “new science” was history,

a science that dealt with the real world and that, because history was made by men, was perfectly knowable by men. It was a truth beyond all question that since the world of civil society has certainly been made by men “its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own mind.” Societies are like individuals, for they are born, mature, decay and die. But as one society perished, another arose in its place.⁸

Vico much resonates Ibn Khaldūn. It could not be established if Vico was privy to the *Muqaddimah* written some 200 years earlier. The Saidian discourse on Orientalism also resonated Vico’s “new world,” and the Khaldūnian cyclical image. In an essay cited by Irwin titled “On the Sumptuous Feasts of the Romans,” Vico had argued that Rome, in conquering Asia, had been conquered by Asian luxury. In the same way, the Spanish Empire in Vico’s own time was being corrupted by the wealth it had acquired in the Americas. Vico’s insights, almost entirely ignored by his contemporaries, found its way in Edward Said’s narrative on how the West imagined the Orient in its own image.⁹

Resonating the Khaldūnian cyclical theories of history is Oswald Spengler. As we shall see, these are about the future as they are about the past. Spengler under the two-volume work titled *Der Untergang des Abendlands* (The Decline of the West) was produced in the wake of the catastrophic German and Austrian defeat in the

⁸ Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun*, 73.

⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

First World War. In the book, Spengler predicted a doom-laden future for Faustian Europe. He predicted that the triumph of European materialism would in turn engender violence, “but the concomitant violence would rejuvenate Europe.” He worked with seasonal and organic metaphors according to which civilizations progress from spring to winter, as well as the organic metaphor of birth, maturity, and death.

According to Irwin, Spengler, like Ibn Khaldūn, was somewhat hostile to the urban culture and presented the phenomenon of the “world city” with its population of rootless parasites as constituting the last phase of a civilization. Spengler’s ideas strongly influence Arnold Toynbee.

Sufism, Reason and Futures

The Khaldūnian corpus could well be appropriate in the attempt at desecularizing the social sciences. Describing the scholar Abū Ḥāmid Muhammad al-Ghazālī (1058-1111) as “the first of the moderns,” he also used rational argumentations in favour of “Islamic orthodoxy.” Deploying logic, Ibn Khaldūn was a defender of Sufism. Following Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, Ibn Khaldūn believed in God’s omnipotence in for example “He creates the acts of men by creating in men the power to do each act.” This means God’s will not only determines what men do but He also wills that the man should will what they do. This was known as the doctrine of *kasb* (literally “acquisition”). In al-Ghazālī, there is no link between cause and effect unless God wills it to be so. What we call cause and effect is nothing more than God’s habit. This is called occasionalism – that “things only appear to have continuous existences over time because at every instant, God wills their continuous existence. And men’s souls are shaped by their habits, hence “worship and good deeds purify the soul.”

Ibn Khaldūn’s position on jurisprudence can be structured in the social science corpus. One of which is related to *qiyās* (reasoning by analogy). Knowledge about the relative reliability of transmitters of information, and the use of personal prudential elaboration and analogy was reapplied by Ibn Khaldūn to assess the truth or falsehood of reported historical events (though he tended to reject

long chains of transmitters - *isnād*). His *uṣūl al-ta'rikh* (principles of history) was modelled on *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of Muslim jurisprudence). This is because jurisprudence could provide a methodology that could be used to reject erroneous statements about historical events.

This is especially so in the application of the concept of *watan* and *wataniah*, inspired by the notion of *grundnorm* (ground rules) as the basis for reasoning for indigenous narratives and Malay civilizational history with regards to Malaysia and the Malay Archipelago. With reference to jurisprudential reasoning, according to the *Muqaddimah*, volume 1, pages 79-80, “the laws pay attention to the things that belong to civilization.” Arabist Hamilton Gibb describes Ibn Khaldūn as perhaps a “pessimist” or “determinist.” He acknowledged that his pessimism has a moral and religious basis, but denied the existence of Ibn Khaldūn’s sociological reasoning. Regardless, the *Muqaddimah* is a significant work regarded as forming the basis for the doctrine of social determinism in modern social science.

Irwin finds it strange as to why Ibn Khaldūn omitted the social and economic impact of Sufi orders. He asks “Was Ibn Khaldūn a Sufi?” Ibn Khaldūn wrote about Sufism, but he “never explicitly claimed to have been one, nor did he describe any personal mystical experiences.” In the *Muqaddimah*, he refers the Sufi Abū Mahdī ‘Isa Ibn al-Zayyat as “our syaikh, the gnostic and chief saints in Spain.” A biographer of Ibn Khaldūn, Allen Fromherz suggested that Ibn Khaldūn had a Sufic approach to history writing. He said that Ibn Khaldūn’s description of ‘awakening’ to the hidden truth (of history), of finding meaning behind the surface of events, had parallels in Sufism that has inspired Ibn Khaldūn himself.

A key to understanding the *Muqaddimah* is the historical process of cyclical dissolution and rebirth echoed on a macroscopic scale the individual path of a mystical disciple. Crucially it was Sufism that led him to look beyond the *ẓāhir* (outer appearance) of historical events and intuit the *bāṭin* (inner truth) of the laws that determined those events. Knowledge is tiered – there are the literal interpretations, and the esoteric interpretations. The latter was arguably to be for the few. Irwin likens the ‘sufic’ underlying

meaning of history to historians like Spengler and Hobsbawm, who also “found meaning behind the surface of events,” and broad explanations for the flow of events. This is where Irwin raises the occidental doubt on the esoteric knowledge, in that the Sufi in Ibn Khaldūn was not apparent to; or perhaps acknowledged by nineteenth-century European commentators who certainly would prefer to think of him as a rationalist, a materialist, and a positivist.

Although Ibn Khaldūn has been presented in recent centuries as the precursor of Comte, Durkheim, and Marx, we are reminded that he inhabited a different and “darker world than the one known to European economist and sociologists. Irwin’s European mind describes this “darker world” as “things visible and invisible, and controlled the art representing them....

It was also a world haunted by spirits and presided over by an all-seeing God. Consequently, Ibn Khaldūn was obsessed with the occult.¹⁰

Sufis were capable of doing things that seemed like magic, but the essential difference between sorcery and sufi *karamat* was moral. In Ibn Khaldūn’s exploration of the occult, he drew upon such powers inherent in the celestial spheres or in letters and numbers. Since sorcery involves the veneration of spheres, stars or jinn, it was a form of infidelity. It could be effective, but they could not interfere with the processes of human history. It was mentioned earlier of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā (Brethren of Purity). It can be argued that Ibn Khaldūn may have been inspired by their writings. In their encyclopaedia, simply known as the *Rasā’il*, there were signs of Neoplatonism and Isma’ili influence. The Ikhwan presented man as a microcosm that corresponded to the macrocosm that was the universe.

The Ikwan’s vision of the universe, also features in the *Muqaddimah*. Here Ibn Khaldūn writes that the world of existence in (all) its simples and composite worlds is arranged in a natural order of ascent and descent. There is an uninterrupted continuum. “Is the future knowable?” asks Irwin of Ibn Khaldūn. Irwin suggests that the main reason for Ibn Khaldūn’s obsession with sorcery was because

¹⁰ Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun*, 119.

“it overlapped with divination and the power to know the future.” Irwin cites historian Hugh Trevor Roger who once critically remarked of Thomas Carlyle’s way of writing about the past. Roger said that “history is not prophesy.” Nevertheless, those who have written about the past, often have one eye on the future. Ibn Khaldūn wrote history. But he repeatedly returned to the future. The field and theme of Futures Studies, which began in the early 1950s and ascended to popularity during the Cold War decades of the 1970’s to the 1980s could very well fall back to this Khaldūnian logic.

Interestingly, Ibn Khaldūn believed that the techniques and the sciences in the Islamic lands had reached their peak in their own time. He was also aware that

the great age of the Arabs was over. After all, Baghdad, Samarra, and Rusafa were all now in ruins. The Berbers had taken over in the Western Islamic lands and the Turks dominated the east.¹¹

In the early draft of the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldūn noted that in his age, civilization seems to be moving from south to north. He once noted that “there was no one to fear with regard to Egypt but the sons of Osman [the Ottomans].”

Quite noticeable is Ibn Khaldūn’s “neglect” of Christian Europe. He was not interested on developments just across the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, according to Irwin, he showed some signs of “marginal unease at the way things were developing.” What can be found was references to intellectual developments in Europe in the likes of the philosophical sciences in Rome. Ibn Khaldūn’s history of the Franks commenced in the 11th century and were “eccentrically presented as *Badawi* in origin.” He noted on the employment of European mercenaries by Maghribi rulers, and the extraordinary wealth of European merchants. He also said that the Christian nations on the shores of the Mediterranean were more versed in the crafts than the Arabs.

Ibn Khaldūn also took exception to the decline of Muslim sea-power in the Mediterranean. In volume 2 of the *Muqaddimah* he foresaw that the Muslims would make a successful attack against the

¹¹ Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun*, 128.

Christians and “conquer the lands of the European Christians beyond the sea. This it is said will take place by the sea.” In many ways, Ibn Khaldūn was preoccupied with knowledge of the Future. It is noted that *Kashf* and *mukashafa*, mentioned in the context of Sufism, are key terms in Ibn Khaldūn’s worldview. The ability to see beyond outward appearance was not restricted to the Sufis. What we understand as the veil of knowledge leads to lifting of that veil. It would be understood that ascribing to the knowledge of the future is through the “removal of the veil” (*kashf*).

Hence for Ibn Khaldūn, history was a process that extended into the future. And that process entails the removal of the veil. Irwin finds that theorizing about the history of the past and the future is echoed in 20th century science fiction. He cites Isaac Asimov’s Foundation trilogy. The “Foundation” of the title was established by the psycho historian Hari Seldon. Irwin suggests that the idea of psycho history, which drew on mathematics, sociology, psychology, and history shows the influence of the *Muqaddimah*. According to Irwin, Arnold Toynbee in *A Study of History*, who mapped out a theory of the rise, decay and fall of civilizations, was much influenced by the *Muqaddimah*. Toynbee had relied on the notion of challenge and renewal. His ideas, transmitted and popularised by Toynbee have an obvious influence on Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, much in a retrospective manner. In that sense the problems of 14th century North Africa were a Futures one.

Economics, Poetry, and Style

This brings us to the domain of economics. Ibn Khaldūn has been presented as a precursor of such economic thinkers as Marx, Engels, and Pareto, but associated with “supply side economics.” Irwin citing the Laffer curve – the setting of higher rates of taxation but taking in diminishing amounts of revenue – was amazed that “a fourteenth century North African thinker” should have anticipated American Republican Party fiscal policy! But he was quick to say that in October 1981, Ronald Reagan (or his speech writers) had misread Ibn Khaldūn.

Ibn Khaldūn wrote extensively about economic matters, particularly in Chapters 4 and 5 of the *Muqaddimah*. We would have

to read him not as an economist; but perhaps as a historian, sociologist and a philosopher writing about economics. And certainly, as a man of God. Ibn Khaldūn was original and almost unique among Arab writers of his time in doing so. The Arabic term then for economics was *tadbīr al-manzil*, literally “household management.” To Ibn Khaldūn, economic needs create human society. Hence it underpins all history. Civilization will depend on people coming together and producing more food they need to consume themselves. The division of labour is a product of the coming together of people in *‘umrān* (society or civilization) (*Muqaddimah*, vol.2, pp. 274-75). Ibn Khaldūn’s ideas about economics drew upon ethics, *ḥikmah*, Islamic law, and personal observation. Irwin highlights that moral judgements play a larger part in Ibn Khaldūn’s deliberations than did the observed movement of money and goods. The strongest influence on his thinking on the subject seems to come from al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, in which various economic issues had been treated in a religious context.

Economic theory had to be shaped by moral considerations. According to Irwin, Ibn Khaldūn would seem to be anticipating the labour theory of value as propounded by Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Karl Marx.

Ibn Khaldūn also wrote about the primacy of poetry.

Poetry carried information about language and other matters. In studying poetry, one studied grammar, lexicography, and eloquence. Mastery of these areas was essential for the education of experts in Islamic law. This was a rather prosaic way of looking at poetry. It was also common practice to produce rhymed manuals on such matters as law and philology in order to assist in the memorization of the subject matter.¹²

Ibn Khaldūn’s views on poetry may provide insights into the consumption and teaching of the *pantun* and other verse forms in Malay culture. These need a re-evaluation as pedagogical tools. He referred to poetry as an archive of history, wisdom and nobility; and with reference to the Arabs “a touchstone of their natural gift for

¹² Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun*, 157.

expressing themselves correctly.

Irwin highlights Ibn Khaldūn's vocabulary of the *Muqaddimah*, and the way he had used it. Style is a major tool of history writing. Irwin gives the examples of Edward Gibbon, Lord Macaulay, Hugh Trevor-Roper, and Eric Hobsbawm. They may suggest to British readers that style may serve as more than a mere vehicle for the conveying of historical insights; "it can actually be their engine." Style carries meaning that shapes thoughts. In this regard, Ibn Khaldūn would have used al-Mas'udi's history, the *Murūj al-dhahab* as one of the models of the *Muqaddimah* and the *ʿIbrār*. Different from al-Mas'udi, described by Ibn Khaldūn as "the imam of historians", the former wrote to entertain as well as instruct. Al-Mas'udi's chronicles are full of digressions. Ibn Khaldūn wrote just to instruct, notwithstanding boasting on his literary style.

Orientalism and European Ideas

In chapter 10, Irwin highlights Ibn Khaldūn's introduction to Europe; specifically, by Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838), who first published translations from the *Muqaddimah*. Irwin accords de Sacy as "the real founder of this branch of institutionalized academic Orientalism, and he taught most of the next generation of leading Orientalists not just in France, but across Europe." It was Silvestre de Sacy who introduced Ibn Khaldūn with his *Chrestomathie arabe*, which included annotated translations from the *Muqaddimah*. His students and successors continued the work of putting Ibn Khaldūn on the European intellectual map.

It is pertinent to note that for a long time most of the work on Ibn Khaldūn was done by the French. They conquered Algeria beginning in 1830. The protectorate the French subsequently established over Morocco meant that there were French experts who were very interested in what Ibn Khaldūn had to say about the Arabs and the Berbers of North Africa. But it must be noted that De Sacy's primary interest in the *Muqaddimah* was philological. Apart from French scholars, Arabists, and translators of Ibn Khaldūn, Irwin also refers to the German scholarship. Their readings of Ibn Khaldūn tended to encourage them to move away from "fact-driven positivism and scissors-and-paste chronologies." Most probably the German and

Austrian scholars' enthusiasm about Ibn Khaldūn was related to Hegel. There is widespread influence of Hegel on German history writing. Hegel had forced history into a grand philosophical system. Strongly influenced by Hegel's worldview, some like Alfred von Kremer (1828-89) saw culture or civilization as the total expression of a people, translating '*asabiyyah*' as civic spirit, and sometimes as national idea. He saw this as the motor of history.

Von Kremer argued that

Ibn Khaldūn was *sui generis* in the Arab world, without Arab precursors and totally original. He was then a man born out of his time.¹³

Ibn Khaldūn was seen as a positivist and a materialist; a precursor of August Comte (1798-1857). Reflecting the commonplace view, Irwin attributes Comte as the founder of positivism "and perhaps the founder of sociology in the West."

It is important to pay attention to the ideas of Ibn Khaldūn to the historian Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975). The English-speaking world had paid scant attention to his *Muqaddimah* until Toynbee discovered him and identified him as one of his intellectual ancestors. In his 1935 *A Study of History* Toynbee had described the *Muqaddimah* as "undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever been created by any mind in any time or place." Toynbee declared that Ibn Khaldūn was the one outstanding personality in the history of civilizations whose social life was "solitary, poor, brutish, and short." It was like discovering a long-lost relative. He grew more mystical as he aged, and eventually identified God as the ultimate mover of the cycles of civilizations. We must emphasize that *A Study of History* derived some of its initial impetus from a reading of Spengler. Like *The Decline of the West* and more cyclical theories of history, Toynbee's schema was somewhat pessimistic. Irwin, in another of his writing "Toynbee and Ibn Khaldūn," (1997) characterized Toynbee's notion of civilization as an array of automata, which have been set in motion at various times, but which

¹³ Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun*, 171.

independently go through what are broadly the same motions. Toynbee has done an immense amount to popularize a reading of Ibn Khaldūn in the Anglophone world in advance of the Rosenthal translation into English. Irwin spent at length on Toynbee's engagement with the *Muqaddimah*. He also identified names like Hamilton Gibb, Marshall Hodgson, Albert Hourani, and Ernest Gellner "who fell under the spell" of Ibn Khaldūn.

On Hourani,¹⁴ Irwin cites his masterpiece, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (1991) as a Khaldunesque preoccupation with the cyclical rise and decline of dynasties. Hourani's prologue to the book consists of a four-page summary of turbulent, perilous, and highly mobile career of Ibn Khaldūn. Irwin lifts Hourani's eloquent words towards the end of his summary:

Something was stable, however, or seemed to be. A world where a family from southern Arabia could move to Spain, and after six centuries return nearer to its place of origins and still find itself in familiar surroundings, had a unity which transcended divisions of time and space; the Arabic language could open the door to office and influence throughout that world; a body of knowledge transmitted over the centuries by a known chain of teachers, preserved a moral community even when rulers changed; places of pilgrimage, Mecca and Jerusalem, were unchanging poles of the human world even if power shifted from one city to another; and belief in a God who created and sustained the world could give meaning to the blows of fate.¹⁵

Irwin highlights the role of Franz Rosenthal in translating the *Muqaddimah*. The translation "is the best substitute for the Arabic edition we do not have." Rosenthal based the translation on a range of manuscripts.

In terms of the Islamic reformation movement and modernism,

¹⁴ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 4.

¹⁵ Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun*, 178.

two of its leading pioneers Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839-97) and Muḥammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905), made a study of the *Muqaddimah* at a time when it was not much read in the Islamic world. Al-Afghānī used the *Muqaddimah* as a teaching text when he was in Egypt in the 1870s. His disciple ‘Abduh lectured on Ibn Khaldūn at the Dar al-‘Ulum College in Cairo and wrote what seems to have been a Khaldūnian history of philosophy and society.

Students and scholars of the *Muqaddimah* must be reminded that Irwin does not represent Ibn Khaldūn as a philosopher in the Graeco-Islamic sense. Ibn Khaldūn however has given history their full philosophical meaning. Irwin explains that the word *muqaddimah* can mean “a premise, preposition or axiom that is an inductively derived statement of a generally recognized truth.” It can also mean “prolegomena.” One sees Ibn Khaldūn’s cyclical laws as derived both from inductive and deductive reasoning.

Irwin’s powerful insights provide a rich texture on Ibn Khaldūn. The reader may think of Ibn Khaldūn as contradictory – a person and scholar of genius, at the same time, a conventional Muslim. In the *Muqaddimah*, volume 3, page 481, Ibn Khaldūn reminded us “We almost strayed from our purpose. It is our intention now to stop...Perhaps some later scholar, aided by the divine gifts of a sound mind and solid scholarship, will penetrate into these problems in greater detail than we did here...God knows and you do not know.”

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

| Ar | Pr | OT | UR | Ar | Pr | OT | UR | Ar | Pr | OT | UR |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|----|--|-----------------|-----|-----------------|
| ء | ' | ' | ' | ز | z | z | z | گ | — | g | g |
| ب | b | b | b | ژ | — | — | ř | ل | l | l | l |
| پ | — | p | p | ژ | — | zh | j | م | m | m | m |
| ت | t | t | t | س | s | s | s | ن | n | n | n |
| ٹ | — | — | ṭ | ش | sh | sh | ş | ه | h | h | h ¹ |
| ث | th | th | th | ص | ṣ | ṣ | ş | و | w | v/u | v |
| ج | j | j | c | ض | ḍ | ḍ | ž | ی | y | y | y |
| چ | — | ch | çh | ط | ṭ | ṭ | ṭ | ة | -ah | — | -a ² |
| ح | ḥ | ḥ | ḥ | ظ | ẓ | ẓ | ẓ | ال | al ³ | — | — |
| خ | kh | kh | kh | ع | ' | ' | ' | ¹ – when not final ² – at in construct state ³ – (article) al - or l- | | | |
| د | d | d | d | غ | gh | gh | ğ | | | | |
| ڈ | — | — | ḍ | ف | f | f | f | | | | |
| ذ | dh | dh | dh | ق | q | q | q | | | | |
| ر | r | r | r | ك | k | k/g | k | | | | |

VOWELS

| | | Arabic and Persian | Urdu | Ottoman Turkish |
|------------|---|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Long | ا | ā | ā | ā |
| | آ | Ā | Ā | — |
| | و | ū | ū | ū |
| | ي | ī | ī | ī |
| Doubled | ي | iiy (final form ī) | iy (final form ī) | iiy (final form ī) |
| | و | uww (final form ū) | uv | uvv |
| | و | uvv (for Persian) | — | — |
| Diphthongs | و | au or aw | au | ev |
| | ی | ai or ay | ay | ey |
| Short | ا | a | a | a or e |
| | ا | u | u | u or ū |
| | ا | i | i | o or ö |
| | ا | — | — | ī |

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. چھ jh گھ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

AL-SHAJARA

Vol. 27, No. 1, 2022

Contents

ARTICLES

- OSMAN BAKAR AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL RENEWAL
IN THE MUSLIM WORLD 1
Khairudin Aljunied

- IBN ARABI AND HIS CHALLENGES ON THE ISSUE OF FREE WILL 29
A REVIEW OF THE ISSUE IN LIGHT OF TWO OF HIS THEORIES
Saeideh Sayari, Mohd Zufri bin Mamat
and Maisarah Hasbullah

- RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY, IFTĀ' CULTURE, AND SECTARIANISM IN 53
MODERN PAKISTAN
THE IMPACT OF ITS INTRA-ISLAMIC PLURALISM
Muhammad Kalim Ullah Khan and Osman Bakar

- AWARENESS TOWARDS WAQF ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN MALAYSIA 77
AND INDONESIA: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION
Nisful Laila, Ririn Tri Ratnasari, Shafinar Ismail, Mohd Halim Mahphoth
and Putri Aliah Mohd Hidzir

- QURANIC EXEGETICAL ACTIVITIES IN THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO 101
A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW
Nadzrah Ahmad

- CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM DURING EARLY 123
ISLAMIC CIVILISATION: A CRITICAL STUDY OF SELECT CONCEPTS
Thameem Ushama

MANUSCRIPT STUDIES

- AN INTRODUCTION TO PERSIAN SEALS: 153
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DEVOTIONAL SEALS FROM
AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MANUSCRIPT
Amir H. Zekrgoo

REVIEW ESSAY

- ON PRAISE AND VIRTUES OF BOOKS IN THE ISLAMIC TRADITIONS 171
Azenita Abdullah

- BOOK REVIEWS 187

AL-SHAJARA

Vol. 27, No. 2, 2022

Contents

ARTICLES

- IBN KHALDŪN'S BIOGRAPHY: UNVEILING GLOBAL HISTORY AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF MODERN CIVILIZATION 205

Ahmad Murad Merican

- DYNAMICS OF SETTLER COLONIALISM: INFLUENCING FACTORS ON THE ISRAELI TREATMENT TOWARDS THE PALESTINIANS 233

Belal Alakhra, Raja Noriza Raja Ariffin & Makmor Tumin

- THE EUROPEAN SOURCE OF GUNNERY PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE IN KITĀB AL-'IZZ WA AL-MANĀFI' LI AL-MUJĀHIDĪN FĪ SABĪL ALLĀH BI AL-MADĀFI' 263

Mansour Mohamed Sabri, Khairil Husaini Jamil & Ahmed Jomaa Abd Al-Hamid

- INTRODUCING EXISTENTIALIST PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES FOR CULTIVATING AUTHENTICITY IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION 289

Malick Elias

- EIDOS IN SUFI PHENOMENOLOGY: A NEW LOOK AT CREATION 311

Konul Bunyadzade

- ISLAMIC ASTRONOMY AND CALENDARICAL SCIENCE IN CHINA FROM SONG TO QING DYNASTIES 327

Min Ke-qin

- SCIENTIFIC HISTORY IN PRE-MODERN CIVILIZATIONS 351

A Critical Review

Radzi Sapiee and Osman Bakar

MANUSCRIPT STUDIES

- DEVOTIONAL POETRY, EXCEPTIONAL CALLIGRAPHY, CHARMING MANUSCRIPT: EXPRESSION OF RELIGIOUS EMOTION IN ḤASSAN KĀSHĪ'S HAFT-BAND 369

Amir H. Zekrgoo

- MA HUAN 马欢 (1380-1460) AND HIS YINGYA SHENGLAN 瀛涯胜览 395

Omar Min Keqin

REVIEW ESSAYS

- SAMUEL JOHNSON'S THOUGHTS ABOUT ISLAM 401

Hüseyin Çaksen

BOOK REVIEWS

411

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