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Current Muslim Reform Projects and Their Destiny: **A Critical Analysis from Ibn Khaldun's Perpective**

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Muslim revival has been studied mainly as a modern phenomenon and as a reaction to Western imperialism and colonialism, and the modernization of the Muslim world. Muslim revival, however, is a much older phenomenon that dates back to the first century of Islam, which saw the first extremist groups to emerge in the Muslim world. An important theoretical resource for the study of Muslim revival is the work of 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun. While Ibn Khaldun is well-known in both the Muslim world and the West, he has been seen more of a precursor of the various modern social sciences and as source of historical data and information, rather than as a resource for the development of theoretical perspectives. This paper introduces Ibn Khaldun's theory of state formation as a theory of Muslim revival founded on the concept of *taghyir al-munkar* and makes some remarks concerning the relevance of this theory to the study of contemporary Muslim revival.

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Introduction

Walī al-Dīn ʻAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Khaldūn al-Tunisī al-Ḥaḍramī (732-808 A.H./1332-1 406 A.D.) was born in Tunis on 1 Ramaḍān (according to the Muslim calendar). His family originated in the Ḥaḍramaut, Yemen and had settled in Seville, Andalusia in the early days of the Arab conquest of Spain. With the Reconquista, his ancestors left Spain, settling in Tunis in the 7th/13th century. Ibn Khaldūn was educated in the traditional sciences.[1]

Ibn Khaldūn was a much sought after official and held posts in several of the courts of the Maghrib (North Africa) and Andalusia. Ibn Khaldūn lived during the period of the political fragmentation and cultural decline of the Arab Muslim world. Eventually, however, he left political office and concentrated on the writing of the *Muqaddimah,* a prolegomena to the scientific study of history. Completed in 1378, the *Muqaddimah* introduces what Ibn Khaldūn claimed to be a novel science which he named *ʻilm al-ʻumrān al-basharī* (science of human social organization) or *ʻilm al-ijtimāʻ al-insānī* (science of human society).[2]

The *Muqaddimah* was conceived of by Ibn Khaldūn as a work that established the principles that had to be mastered in order that the proper study of history could be conducted. Here, Ibn Khaldūn is not referring to historical methods or to historiography, but rather to a science which involves "subtle explanation of the causes and origins of existing things, and deep knowledge of the how and why of events" (Ibn Khaldūn, 1378/1981: 4 [1967: Vol. I,6]). The problem with existing historical works was that they were beset by errors and unfounded assumptions, as well as a blind trust in tradition. The historians that were tradition bound relied heavily on the works of the earlier more established historians and ignored changes that had taken place in the societies. Theydid not inquire into the origins of things and were not critical in ther approach, failing to distinguish between truth and the imaginary, merely reporting what was handed down to them (Ibn Khaldūn, 1378/1981: 4-5 [1967: Vol. I,7, 9]).

The aim of the *Muqaddimah*, on the other hand, was to comprehend these changes via a critical approach that distinguished the possible and the probable from the imaginary, particularly with regard to the rise and fall of states. For this, he developed a theory that took into ac-

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1 Following ibn Khaldūn, there are two general categories of knowledge. The first category is that of the traditional sciences (*al-ʻulūm al-naqliyyah*). These refer to revealed knowledge rather than knowledge which is generated by man's intellect. They include Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), Islamic law (*al-ʻulūm al-sharʻiyyah*) which are derived from the Qur'an and the *sunnah*, jurisprudence and its principles (*fiqh*, *ʻusūl al-fiqh*), the science of Prophetic tradition (*ʻilm al-ḥadith*), and theology (*ʻilm al-kalām*). These sciences are specific to Islam and its adherents. The second category is that of the rational sciences (*al-ʻulūm al-ʻaqliyyah*), that is, the sciences which arise from the man's capacity for reason, sense perception, and observation. Among these sciewnces are the science of logic (*ʻilm al-mantiq*), physics (*al-ʻilm al-tabiʻi*), metaphysics (*al-ʻilm al-iāhiyyah*), and the sciences concerned with measurement (*maqādir*), that is, geometry (*ʻilm al-handasah*), arithmetic (*ʻilm al-artamāṭiqi*), music (*ʻilm al-māsiqi*), and astronomy (*ʻilm al-hay'ati*) (Ibn Khaldūn, 1378/1981: 435-437; 477-478).

2 Apart from the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldūn's chief works are the *Kitāb al-ʻIbar wa Diwān al-Mubtadā' wa al-Khabar fi Ayyām al-ʻArab wa al-ʻAjam wa al-Barbar wa man □□sarahum min Dhawi al-Sultān al-Akbar* (*Book of Examples and the Collection of Origins of the History of the Arabs and Berbers*); *Muqaddimah* (*Prolegomena*); *Lubāb al-Muḥaṣṣal fi uṣūl al-din* (*The Resumū of the Compendium in the Fundamentals of Religion*), being his summary of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *Compendium of the Sciences of the Ancients and Moderns*; and ibn Khaldūn's autobiography, *Al-Taʻrif bi Ibn Khaldūn wa Riḥlatuhu Gharban wa Sharqan* (*Biography of Ibn Khaldūn and His Travels East and West*) (1979).

count phenomena such as the types of social organization, solidarity, and the types of authority. The discussion in the *Muqaddimah* falls under the following headings (Ibn Khaldūn, 1378/1981: 41 [1967: Vol. I, 85]):

(i) social organization (*'umrān*) in general and its divisions
(ii) bedouin soceity (*al-'umrān al-badawi*)
(iii) the state (*al-dawlah*), royal (*mulk*) and caliphate (*khilāfah*) authority
(iv) sedentary society (*al-'umrān al-haḍari*)
(v) the crafts, ways of making a living (*al-ma'āsh*)
(vi) the sciences (*al-'ulūm*) and their acquisition

The *Muqaddimah* was the first of a total of three books that constitute the *Kitāb al-'Ibar*, a history of the Arabs and of Islam, as well as others peoples such as the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and Persians (Ibn Khaldūn, 1378/1981: 6 [1967: Vol. I,11-12]). So important was the *Muqaddimah* in terms of its originality, that it came to be regarded as an independent work and is often read as such.

Theorising the Rise and Decline of States

In the *Muqaddimah* Ibn Khaldūn was concerned with several issues that relate to the study of history. These include methodological as well as epistemological issues. In substantive terms, however, his central concern was the explanation of the rise and decline of states, particularly of the Maghribi and eastern Arab states (al-Mashriq). The core phenomena and related concepts relevant to this theorising are main types of social organization, that is, nomadic or bedouin (*badawi*) and sedentary (*haḍari*) societies. He also elaborated on the concept of authority, particularly caliphate (*khilāfah*) and royal (*mulk*) authority and the differential effects of these on solidarity (*'aṣabiyyah*). This in turn explained differences in the power of the ruling dynasty in its early as compared to its final days. He saw bedouins as prior to sedentary people in the sense that the desert was the reservoir of sedentary society and city life. In other words, sedentary society is the goal of the bedouin life (Ibn Khaldūn, 1378/1981: 371 [1967: Vol. II,291]). Fundamental to his theory is the concept of *'aṣabiyyah* or tribal-based solidarity. Only a society with a strong *'aṣabiyyah* could establish domination over one with a weak *'asabiyyah* (Ibn Khaldūn, 1378/1981: 139 [1967: Vol. I, 284]).

Here, *'aṣabiyyah* refers to the feeling of solidarity among the members of a group that is based on their belief in a common descent. The superior the *'asabiyya*, that is to say, the stronger the feeling of solidarity, among the Bedouin, the more capable they were of defeating sedentary people in the cities and its environs, and establishing their own dynasties. The establishment of a new dynasty by nomadic tribesmen implies that it is these tribesmen that now

constitute the new ruling class, as it were. It is this very assumption of ruling class status in an urban setting that creates the conditions for the decline of *'aṣabiyyah*. As Ibn Khaldūn noted, the second generation of tribesmen undergo a change "from the desert attitude to sedentary culture, from privation to luxury, from a state in which everybody shared in the glory to one in which one man claims all the glory for himself while the others are too lazy to strive for (glory), and from proud superiority to humble subservience. Thus, the vigour of group feeling is broken to some extent." By the third generation *'aṣabiyya* disappears completely (Ibn Khaldūn, 1378/1981: 171 [1967: Vol. I, 344-345]). The decline or disappearance of *'aṣabiyyah* or weakening solidarity among the tribesmen translates into diminishing military strength and a compromised ability to rule. The dynasty now is vulnerable to attack by fresh supplies of pre-urban bedouins with their *'aṣabiyyah* intact, who eventually replace the weaker sedentarised ones. And so the cycle repeats itself.

A Theory of Muslim Revival

Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddimah* is well-known as a work that explains the rise and decline of the state. What is rarely discussed, however, is the fact that this theory is, at one and the same time, a theory of religious revival. Perhaps the first to recognise this was the Spanish philosopher, Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955). In an essay devoted to Ibn Khaldūn, Ortega suggests that Ibn Khaldūn's theory on the rise and decline of states can be applied to the rise of the Wahhabi movement in Arabia. The development of this movement took place according to the historical laws discovered by Ibn Khaldūn. Ibn Saud had the support of his tribe and captured the city of Najd. He employed an overarching religious ideology, Wahhabism. Ortega regarded Wahhabism as a form of puritanism and note dits extremism. He was wrong, however, in equating the puritanism of the Wahhabis with Islam itself. Nevertheless, he was right in recognising the relevance of Ibn Khaldūn's theory for the explanation of the rise of the Saudi state and the role of the Wahhabi revival movement in that (Ortega y Gasset, 1934/1976 : 111-112).

Ibn Khaldūn noted the role of religious leaders in the unification of the bedouin.

> When there is a prophet or saint among them, who calls upon them to fulfill the commands of God and rids them of blameworthy qualities and causes them to adopt praiseworthy ones, and who has them concentrate all their strength in order to make the truth prevail, they become fully united (as a social organization) and obtain superiority and royal authority (Ibn Khaldūn, 1378/1981: 151 [1967: Vol. I, 35-306]).

Therefore, the solidarity implied by the concept of *'aṣabiyyah* is not wholly dependant on kinship ties. Religion can also aid in forging such solidarity, the prime example of that being the rise of Islam itself.

The conflict between the pre-urban bedouin and the sedentarised urban tribes is not just one over the city and the luxuries and prestige that that brings. The bedouin are driven by a will to reform. The logic is one of periodical waves of revolutionary movements bent on abolishing what is objectionable *(taghyīr al-munkar)* (Ibn Khaldūn, 1378/1981: 159 [1967: Vol. I,

323]). In other words, it was the conquest of the dynasty by pre-urban bedouins that effectively, albeit temporarily, abolished what is objectionable, that is, the excesses of urban life. In Ibn Khaldūn's world there was the cyclical change that rescued society from these excesses.

The reform is cyclical. A tribe conquers a dynasty, founds a new one and rules until it is overthrown by a reform-minded leader who has the support of tribes eager to cash in on the city. The luxury of city life is the chief cause of the rise of impiety.[3]

In Ibn Khaldūn's world, ordinary folk were caught between the oppressive policies and conduct of a royal authority on one hand and the prospects of conquest by bloodthirsty tribesmen led by a religious leader bent on destruction of the existing order.

Ibn Khaldūn resigned himself to the eternal repetition of the cycle. He did not foresee developments that would lead to the elimination of the cycle. This happened with the Ottomans, the Qajar dynasty in Iran, and the state in the Yemen. The cycle ceased to be in operation when the basis of state power was no longer tribal.

Gellner's application of Ibn Khaldūn's theory by way of a merger with David Hume's oscillation theory of religion is well-known. What is particularly interesting about Gellner's application of Ibn Khaldūn's model to North African history is not the above account in terms of circles of tribes, which does not add much to the original model, but Gellner's attempt to merge Ibn Khaldūn's sociology with David Hume's oscillation theory of religion. Hume rejected the unilineal theory of the development of religion from polytheism to monotheism in favour of an oscillation theory according to which there is a change from polytheism to monotheism and back again to polytheism. There is a flux and reflux in the human mind of polytheism and monotheism (Hume, 1976, cited in Gellner, 1981: 9). The swing from polytheism to monotheism is triggered by a competitive sycophancy. Devotees compete with each other in their adulation of one of the deities of a pantheon till that deity assumes the status of the one and only God. An example that Hume gives is the elevation of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to Jehovah and the creator of the world. Such a God, however, is then seen to be too distant and inaccessible. Demi-gods and middle beings are needed for mediation. But the pendulum swings back again to monotheism as "these idolatrous religions fall every day into grosser and more vulgar conceptions..." (Hume, 1976, cited in Gellner, 1981: 10).

As Gellner notes, Hume's theory is too psychologistic (Gellner, 1981: 16). It is devoid of references to social factors. Ibn Khaldūn's model provides the social basis for Hume's pendulum swing theory of religion in that it explains the how the urban setting provides for a scripturalist unitarian puritanism while the nomadic setting provides for a saint-mediated, hierarchical system (Gellner, 1981: 41-42). The oscillation now has a social basis.

While Gellner's work is probably the only serious attempt to look at Ibn Khaldūn's theory as a theory of Muslim reform, there are problems with it. Gellner noted that Hume's model was excessively psychological (Gellner, 1981: 16). Gellner's merger of Hume and Ibn Khaldūn do-

[3] Ibid., pp. 347-351.

es provide the social basis for a theory deemed too psychologistic. What it does not do, however, is to introduce Ibn Khaldūn's concept of religious change or reform (*taghyir al-munkar*) and elaborate on the social basis of such change. In fact, it is not merely that this religious change has a social basis. The relevance of the social goes beyond that. The process of religious change is part of a larger societal change that involves war and conflict, a change in the state elite and regime, and the ascendancy of a new ruling tribe.

Consider, Ibn Khaldūn's own examples, the period of the rise and decline of three dynasties, that is, the Almoravids (al-Muwāḥḥidūn) (A.D.1053-1147), Almohads (al-Murābiṭūn) (A.D.1147-1275) and Marinids (A.D.1213-1524).

Each of these dynasties were founded with the support of Berber tribes, the Ṣanhājah for the Almoravids, the Maṣmūdah for the Almohads, and the Zanātah for the Marinids, and declined generally according to the model suggested by Ibn Khaldūn.

The Almoravids established their state utilizing the power of the powerful Ṣanhājah Berber tribes, enlarged and established cities, and then enlisted the Ṣanhājahs help to other possibly dissident tribes in the surrounding areas at bay. But the Almoravids were eventually overcome by the Almohads, which started as a religious reform movement under Ibn Tūmārt with the support of the Maṣmūdah Berber tribes. The Almohads themselves finally gave way to the Marinids who rode on the military support of the Zanātah Berber tribes (Montagne, 1931: 14-15).

A work that is related to our theme is Spickard (2001), although it is more concerned with elaborating an alternative sociology of religion rather than a theory of reform.

Conclusion: The Relevance of the Khaldūnian Model Today

While there is no such cyclical logic today, there are general lessons from Ibn Khaldūn's theory of Muslim revival. They can be stated as follows:

1. Religious revival takes place within the context of regime change, the coming of a new ruling class and, therefore, a realignment of loyalties.
2. Religious revival functions as an overarching *'aṣabiyyah* that transcends tribalism, class and ethnicity and yet is immanent in them. For example, an Islamic *'aṣabiyyah* transcends all tribes, but is at the same time dependent on the *'aṣabiyyah* of the strongest tribe which appealed to religion. The same logic of interacting *'aṣabiyyah*s can be applied to non-tribal forms of solidarity and their relationship to religion.
3. The source of religious change of revival originates from societal groups characterised by simpler modes of making a living and less luxurious lifestyles.
4. Religious revival is the outcome of conflict between a lesser institutionalised religion-based solidarity (*'aṣabiyyah*) and an urban-based religiosity regulated by institutions (see also Spickard, 2001: 109).
5. Religious zeal and religion-based solidarity are positively correlated.

6. The religious experience can be understood beyond its individual and psychological manifestations as a sociological phenomenon to the extent that is a function of a type of *'aṣabiyyah*. As noted by Spickard, the Khaldūnian approach is not grounded in individuals (Spickard, 2001: 108).

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