

# CITY METAPHOR IN THE CONTEXT OF WISDOM AND CIVILIZATION<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract:**

*In today's globalized societies, original, unaffected ideas have lost their influence because, with technological developments, almost the whole world can be seen as a single city. Yet in urban culture, the understanding of living together, leaves its place in a smaller community and even more to individualism. While wisdom and civilization have integrated perception of the city, in the course of time this perception has been transformed, shaping the mentality not from where it is viewed, however, but from how it is viewed. In this context, the city concept through this perception requires further discussion. No civilization can be discussed from a place where a city does not exist. However, now the concept has been transformed into an understanding that wisdom and civilization cannot be discussed from a place where there are no universities. With regards to this, universities become centres for Islamic civilization to grow and flourish like cities before. It discusses neither wisdom and civilization nor law and jurisprudence in places where there are no social communities. Therefore, in this paper, wisdom and civilization will be considered in line with the transformation of the city metaphor.*

**Keywords:** city; culture; university metaphor; wisdom and civilization; law and jurisprudence.

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## Introduction:

Ibn Khaldūn (1332/1406) is a unique personality who combined arts, history, *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), Islamic values and civilizational parameters in his intellectual life. Although Ibn Khaldūn was trained as a jurist (*faqīh*) who was familiar with all the ancillary sciences of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), he was also an *adīb* (litterateur). His genius was that he was able to combine different sciences with *adab* (literature).<sup>3</sup>

It is an undoubted reality that Islam is a religion with a concept for the city, despite the fact that the religion is able to grow in every environment. Though it is a universal religion for all, it was born in the city of Makkah, developed and announced its universal values and parameters in the city of Medina, and soon after, became the most influential paradigm in the world with its civilizational values and worldview. A city without Islam and Islam without a city cannot flourish in terms of reflecting its eternal values. Sciences, arts, literatures, and technologies create civilizational values. With the existence of all these, Ibn Khaldūn insisted that “the sciences are numerous only where civilization is large and sedentary culture is highly developed.”<sup>4</sup> In that respect, a scientific instruction is one of the crafts, and these crafts can only be numerous in cities. A city life needs a sedentary culture which resembles a four-legged counter: every single leg must rely on the following parameters: law, religion, science and administration. Law evokes a wide range of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) which bring justice to all irrespective of race, religion and color of the citizens; the second evokes belief of the society and religious values; the third evokes all kind of sciences that create great civilizations; and the last evokes the public policy of politics, that is yet to bring just administration through *siyāsah al-sharī‘ah* (public policy of Islamic law) based on *maqāsid al-sharī‘ah* (higher objectives of Islamic law).

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<sup>3</sup> See more details on the concept of *adīb*, Miriam Cooke, “Ibn Khaldūn and Language: From Linguistic Habit to Philological Craft,” in Lawrence, *Ibn Khaldūn and Islamic Ideology*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), 27-36. According to him there is no single English equivalent of *adab*, and it is translated as literature.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans and introduced by Franz Rosenthal (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 343.

Unfortunately, the current globalized world lost its essential life values with technological developments. For the Western mind, in recent times, civilization is seen as technological development. Since the colonization period, it realized that superiority can only taken place through technological advancements which separate them from other civilizations. Due to this technological advancement and ignoring civilizational parameters, the West lost their opportunity to create a human civilization. Producing technology or developing a new apparatus is not civilization. Since technology and civilization is something else, Japanese technology does not bring or create Japanese civilization. Creating a civilization needs values. Although the Japanese produce high and advanced technology, they do not inculcate their values from these technologies. In order to create technology from the civilizational perspective, Alparslan Açıkgenç talks about three dimensions: 1- intellectual infrastructure, 2- scientific infrastructure, 3- technical infrastructure.

Regrettably, in the end, the West lost its spiritual values because of greed and not inculcating values into their technology. Eventually they became monsters –like in their exploitation of others with the help of their technology. This became a source of pride for them. For the time being, with the advancement of technological development, almost the whole world has been reduced to a single city concept. In contrast to urban culture that was increased and became gigantic; social relationships, on the other hand, have shrunk into smaller communities and even more to individualism.

The concept of civilization and wisdom were used to look at things from the perspective of the city. Ibn Khaldūn widely explored in his writings cities, reflecting on scientific instructions, arts and crafts which are the signs of civilization like Makkah, Madinah, Baghdad, Istanbul, Kūfa, Samarqand, etc. Nonetheless, the perception has today been transformed by looking through the windows of universities such as Oxford, Al-Azhar, Harvard, Sorbonne, Istanbul University, The International Islamic University Malaysia and so on. This paper, therefore, will investigate the transformation of the city metaphor to the university metaphor through the concept of wisdom and civilization.

## Justice, Civilization and the Civilized City (Madinah):

In Islamic understanding, peace cannot be attained unless justice is established first. The concept of justice and peace must be both simultaneously maintained and considered part of a civilized society.<sup>5</sup> In other words justice, in a real sense, cannot be established without the establishment of the *sharī'ah* and its total values as a complete code of life. In the linguistic sense in Arabic terminology, a civilized city is 'Madinah',<sup>6</sup> This was the opinion from the time of the Prophet (pbuh).

From our traditional understanding, we know that the term civilization could be perceived as a science which deals with philosophy and epistemology of human progress towards the establishment of a state of development or improvement from all aspects and facets of human life. There are some vocabularies related to civilisational discourses: history, worldview, society, achievement, traditions, believe system, culture, values, science, knowledge, literary production, social organization, development, advancement, science and technology, architectures arts and crafts. These terms obviously illustrate the various nature of issues in civilization discussions. These long lists of terms indicate that civilization is, in fact, a broad and multifarious issue that needs to be appropriately comprehended.<sup>7</sup>

Ibn Khaldūn (1332/1406) in the fourteenth century expressed that human civilization requires political readership for its organization, for this, a civilization either in a city or a university needs strong leadership.<sup>8</sup> Islam established a progressive civilization since the beginning of the revelation, especially in the golden age

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<sup>5</sup> See more on Sayyid Naquib al-Attas, "Religion and the Foundation of Ethics in Islam," in Altaf Gauhor (ed), *Challenge of Islam*, (London: The Islamic Council of Europe, 1978), 32-67.

<sup>6</sup> Zeenath Kausar, *Colonization to Globalization: Might is Right continues Earthly City Versus Civilized City, Madinah*, (Selangor: Thinker's Library, 2007), 196.

<sup>7</sup> Zaid Ahmad, "The Teaching of Islamic Civilisation in Malaysian Universities: Prospects and Challenges," in Osman Bakar, Eric Winkel, Airulamri Amran (ed.), *Contemporary Higher Education Needs in Muslim Countries*, (Kuala Lumpur: IAIS, 2011), 153.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. and introduced by Franz Rosenthal (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 256.

until the fourteenth century, particularly in the Muslim cities in Andalusia such as Cordoba, Seville, and Granada. They were called the ornaments of the civilized world and therefore they became the envy of the West. On the contrary, Westerners used to live in the dark age, and they did not concern themselves with science in a creative sense from the seventh century until the eleventh century.<sup>9</sup>

In the course of time civilizational characters vigorously changed, with these changes people needed to adopt themselves to them in order to survive and therefore civilizational values simultaneously changed.<sup>10</sup> Our perception of the world and our consideration of it as an entity not independent from our mind and heart is taken as a matter of habit that is significant in our daily life. This is materialized “either: 1- through culture, technology, scientific, religious and speculative ideas that we acquire through education and other means, or; 2- through a conscious effort to acquire knowledge, or; 3- in both of the above.”<sup>11</sup>

Since civilization is a reflection of multiculturalism, culture itself consists of the essence of some basic elements that is, the conception of life, the goal of life, the building of human character, the nature of man and the nature of human relations. On the other hand, more specifically, Islamic culture reflects the Islamic view of the worldly life, man’s status on earth, his peculiarity as a human being and his relationship with nature and reality, his purpose in life and the object of Islamic culture which is deeply related to the conception of life as well as the role of man on earth as vicegerent.<sup>12</sup> Believe in the Absolute Existence in the highest degree of absoluteness does not require anything. He is sufficient unto Himself and need no “other.” With this statement relying on the Absolute Existence reflects the ontological awareness which brings about a strong stand against civilization destroyers. The word “other” refers to “that of other than God (*mā siwā Allah*), that is, both the invisible

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<sup>9</sup>Cemil Akdoğan, *Science in Islam & the West*, (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 2008), xii.

<sup>10</sup> Zaid Ahmad, *The Teaching of Islamic...*,156.

<sup>11</sup> Alparslan Açıkgöç, *Islamic Science, Towards a Definition*, (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996), 15.

<sup>12</sup> Shahid Ashraf, *Arts in Islamic Civilization*, (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 2006), 1-6.