

Alhassanain (p) Network for Islamic Heritage and Thought

IBN KHALDUN'S POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REALISM

Louis Baeck

(1996) in L. S. MOSS (ed.) Joseph A. Schumpeter Historian of
Economics, London: Routledge, p83-99.

www.perswww.kuleuven.be

www.alhassanain.org/english

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. HIS LATE RISE TO FAME	3
II. THE CONTOURS OF IBN KHALDUN'S WORLDVIEW	6
III. A TREATISE ON NON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	11
IV. THE SOCIAL CORE OF POLITICAL CHANGE	14
V. THE MECHANICS OF THE LONG TERM	16
1. The umran badawi	16
2. The umran hadari	16
VI. CONCLUSION	20
Notes:	22
Bibliography	23
Endnotes	25

I. HIS LATE RISE TO FAME

Since the 1950s academia has rightly hailed Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) as the greatest social scientist of medieval Islam. Moreover, in his survey on Muslim Economic Thinking, Mohammad Siddiqi praises him as their greatest economist (Siddiqi, 1981:70). Being a native of the Maghreb, at a time when the lands of western Islam were torn apart by a series of dynastic struggles between rival Arab and Berber tribes, Ibn Khaldun proved to be a mettlesome and ambitious political activist. After a series of reversals and failures in his role of teacher and counsellor to various local emirs, he quit the political scene with a pang of disappointment. For about three years he retreated into the desert castle, Qalat Ibn Salama. There, disentangled from the hurly-burly of city and court, he decided on a new course, this is on a literary career. His new ambition was to become a detached scholar with a long term view on the socio-political and economic determinants that have an impact on history.

Ibn Khaldun's major achievement was the writing of the Muqaddimah, or the long introduction serving as an analytical and synoptical framework of his lengthy treatise on history, namely the Kitab al-ibar. During his lifetime this monument of medieval scholarship was not received as an outstanding classic text destined to lift its author to the pantheon of the universally acclaimed intellectual celebrities. The bulk of the Kitab al-ibar does not significantly depart from the mainstream historiographic tradition of his predecessors. But in the Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun ventured into untrodden paths. The characteristic in-depth analysis, the socio-economic realism and the masterly comprehensiveness of his essay came as a shock and startled most of his contemporaries. On several issues, the methodological innovation of the Muqaddimah broke away from the cherished canons of mainstream Islamic thinking.

Erwin Rosenthal who published one of the first socio-political analyses of the Muqaddimah, made the following important remark: "To my knowledge Ibn Khaldun was the first medieval thinker to see the importance of economics for politics and for the whole life of any society organised in a state" (Rosenthal, 1962:90). In Ibn Khaldun's mindset, socio-political and economic development go hand in hand. His untraditional method and his prima donna-like ego unabled him to build up an audience and still less a school of followers. In his lifetime he was more reviled than praised. The Andalusian epigone Ibn al-Azraq (1428-1491) was a remarkable exception. His near contemporary, the Egyptian historian al-Maqrizi (1364-1442) admired the Muqaddimah. He also engaged in social and economic history writing but went his own way for his methodology. On some important matters like the practice of money debasement, the thirteenth century Hanbalite jurist Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328) and also al-Maqrizi offer a more penetrating analysis. Notwithstanding the floppyness of some factual details, Ibn Khaldun surpasses them all with his analytical sharpness and the realism of his global vision. His originality consisted precisely in the patient insight with which he described the social web (asabiyya) as principal determinant in human history. This emphasis on the social dimension in the

cyclical development of civilizations implied a more deterministic attitude than any to which his contemporaries were accustomed.

After a relatively long eclipse from the intellectual scene in the Arab world, our fourteenth century author was rediscovered by the European orientalist of the nineteenth century. In the wake of this rediscovery, the *Muqaddimah* was translated into several languages. In 1863 Marquis de Slane translated the *Prolegomena* into French. The English speaking world had to wait for almost a century later. In 1958, Frank Rosenthal published an English translation; this was reprinted in 1967 and prefaced with text-critic comments. The translations in other languages are the following: into Turkish 1859, into Urdu 1924, into Persian 1957, into Portuguese 1958, into Hindi 1961 and into Hebrew 1967. In the course of the last decades the secondary literature has been growing steadily. The bibliography published by al-Azmeh in 1981, registers more than 650 titles. In 1983 Ahmed Abdesselam published a sort of intellectual portrait gallery of the Maghrebi scholar. This study brushes the different historical and cultural contexts as well as the viewpoints from where the readers of Ibn Khaldun have commented upon the *Muqaddimah* and the different ways in which they profiled the author. With the western commentators, the comparison to Machiavelli is the most frequent. But a number of readers compare him also to Vico, to Montesquieu, to Rousseau, to Marx, to Hegel, to Nietzsche and to Weber.

Interesting to know is the fact that the intellectual status of Ibn Khaldun got a significant lift during and after the political decolonization of the Maghreb countries. In a series of symposia and congresses (Cairo, 1962 ; Alger, 1978 ; Rabat, 1979 and Tunis, 1980) he came to be celebrated as the founder of sociology and as the discoverer of a great number of analytical insights and theories in political science, in economics, in public finance, in the philosophy of history, in demography and in social geography ; all this a long time before their official births. In the 1960s and 1970s the development theorists following the line of the Latin American dependencia-school, and also other authors of Third World signature, frequently invoked Ibn Khaldun as the prestigious and cosmopolitan forefather of the Maghrebi social sciences. Against the penetration and domination of the western social sciences in their academic milieu, which were berated as a new form of colonization, or worse still as a drive towards intellectual "bedouinization" of local scholarship, Ibn Khaldun was posited as an historical model rooted into the Arab historical tradition. In the effort of the Arab social scientists towards cultural indigenization and in the endeavour to construct their own conceptual framework in reference to the Arab social and cultural context, Ibn Khaldun figured as a prestigious precursor ; this is as the indigenous originator, classifier, analyst and systematiser (Irabi, 1982 ; Sabagh & Ghazalla, 1986).

Since the second half of 1970s the revival of Islam's historical, cultural and religious tradition stimulated an intensive wave of scholarly interest in the Muslim social sciences, more particularly in sociology and economics. However, with the movement in the tradition-bound intellectual milieu of the Middle East towards the islamization of the social sciences, the exegetic

references to Ibn Khaldun became less frequent, while the references to orthodox, some would say fundamentalist sources from eastern Islam, especially al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah, came in favour. This Arabian paradigm-shift is also noticeable in the contemporary economic literature of Muslim origin, sunnite as well as shi'ite (Taleghani, 1982; Kepel & Richard, 1990; Baeck, 1994).

II. THE CONTOURS OF IBN KHALDUN'S WORLDVIEW

Ibn Khaldun was born in Tunis in the year 1332 to an aristocratic family who had recently emigrated from Andalusia to the Maghreb. All his life he felt himself as an emigrant, more so as an odd man out, frequently changing jobs, masters and towns. For the Islamic lands, the fourteenth century was a time of dynastic and political strife, of social disruption and of foreign invasion. In the East, Persia had been invaded by the Seldjuks, followed by the advance of the Mongols who burst out of the Asian steppes. During one of his diplomatic missions Ibn Khaldun accompanied the Mamluk sultan of Egypt, for the negotiation of a peace treaty with the famous Mongol conqueror Tamerlane.

In the lands of western Islam, the confederation of Arab and Berber states, which had since the twelfth century been ruled by the Almohad dynasty, fell apart into several rival emirates. The Spanish princes had conquered Cordoba in 1236 and Seville in 1242. The king of Sicily occupied Djerba in 1284. From the fourteenth century onwards, the Portuguese gradually took over the control of the African coast. The merchant oligarchies of the Maghreb and Andalusia which for centuries had been the intermediaries in the trade over land between Europe and Africa South of the Sahara, lost their trade monopoly. The caravan trade and with it the merchant class of the Maghreb entered into a crisis from which it never recovered.

Being a talented and ambitious scion of a wealthy and respected family, Ibn Khaldun received a first class education from a series of notorious teachers in the most important study domains, namely the religious canons (the Quran and the prophetic tradition), the legal focus of the different schools and the practices of law, the methods of speculative theology (kalam), the Greek tradition of Arab philosophy (falsafa) and last but not least the Persian political wisdom literature, a didactic genre also called "mirror of the prince" literature.

After his graduation in this classical curriculum the young man engaged in political activity with a remarkable zest, a notorious versatility and a rarely seen bent for non conformism. Frequently changing sides, he first served the emir of Tunis, followed by a post at the rival court of Fes, then by a stay at Tlemcen and finally with the sultan of Granada. His audacious initiatives for radical reform and his undiplomatic language landed him in jail. Disgusted with court life and its intrigues, he "emigrated" to Egypt where the Mamluk sultan offered him protection and where he became supreme judge for litigation in the Malikite tradition.

The Malikite tradition (founded by Malik Ibn Anas, 712-796 in Medina) was one of the four major schools of law. From the beginning, the majority of the Maghrebi law doctors as well as the judges had opted for the Malikite tradition. One of the reasons being that the North African tribal organisation and its social and economic structure were more alike to the small town situation of Medina situated in the heartland of Arabia, than to the big town context of the Persian and Syrian lands from where the other law schools stemmed. The Malikite tradition kept to the letter of the divine law (shari'a)

revealed by the Prophet. It did not permit a too frequent use of analogical reasoning or a laxist adaptation of the law to different circumstances of time and place. During his career as qadi in Egypt, Ibn Khaldun was known to be averse to the sterile casuistry and to hermeneutics or the disputation techniques (munazara) of the other law schools. His principled stance landed him more than once in trouble with his colleagues qadi who adhered to other jurisprudential rites. Another important characteristic of the Malikite tradition is that it stresses more than some other schools the idea of social utility (maslaha). The divine law or shari'a prescribes in great detail how believers should conduct their life, how submit to God and deal with their neighbour, how they ought to sell and buy at the market place, how they should eat, sleep and procreate, etc. In all this the Malikite rite emphasized the importance of the common good.

The emphasis on social utility of this jurisprudential tradition not only influenced Ibn Khaldun at the law court, where he showed a great interest for the social context of the cases, but he kept also to the same focus in his scholarly work. His sense of social justice invited him to become a sharp observer of events, with a thirst for knowledge concerning the concrete circumstances and the specific context of cases and causes. In this valuable attempt to sift the basic argument from the details he matured into a potential social scientist wary of dogmatism.

Philosophy had reached eastern Islam by the translation of Greek treatises in Arab by Chaldean Christians, who were adherents of the Neoplatonic synthesis realized by authors of Late Antiquity like Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus and others. The islamization of the Neoplatonic falsafa through Muslim hellenizers like al-Farabi (887-950) and Ibn Sina (980-1073) led to a Neoplatonism with pronounced spiritual and mystical exaltations, as well as by a stoic self-discipline. However, the lands of the western Islam leaned heavier on the Aristotelian tradition. The works of its most famous figure, namely the Andalusian Ibn Rushd (1126-1198) were hotly debated by the Latin scholars of the Paris university. The penetration of Greek or pagan falsafa aroused the outrage of the majority of the ulema and the devout Muslim scholars adhering to orthodox tradition. With al-Ghazali's (1058-1111) hermeneutic attack against the Muslim brand of philosophy, the post-Ghazalian scholarly world purified falsafa from its metaphysical and rationalist overtones and reduced it to bare logic. The Muslim scholastics, with a mindset to reconcile between faith and reason, tried to work out a new synthesis. This ambitious scheme, however, led to an impasse.

In the post-Ghazalian fideist climate, kalam was reduced to formal disputations. The scholastic discourse degenerated into dry logic and to hairsplitting casuistry based on pure analogical reasoning. By the time that Ibn Khaldun graduated from school he had become utterly disgusted with it. He decided to embark upon a political career where he was confronted with the concrete problems of the world. But his analytical mind continued to show a keen interest in the underlying causes and determinants of the political turbulence of his time. This led him to the works on political philosophy written by Muslim authors.

In that vein, al-Farabi's treatise on the Virtuous City (al-madina al-fadila), an Islamic version of Plato's Republic, caught his eye. But, Ibn Rushd's famous commentaries on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics as well as on Plato's Republic interested him in a still higher degree. Indeed, the Andalusian philosopher more than the eastern utopian al-Farabi of eastern Islam, referred to the historico-concrete developments of southern Spain and of the Maghreb. Besides being an influential qadi, Ibn Rushd had sided actively with the regime, as a counsellor at the court of the Almohad empire. His profound humanism, with an underpinning of the ethical norms by reason, inspired for a while the Almohadan ideology of revival. This novelty, however, was of short duration.

In Ibn Khaldun's time the politico-religious reform movement of the Almohads had spent its spell. And in eastern Islam, conquerors like Hulalu and Tamerlane could hardly be identified with al-Farabi's philosopher king. Being a realist with an analytical mind, Ibn Khaldun drifted away from al-Farabi's political idealism. This was based on Plato's premise that the first best ethics and politics derive from theoretical knowledge. The author of the Muqaddimah who in his early career avidly read the Socratic philosophers and the Muslim hellenists, became in his mature age highly critical of their metaphysical stance in ethics and politics (Mahdi, 1957 ; Lambton, 1981 ; Azmeh, 1981 ; Himmich, 1987).

Not only the Platonic equation of knowledge with being comes under heavy attack but also Ibn Rushd's rationalism. The focus of his attack was directed against the pretension of the Socratic school to equate the total-dimension of being with knowledge¹. These idealistic philosophers, he stated, made the same error as the naturalists who only emphasize the body. In the Latin West a similar opposition against the concepts (called universals) of Thomistic, this is of Aristotelian inspired philosophy, had led to the new, more realistic paradigm of nominalism. According to our fourteenth century scholar, the reign of pure reason is not a universal or categorical imperative ; it has natural limits. Man is not only moved by the knowledge of the good ; he is also driven by a will for power and by material aspirations such as the desire of wealth. However, if the élan vital, the competitive drive and the desire for comfort degenerate in lust for power and luxuries, they ultimately lead to destruction of man and society. This is the kernel of Ibn Khaldun's "realistic" philosophy. Its seeds germinated in medieval Islam in critical confrontation between philosophic rationalism, Muslim law and kalam (Nassar, 1967).

In keeping with this realistic focus, he also distanced himself from Ibn Taymiyyah's fundamentalist stance, more particularly the al-siyasa al-shari'a. This is a treatise on a political regime and a community ruled by the shari'a. This notorious Hanbalite jurisconsult exercised for years the function of muhtasib or supervisor of the markets ; with as duty the control of weight measures, prices and the quality of money. This supervision of the suq gave Ibn Taymiyyah first hand insight in the motivation of buyers and sellers, in the practical laws of the market and in the social and economic mechanisms of society at large. In his discourse on a community ruled by divine law, the Hanbalite jurist aimed at a revival of primeval Islam. In

opposition to the hellenizing philosophers who dreamt of a philosopher-king as a substitute to the early caliphate, his plea was a call for devout leaders, like the early right-guided (rashidun) successors of the Prophet, to take over political leadership. Ibn Khaldun, the realist, opined that this nostalgic idealization aimed at a renaissance of the caliphate, left a wide gap between religious zeal and the historico-concrete functioning of the world.

The reading and the almost uncritical absorption of the "mirror of the prince" literature enriched Ibn Khaldun's research with a tradition from Persian origin. It set his pragmatic mind upon a fruitful path². With the move to the East under the Umayyad regime, and still more so under the Abbassid dynasty, Islam underwent an intense process of Iranization. One of the consequences was that their scholars came into contact with the oriental wisdom literature of Iran. In the eight century, Ibn al-Muqaffa initiated this didactic genre with two manuals. The fourteenth century al-Turtushi closed this long series of open letters to the prince (Rosenthal, 1962).

In the mirror literature, the moral principles of social justice and public equity are not conceived as absolute ethical norms, but rather as practical devices in the interest of the state, the society and of its leaders. The efficient ruler is not perceived as a religious devotee nor as a philosopher. He should rather be a practical manager with an eye to the checks and balances of reality. An efficient ruler applies the sound principle of *raison d'état* ; blending political authority with propaganda aimed at popularity. The mirror-genre had as origin the courtly ethos fostered by the Sassanian aristocracy. This reached unparalleled peaks of earthly wisdom and *joie de vivre* ; its final aim was to obtain the willing submission and legitimation of the sultan's subjects. The mirror books abound with discourses on public administration, on fiscal systems, on the organisation of commerce and the economy. These essays written as manuals for the enlightened political manager (*mulk hazm*) are the result of functional pragmatism in the service of socio-political realism. They are almost the opposite of the philosophical discourses on the ideal city. The mirror books also offer a reasonable alternative to Ibn Khaldun's dislike of despotic rule by intriguing sultans. A manager type regime was also more to his taste than a theocracy or a regime solely based on the *shari'a*.

With the Persian authors Ibn Khaldun agreed that ruling a community is a rare skill ; an efficient statesman is like a manager of an historico-concrete society, he does not rule utopia. This requires the knowledge of the practical determinants, the specific causes and the social and economic laws of development that move it. When he retreated to a three year sojourn in a desert castle, Ibn Khaldun opined that the best way to serve the coming statesmen, consisted in the writing of a book on the dynamics of history. But it should not be a mere court chronicle destined to flatter the ruler ; it ought to be a manual useful to the statesman. The book he wanted to write would pass beyond the mere relating of the facts ; it should preferably unveil the basic dynamics of becoming³. Ibn Khaldun, the realist, embarked upon the study of the social and economic forms of life as they had actually existed and were known in history. He was not interested at all in idealist

speculation and was averse to another version of a madina fadila of his signature. In the introduction of his Kitab al-ibar, he boldly announces without a blush, that his treatise launches a new science, namely the science of societal development (ilm al-umran).

III. A TREATISE ON NON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Since the time of Greek and Roman Antiquity, literators and historians had made a try to structure the unfolding of facts and events along different interpretative themes ; with the expectation of a deeper insight into the laws and the dynamics of history. In this genre, the theme of the rise, growth and decline of societies, states and civilizations had been treated already in Hesiod's three stages of development. Plato and Aristotle theorized on the historical unfolding of constitutions. Polybius, a Greek scholar living in Rome halfway of the second century BC, wrote a remarkable essay on political development (Polybius, 1923). In the sixth book of his Histories, the Greek historian witnessed Rome's rise to power by the conquest of the central Mediterranean and set himself to expound a theory on the development cycle of regimes (anakuklosis politeion).

To Polybius this cycle was a natural sequence of birth, growth and decline through which historical societies were bound to pass. The rise to power and the territorial expansion by conquest could not endure, since the richer and more powerful a commonwealth became, the harder it would be to maintain moral and civic virtue in proper equilibrium. With a clear emphasis on internal causes, Polybius explored the two avenues that lead to societal decadence. The first one being social and economic: the achievement of a high level of prosperity feeds the drive for luxury ; this inevitably brings decline (tes epi to kheiron metaboles). The second, and most of the time the simultaneous cause, is socio-political. The political emancipation and later the radical claim of the people for more freedom ends in the worst regime of all, namely the tyranny of the masses (ochlokratia). Another famous literator, namely the Roman rhetor Cicero was also preoccupied with the historical cycle of constitutions. Being an accomplished popularizer of abstract ideas, he relayed the view of Polybius to the Roman intelligentsia.

The Polybian cycle theory had been a valuable attempt to prophesize the mis-development of the early Roman republic, but in theory it was tributary of Aristotle's political philosophy. Ibn Khaldun's realistic bent, supported by his intimate knowledge of the Islamic commonwealth's problematic development cycle, led him to write his lengthy volume on stability and instability of regimes and to come forward with a more comprehensive analysis. His horizon was wider and he approached his domain of study as a social scientist rather than as a political philosopher. In his view, the conditioning factors, this is the political, social and economic variables, interact in a more or less autonomous way. On the theme of realism in power politics his work illuminates a classic and universal issue: how to establish and maintain a stable state with a sustainable development model. With his hard-headed approach he came almost a century and a half ahead of Machiavelli's theses.

The scholarly commentaries of our time offer a wide variety of opinion on the object of Ibn Khaldun's new science and on the author's intentions. Indeed, the richness and complexity of the work make that it can be read and interpreted as a theory on decline. In Himmich's book, Penser la

dépression, Ibn Khaldun is profiled as a nostalgic who senses the end phase of a civilization. But the *Muqaddimah* can also be read as a high quality product in the genre of mirror literature. His scientific method, however, offered surer guidelines for rulers than the outright descriptive and conformist literature of the Persians. According to one's standpoint, the *Prolegomena* can be read as a philosophy of history or as a treatise on social dynamics.

Noteworthy is the fact that Ibn Khaldun was a deep religious man and some hesitant passages of his book end with "for God knows best". In several passages he recognizes that in the prime time of Islam, religion had welded the umma into a community submitted to the will of Allah. After the Prophet's revelation of the Quran, the believer could thrust that religion offered the final salvation for the individual and for society. In the religious view on history, Christian and Muslim alike, the social drama of decline or worse, of decadence, were sensed to be a sanction inflicted upon the unfaithful who betrayed their thrust in God. But the *Muqaddimah* opened the path to a secular view of history. In fact it unveils a complex matrix of natural causes, this is of autonomous factors, who imply that with or without religion, history in itself is not linear. History is cyclical ; this for reasons which are intrinsic to the unfolding of the human socio-drama itself. When the coercive forces of a civilized state and its institutions are increasingly felt to cramp and obstruct the vigorous and creative forces in society, and it has not enough resilience to resist them, the organic alliance disintegrates. Limiting himself to be an acute observer of reality, our treatise writer refused to preach.

In my view Ibn Khaldun is the first but also a classical proponent of the non durability of development. His work offers a superposition of various cycles - the political, the social, the economic, the fiscal, the demographic - each having their intrinsic dynamics, but with a dialectical impact on each other. The interesting point is that his analysis privileged the internal misdevelopment of society and the dysfunctional growth of its economy as the major determinants of decline. The intrinsic laws of socio-economic development are such that all the primitive cultures who succeeded to break through the level of basic material needs, and who entered into a process where the clan solidarity (*asabiyya*) dwindles as a result of detribalization, are sooner or later caught in a maelstrom.

The weakening of *asabiyya* through detribalization permits the formation of a bigger scale society ; second in line comes the division of labour, with its ensuing uplifting of labour productivity and general welfare. After this take-off to luxury a society cannot escape for long the dysfunctional traps of misdevelopment. The growth fever that in the initial stages functions as a leverage to higher forms of societal and economic development, turns into a cancer. The message of Ibn Khaldun is clear: the intrinsic laws of growth and development have the inevitable consequence that, viewed in the long course of history, they prove to be non durable. In the long course of history there are no known forms of development that proved to be sustainable. This thesis, ably demonstrated by a medieval scholar, brings a clear message

for the economists interested in the problematics of our own longterm development.

IV. THE SOCIAL CORE OF POLITICAL CHANGE

In the beginning of the seventh century the revelation of the prophet Muhammad had given rise to a spiritual and social revolution in Arabia. Islam imposed itself as a novel response to the political crisis resulting from the continuous feuds between the desert people in the Hijaz and the urban merchant oligarchy in Mecca and Medina. The social conflict was defused by the new religion with its binding element of a higher order, namely the umma or the spiritual link of believers. In the space of barely one century, Islam, driven by a holy zeal for Allah and lust for booty, would conquer an area stretching from Persia to Morocco and up to the Pyrenees in Europe.

After the death of Muhammad a vicar or Khalif presided over the community of believers. According to the ideal model set by the rightly guided leaders of primeval Islam, the caliph was the supreme spiritual authority who also served as the temporal ruler and judge. In the course of time the caliphate gave way to mere earthly power relations. Sultans, emirs and in due time despots gripped the reins of power with the aid of military force. The spiritual guidance was gradually monopolized by the interpreters of the revealed message and of sacred law. The history of medieval Islam is a tale of a magnificent civilization regularly torn apart by new conquerors, most of the time tribal leaders of desert nomads. These brave newcomers toppled the exhausted urban rulers with the cohesive military clout of their unspoiled clansmen.

Ibn Khaldun who in his schooling had absorbed all the available knowledge and who as a political activist had participated in some major power struggles of his time, became fascinated by the natural development cycle, this is by the genesis, the flourishing and the decline of political power and authority. In his search for the operational foundations of this repeated cycle he singled out its underlying social dynamics as the prime mover. As a medieval scholar he drew more than he admitted on the prescriptive norms of the fukaha, on the apologetic literature of kalam and on the metaphysical schemes of the hellenizing Muslim philosophers. But in the social contextualization of his thesis he proved to be all himself. He came up with a new science in order to explain how and why things are as they are in the natural development course of human societies. Ibn Khaldun, the realist, sided with the facts of life while the hellenizing philosophers cherished the utopian schemes of an ideal state. According to his mindset also the juridico-religious norms of the fukaha seemed to be more apt to offer guidance to the believer for his salvation, but were no match for the despots and their power holders.

In Ibn Khaldun's socio-political dynamics, asabiyya or the primary group cohesion and solidarity based on blood ties, is the pivotal concept. The kinship ties lead to affection and support in one's social relations. The members of the nomadic tribes concentrated on the satisfaction of the primary needs, like food and shelter. The social organisation of the clan guarantees that each member gains the means of subsistence and moreover it secures the mutual protection of the group. As a result of the natural vicissitudes of the subsistence economy the clan member necessarily has to

fall back on the solidarity of the group. Consequently he takes its cohesive power structure for granted.

Asabiyya alone, however, is not sufficient to found a great civilization. With the development of cities where several tribes are clustered together and with the formation of the state a different social organization and an additional force is needed to buttress the cohesion of this multi-ethnic entity. According to Ibn Khaldun the primeval umma was linked together with God's help. But in the course of time, a multi-ethnic empire developed and after the charismatic founding fathers, the cohesive impulse of religion weakened. Ambitious rulers monopolized power and some behaved as despots. They were set to keep the community together with a paid army and with an exacting state bureaucracy.

The development of urban agglomerations (tamaddun) resulted in a process which may be called detribalization. This entails a gradual loosening of natural solidarity ties. In order to safeguard the state authority of the ruler, the army and the bureaucracy assisted by a learned power elite became the instruments of law and order. In due time this coercive machinery could not function without considerable financial means. The prodigality and the luxury of the court and of the ruling class swallowed an exorbitant mass of resources. The tax levies beyond the rate admitted by the canonical prescriptions created a fiscal overload eliciting the moral disapproval of dissident fukaha. In order to fill the void the state authorities felt obliged to take over some of the most profitable economic activities and by doing so alienated large sectors of the business community. The resulting dissolution of the social fibres weakens the state to the point of exhaustion. The times are ripe for a desert tribe, still unspoiled by civilization, to open a new cycle.

The inductive method of the author and the realistic contextualization of the development cycle, based upon the pivotal changes in asabiyya, have lead some modern readers to hail Ibn Khaldun as a sociologist avant la lettre. True, for his time he was an original social analyst. This does not make him yet a sociologist in the modern sense. He was after all a medieval scholar deeply rooted in Islamic culture.

V. THE MECHANICS OF THE LONG TERM

Ibn Khaldun called his new science ilm al-umran, but most readers familiar with his semantics agree that umran is too complex a term to translate in one word. In the text, umran refers to the cultural, societal and material unfolding of history. In some passages it means social change. Ibn Khaldun's analysis rests on a series of binary dichotomies ; the most important being: primitive-civilized, nomadic-sedentary, rural-urban, small scale society versus big scale, feeling of solidarity versus anomie, natural subsistence economy versus money economy with a surplus. The analysis is dynamized when the ideal types change from one stage to another. Ibn Khaldun's reasoning is essentially a discourse on stages of development. Readers with a schooling in sociology identify these ideal-types as forebears of the Durkheim-Weber-Parsons scheme. Readers with an education in economics opine that the German Historical School and Rostow's stages of growth had a medieval ancestor. The most important distinction is the one between umran badawi and umran hadari. The historical cycle consists in a dynamic change from badawa into hadara.

1. The umran badawi

The principal meaning of badawa is primitive ; its derivative meanings are nomadic, rural or backward. Today we would call this societal form an underdeveloped subsistence economy in which man is engaged in the satisfaction of his limited, basic needs like food and shelter. The desert people practice stock-raising and oasis-agriculture ; they are either bedouins or semi-nomads. The badawa people live a natural life whose simplicity engenders certain physical and moral qualities. Used to stand up to hardship they are brave and live on the close-knit ties of common ancestry or common interests. The manifest link uniting them is asabiyya or social solidarity. After the necessary aggrandizement of scale, these semi-nomads are able to conquer an existing civilized state, or to create one ; because their striking power is sustained by an intense feeling of inner cohesion and solidarity. As time is wheeling on, some tribes get lured into the attractions of civilization. Ibn Khaldun underlines the progressive division of labour as a consequence of scale aggrandizement. The ensuing rise in productivity creates a surplus, so that trade intensifies between food producers and craftsmen.

2. The umran hadari

This is the sedentary way of life or the civilized society with people living in big and complex cities. The luxury of hadara is the result of advanced technical skills. But the desires of townspeople soon become unlimited. In the process of urbanization, this is a few generations after a powerful tribe has taken over power in an existing state, detribalization sets in and asabiyya gradually weakens. The conquering leader, who initially could count on the strong solidarity ties of his followers, is obliged to hire mercenaries to defend himself and to guarantee his power and his authority. With the dwindling of asabiyya the need of a standing army becomes bigger

and starts to swallow up a considerable share of the state budget. More public works (notably flood control and irrigation) and the patronage of education, the science, the arts and especially the luxurious courts cost money and gradually overburden the royal treasury. In order to meet the financial requirements for the growing administration and army, the public authorities engage in economic activities to meet the bill, but they simultaneously start to levy heavier taxes. For a couple of generations these devices may be able to avert the problems of overload.

At this point, it should be emphasized that Ibn Khaldun showed no interest in the problems of commutative justice, this is in the search for the value equivalence in commercial exchange, nor in a theoretical discourse on the intricacies of commensurability in the terms of trade between exchangers of goods and services, like Aristotle and the thirteenth century Latin scholastics had so masterly done (Baeck, 1994). As an analyst of the macrosphere he focussed his attention on the socio-political levers of wealth distribution between the power holders (the state machinery) and the rest of society.

In the beginning the impulses of the state work as a booster on economic development. The state is the greatest employer and also the biggest provider of public utilities like public buildings, ports, canals, roads. After a period of commercial and economic expansion and creation of wealth, leading to welfare and to luxury, the fiscal overload spins off a series of vicious circles. The first one being that the commercial and economic establishment loses its profits and its motivation as a consequence of excessive taxes. The forces of decline set in, once the fiscal income of the state (who originally induced the greatest stimuli for the economy as its greatest spender) becomes unable to finance the ballooning public deficit. In chapter 3, section 39 of the *Muqaddimah* the different stages and effects of taxation are clearly formulated, we quote: "In the city, the bedouin simplicity loses its importance and needs become more varied. Taxes continually rise to keep pace with the rise in needs and luxury. Finally, the subjects are gradually overburdened with heavy taxes. Consequently, the subjects lose interest in social and economic activities, since the expected profits are not realised. At last civilisation is destroyed, because there is no incentive for social and cultural activity".

One of the basic themes of the *Muqaddimah* is that once the natural economy, characterised by basic needs and social solidarity, changes into a highly productive economy (producing luxury and social anomie) the internal coherence weakens. A vicious circle of disfunctional development sets in. This leads to decline. The loss of solidarity, the tyranny of the masses and luxury figured already in the picture of Polybius as the villain of the piece. But it was Ibn Khaldun who first offered a well-documented global analysis of unsustainable development. A civilized state with a highly developed economy, with comfort and luxury, is the telos of most historical societies. But once a society and its economy achieves *hadara*, the very success augurs its dissolution.

The developed modes of production resulting in surplus production (in agriculture, stock-raising, crafts and industries), the intense exchange and

trade relations between these sectors, the use of money, the refinement of arts and skills evolved as a response to man's desire for material comfort. In the next course of development, however, the rise and growth of the economy is intimately related to the assertive power of the state. In order to underpin their legitimacy the rulers embark upon the construction of public works and distribute attractions and public utilities for the people. In a sort of mercantilist interplay the state and the commercial classes activate the professional skills of the craftsmen and of the other productive sectors.

With greater emphasis and clarity than any author before him, our medieval scholar discourses on the value of labour, on the productivity-effect of the division of labour, on the stimulus of profit, the profit motive, the accumulation process and on the impetus given by inflation on economic growth⁴. The importance of labour and the profit motive merit special mentioning. Chapter V, section 1 of the *Muqaddimah* is replete with statements such as: "profit is the value realized from human labour" or "capital is the value realized from labour". A number of Marxist writers, like Batsieva, were tempted to profile our author as an early socialist and labour-value theorist. Ibn Khaldun would be the first to take umbrage at such a label. For an author who denounces the luxury, the parasitical idleness and the fiscal hunger of the ruling leisure class, the emphasis on labour as the real source of value is not only an illustration of his economic realism but also of his moral disapproval of feudal parasitism.

The division of labour, the specialisation of the craftsmen and traders in a variety of skills is explained by the profit motive. The differential upward trend of prices works as a pulling force for the occupational transfer of labour over the sectors: from basic necessities towards the sector of luxury goods. When the mentality of *hadara* develops, the demand for comfort and luxury goods grows proportionally faster than demand for basic needs. This makes that the price of luxury goods, and the profit to earn, attracts relatively more people in that activity. The differential trend in price and profit induces labour to move from the primary goods sector to industry and trade, and finally to the sector of the superfluous. In order to satisfy the demand for riches, the state is tempted to intervene with price controls. These obstructions to the law of demand and supply, force the producers and merchants to work for lower profits. When the state, moreover, raises the tax rate above the tolerable limit and above the religious norm, the growth cycle has passed its peak and starts to spiral down.

The analysis of the demographic cycle forms another important subsystem in his cyclical theory of stages. Here follows the scenario in a nutshell. When a new tribe of bedouins and semi-nomads take over a visibly decadent regime of the cities, their invasion and high number of children initially gives a boost to population growth. The increase in population permits more division of labour and specialisation, and thus more productivity and prosperity. For a while this cumulative process feeds itself. As the process of more population with higher productivity and prosperity goes on, the richer regions see their cities grow bigger and more prosperous, while other cities and the rural areas lag behind. And here again our author shows his interpretative power: when the demographic cycle reaches

maturity, internal bottlenecks enter the scene who turn the cycle into a vicious process of dysfunctional growth. First the prosperous cities grow too large and get overcrowded. The earlier positive effects of urban life (tamaddun) like division of labour and specialisation enter into the zone of diminishing returns. The mass of the urban poor becomes restless and a growing number resort to criminality as a way of living. And second, the rural exodus or the flight of population from the countryside brings about a decrease in agricultural production. The results are famine and disease, ending up in a decrease of the population.

VI. CONCLUSION

Islam was the latest revealed religion of Antiquity. Ibn Khaldun lived seven centuries after its revelation. In the transition from Late Antiquity to the emergence of the Latin West in the twelfth century, Islam was at its zenith and played an eminent role as a marker of Mediterranean culture and history. Classical Islam made an important contribution to economic thought (Baeck, 1991). During that long span of time, the lands of Islam were witness of a series of tribes with a fervent esprit de corps taking over the lead in order to found a new regime and a reborn society. In the eastern lands the Umayyads took over the caliphate from the early followers of the prophet, with in their wake the Abbassids, the Seldjuqs, the Mongols. In Andalusia and in the Maghreb, the Almoravids were conquered by the Almohads. Our author entered his manhood when the Almohad empire had given way to a series of rival princedoms. Educated by the best scholars of his time, his career evolved as a rare combination of roles and functions: political activist, grand judge and scholar.

Thoroughly familiar but unsatisfied with the best of what the science of law, kalam and falsafa of his time could offer, he created a new framework of thought to make his contemporaries conscious of the patterns and the overall determinants that govern the rise, growth and decline of societies. In the preface to his *Kital al-ibar* he proudly declared "this topic is something new, extraordinary, and highly useful for statesmen". With a rare show of chivalry he admitted that Aristotle in his *Politics* (book I, chapters 8-11) had initiated the eternal theme of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. But he hastened to dismiss Aristotle's few pages on the topic as a set of general ideas without all the arguments it deserves. His own new discipline, the *ilm al-umran* had the avowed ambition to offer "an exhaustive, very clear and fully substantial interpretation" of the politics, sociology and economics of development. For our contemporaries who sense the impossibility of extrapolating our western development model to the other five billion people on earth, his message questions the thesis of "sustainable" development.

His *Summa* is now universally recognized as a benchmark in the history of socio-political and economic thought. In my view Ibn Khaldun is the greatest social scientist of classical Islam. In the Latin West, the Italian humanists of the fourteenth century, like Leonardo Bruni, Matteo Palmeri, Leon Battista Alberti, Giannozzo Manetti and Lorenzo Valla, had also reacted to the normative treatment of social and economic affairs by canon law and speculative theology, with a more secular or realistic version. And also Nicolas Oresme's *Treatise on Money* is sometimes quoted as a notable example of matter-of-fact writing on economics. Oresme's essay, however, like al-Maqrizi's is a monograph on one topic namely money. They both lack, like also the works of the Italian humanists, the comprehensiveness, the analytical muscle and the systematic interplay of the political, social and economic factors. In Ibn Khaldun's time, political science, sociology and economics were not yet conceived to form an analytically isolable sphere of thought. In this respect this medieval scholar was thoroughly Mediterranean, this is pre-modern. With him, however, the economic concepts and

determinants are more forcefully developed than with any other medieval author. Today we would call Ibn Khaldun's oeuvre a perfect example of the interdisciplinary approach. In this genre the Muquaddimah is a masterpiece.

Notes:

1. When the Arab scholar declares that he wrote his book with God's help and without the instruction of Aristotle, he is shielding himself off from the criticism of the orthodox establishment who might find his analysis too far away from kalam. The attack on a theory without facts and arguments is also unfair, since Aristotle's research team garnered the impressive number of 157 constitutions which he methodically classified and systematized. Here like in some other passages Ibn Khaldun's immense pride and his pretence had won over the gentleman.

2. In the Latin West, this *specula principum*, also called *Fürstenspiegel* literature, flourished since the twelfth century and formed the seeds for the theory of "Staatsraison" or reason of state. Machiavelli was largely inspired by this Persian of tradition absorbed by the West (Senellart, 1989).

3. Here again Ibn Khaldun is more influenced than he cared to admit by Aristotle's philosophy of development, this is by the Aristotelian tension that regulates the unfolding of the potential (*dunamis*) to maturation in actual reality (*energeia*).

4. In the last decades a number of PhD-theses were written on his economic thought. For a sample of commenting studies, see: Belal (1968), Boulakia (1971), Benassine (1982), Busau (1990).

Bibliography

- 1- Abdesselem, A. (1983), *Ibn Khaldun et ses lecteurs*, Paris.
- 2- al-Azmeh, A. (1981), *Ibn Khaldun in Modern Scholarship*, London.
- 3- al-Wardi, A. (1962), *Mantiq Ibn Khaldun*, Cairo.
- 4- Baeck, L. (1991), "The economic Thought of Classical Islam" in *Perspectives on the History of Economic Thought*, Edgar Elgar, Vol. V, p. 3-22.
- 5- Baeck, L. (1994), *The Mediterranean Tradition in Economic Thought*, London.
- 6- Batsieva, S. (1974), "Les idées économiques d'Ibn Khaldun" in *Orientalia Hispanica*, p. 96-109.
- 7- Belal, A. (1968), "Sur la pensée économique d'Ibn Khaldun" in *Bulletin économique et social du Maroc*, vol. 30, p. 3-11.
- 8- Benassine, M. (1982), "La pensée économique de Abderrahmane Ibn Khaldoun" in *Revue Algérienne des Sciences Juridiques, Economiques et Politiques*, vol. 19, n° 1, p. 7-22.
- 9- Himmich, bin Salem, H. (1987), *Penser la dépression: partant d'Ibn Khaldoun*, Rabat.
- 10- Boulaika, J. (1971), "A Fourteenth Century Economist" in *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 29, p. 1105-18.
- 11- Busau, A. (1990), "Economic Views of Ibn Khaldun" in *Journal of Objective Studies*, vol. 3, p. 48-66.
- 12- Dawood, N. (1967), *Ibn Khaldun: the Muqaddimah*, London (an abridged version ; edited in paperback 1978).
- 13- de Slane, M. (1863). *Les Prolégomènes d'Ibn Khaldoun*, 3 vols., Paris (new edition in 1939, with an introduction by G. Bouthoul).
- 14- Gabrieli, F. (1966), "Il concetto della asabiyya nel pensiero storico di Ibn Khaldun" in *L'Islam nella Storia*, Bari, pp. 211-252.
- 15- Irabi, A. (1982), "Zum Stand der gegenwertigen arabischen Soziologie" in *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, vol. 11, p. 167-182.
- 16- Kepel, G. & Richard, Y. (1990), *Intellectuels et Militants de l'Islam Contemporain*, Paris.
- 17- Lacoste, Y. (1966), *Ibn Khaldoun, naissance de l'histoire*, Paris.
- 18- Lambton, A. (1981), *State and Government in medieval Islam*, Oxford.
- 19- Mahdi, M. (1957), *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History*, London.
- 20- Mazarino, S. (1959) *La fine del mondo antico*, Rome.
- 21- Monteil, V. (1967), *Ibn Khaldun: Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle*, Beirut, 1967; French translation of the *Muqaddimah*, new edition, Paris 1978.
- 22- Nashaat, M. (1944), *The Economic Ideas in the Prolegomena of Ibn Khaldun*, Cairo.
- 23- Nassar, N. (1967), *La pensée réaliste d'Ibn Khaldun*, Paris.
- 24- Oumlil, A. (1979), *L'Histoire et son discours: essais sur la méthodologie d'Ibn Khaldun*, Tanger.
- 25- Polybius, (1923) *The Histories*, translated by W. Platon, Loeb Classical Library, London.
- 26- Rabi, M. (1957), *The Political Theory of Ibn Khaldun*, Leiden.

- 27- Rosenthal, E. (1962), *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, Cambridge.
- 28- Rosenthal, F. (1958), *Ibn Khaldun: the Muqaddimah*, 3 vols., Princeton.
- 29- Sabagh, G. & Ghazalla, I. (1986), "Arab Sociology Today: a view from within" in *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 12, p. 373-399.
- 30- Senellart, M. (1989), *Machiavellisme et raison d'Etat*, Paris.
- 31- Sharif, M. (1955), "Ibn Khaldun: the Pioneer Economist" in *Islamic Literature*, Vol. 6, n 5, pp.33-40.
- 32- Sherwani, H. "Ibn Khaldun and his Politico-Economic Thought" in *Islamic Culture*, vol. 44, n° 2, p. 71-80.
- 33- Sohbi, M. (1932), *Les idées économique d'Ibn Khaldoun*, Leiden.
- 34- Spengler, J. (1964), "Economic Thought of Islam: Ibn Khaldun" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. vol. VI, p. 268-306.
- 35- Taleghani, Ayatullah, S. (1982), *Society and Economics in Islam*, Berkeley.
- 36- Walbank, F. (1957) *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, Oxford.

Endnotes

1 When the Arab scholar declares that he wrote his book with God's help and without the instruction of Aristotle, he is shielding himself off from the criticism of the orthodox establishment who might find his analysis too far away from kalam. The attack on a theory without facts and arguments is also unfair, since Aristotle's research team garnered the impressive number of 157 constitutions which he methodically classified and systematized. Here like in some other passages Ibn Khaldun's immense pride and his pretence had won over the gentleman.

2 In the Latin West, this *specula principum*, also called *Fürstenspiegel* literature, flourished since the twelfth century and formed the seeds for the theory of "Staatsraison" or reason of state. Machiavelli was largely inspired by this Persian of tradition absorbed by the West (Senellart, 1989).

3 Here again Ibn Khaldun is more influenced than he cared to admit by Aristotle's philosophy of development, this is by the Aristotelian tension that regulates the unfolding of the potential (*dunamis*) to maturation in actual reality (*energeia*).

4 In the last decades a number of PhD-theses were written on his economic thought. For a sample of commenting studies, see : Belal (1968), Boulakia (1971), Benassine (1982), Busau (1990).

**All rights reserved for Al-Hassanain (p) Network, ImamHussain (p)
Foundation**

Alhassanain (p) Network for Islamic Heritage and Thought

www.alhassanain.org/english