

## Book Review

### Civilization and Adab as Foundations of Society in Ibn Khaldun's Al-Muqaddimah

Abdul Kader Zilani<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Ibn Khaldun was born in Tunis on 27 May 1332 of an Arab Hadrami family who had emigrated twice, firstly to Spain and then after the fall of Cordova (933 AD), they moved for a second time, this time settling at last in Seijlmesa (currently Sakiliya near BejoaiCem, Helvet). At the latter place, he acquired broad theological and philosophical training. Above all, he chanced to be launched as a secretary of the Sultan of Tunis upon the world at large when in his twentieth year. He was a man of many paths and therefore knew multilevel clad as he could already understand human nature in his infant years against other political institutions. So he kept on being a prolific writer and intellectual with treatises of amazing depth both in sociologies but also economic, historical or political sciences plus philosophy etc. He laid the systematic foundation for understanding how dynasties originate why states dwindle and finally, they make mistakes i.e. Asabiyyah: derived from blood relation, common interests, spatial closure is a motivating factor for rise up/down to any dynasty or state. A large part of the concept also showed work as the first known analytical piece written on analyzing kingdoms—why the Roman Empire fell, how Spain became a petty kingdom after the Romans left etc. This article reveals that the concept of civilization is deeply entangled with Adab in Khaldun's Al-Muqaddimah and explores how civilization rises and falls by the concept of Asabiyyah.

It is amazing to see the intellectual depth of an Arab philosopher in Ibn Khaldun (Al-Muqaddimah-14th century)—a milestone in sociology. As uniquely illustrated within his profound critique of societies and histories, Khaldun manages to reconcile the term civilization by capturing all shades of Adab which provides a more accurate depiction of human evolution. Historians, sociologists, researchers, and political scientists from all over the global Muslim community continue to pore over Khaldun's writings and views. He was educated in terms of the Qur'an from his early years and learned Arabic grammar and jurisprudence up to some extent by memorizing most Hadiths interspersed with commentary and studying poetry by heart. In the chancellery of the Tunisian king Ibn Tafrakin, he was appointed as seal-bearer (katib al-alamah) when he was twenty years old. Producing poetic sentiments that matched the content of the letters and showcased beautiful handwriting was part of his responsibility to convey thankfulness to God and His Messenger.

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<sup>1</sup> Researcher, Email: [zilani23nov@gmail.com](mailto:zilani23nov@gmail.com)

Ibn Khaldun found his involvement in politics and his services to various tribal leaders and tribunals to be unsatisfactory. Consequently, in 1375, he transitioned to a life centred on scholarship and writing. He retreated to the Fort of Ibn Salamah, under the protection of the Awlad Arif tribe near the present town of Frenda in Tiaret, Algeria. During this period, he finalized the initial version of his masterwork, the *Muqaddimah*. Khaldun's worldly and political concerns to compose his masterpiece, the *Muqaddimah*, at the remote tribal fortress of the Banu Salama—a kind of intellectual hermitage. However, more frequently, solitude was imposed upon him by factors like plague, shipwrecks, or the prevailing political uncertainty of his era. (Razali, 2017, p. 3)

Nevertheless, the originality of Khaldun's intellectual composition is not limited to variations in form and style; he also succeeded in developing innovative methods for expressing, organizing, and presenting knowledge. He meticulously examined and explored the domain of human association as a result of his groundbreaking contributions to historiography, concepts, and methodology in scholarly writing. This entailed the adoption of innovative approaches to discussions about functions, subjects, methodologies, and applications, which distinguished his work from existing logic, philosophies, politics, and rhetoric.

Ibn Khaldun sought to rejuvenate ancient writing techniques, prioritizing clarity and concentration on significance. Modern research on Khaldunian thought has established him as one of the most distinguished scholars in Arabic literature and a Muslim revivalist (*mujaddid*) of writing style, known by the name Abdul Wafi. Khaldun was a secretary to Abu Salim ben Abul Hassan, and while in that role, he displayed literary skills that are now considered classics: brevity, precision, accuracy, robust reasoning, coherence, and careful word choice. (Machouche & Bensaid, 2022, p. 40). Moreover, he actively avoided the constraints of rhythmic assonance to enhance the effectiveness of his written communication.

After moving to Egypt and suffering the terrible death of family members, Khaldun did not waver in his dedication to scholarship. His writing career was not impeded by his judicial obligations, and he continued to conduct extensive investigations on universal history. He also wrote his autobiography, which Fromherz describes as “the most detailed autobiography in medieval Muslim literature”. Khaldun's impressive learning and writing career deserves attention and analysis. Given his remarkable scholarly contribution, his experience may represent an interesting and rich case of scholarly writing. In this paper, in light of the particular nature of *Adab* within Islamic civilization and world view as well as Khaldun's unique perception regarding societal phenomena such discussions are made thereafter. We analyze the evolution of civilizations and their need for graceful etiquette, noble conduct, and virtuous qualities based on a critical discourse in Khaldun.

### **The Importance of *Asabiyyah* in the rise and fall of Civilizations**

Ibn Khaldun states about the importance of civilization: “The nature of civilization. Bedouin and settled life, the achievement of superiority, gainful occupations, ways of making a living, sciences, crafts, and all the other things that affect (civilization).

The causes and reasons thereof” (Khaldun, 2012, p. 1). The analysis of Khaldun was derived from the observation of the Bedouin communities in the North African desert. In many ways, these Nomads were similar to the original inhabitants of the Arabic Empire, who continued an ancient way of life. As he observed the Bedouins struggle to stay alive in the desert, Khaldun came to a profound realization: he understood the critical importance of cooperation for human existence. It was difficult for people to protect themselves from predators and get enough food when they were on their own, he noticed. He believed that the innate desire for mutual assistance and support was a critical factor in the development of tribal societies. Subsequently, these tribal structures established the foundation for the growth of more complex and urbanized civilizations.

According to Khaldun, “mankind consists of various communities, whose existence is vested in the will of God. The individual can only exist in the community. Each community is like a living organism, with own limbs, which are directed by a single soul” (Khaldun, 1980, p 322). The idea of Assabiyah was fundamental to the development of civilizations. It refers to the ties that bind a social group’s members together and can be loosely translated as a sense of group emotion or social solidarity. Khaldun emphasizes the group or society (Ismail et al, 2018, p. 290). Because of our inherent care for our family, Khaldun explained, Assabiyah usually shows up among blood relatives. When they encounter peril or injustice, this instinct prompts them to intervene. Notably, this tendency to protect can apply not only to blood relatives but also to non-relatives with whom we have strong bonds, particularly those who provide us with mutual support for our survival. Because of this, Assabiyah or social solidarity can be found not only inside families but also within tribes, societies, or even vast empires.

Ibn Khaldun posits that the idea of Asabiyah was the key to understanding why some tribes prospered and developed complex societies while others failed or disappeared altogether. According to him, strong social ties made a tribe better able to deal with outside aggression, claim territory from other tribes, and resolve internal disputes. On the flip side, these activities would be more difficult for tribes with weak Assabiyah to do. Khaldun described how the most cohesive tribes would eventually become the dominant ones by absorbing the less cohesive ones. Due to the absence of robust social connections, these weaker tribes were vulnerable to attacks or internal collapse. In certain cases, this evolutionary process resulted in the establishment of major civilizations and empires, as well as the emergence of larger, more complex societies over time.

Bruce B. Lawrence states, “Ibn Khaldun strove to be different, to be a man of his times and more: to grasp a point of balance or measurement (miyar) between the norms of belief, religion, and law (dawah) and the demands of state, science, and practical reason (dawlah)” (Khaldun, 2015, p. 20). One notable aspect of Khaldun’s perspective was his assertion that the evolutionary process was significantly more efficacious when a tribe adopted a unified religious ideology. This is because the group’s Assabiyah was greatly amplified by their common religion, which helped them unite and become an extremely powerful entity. He highlighted the rise of the Islamic empire as an illustrative case in point. This

civilization had its roots in the nomadic tribes of the Arabian desert, whose rapid conquest of extensive regions was motivated by their genuine mission to disseminate the religious teachings of Prophet Muhammad. (Azmah, 1990, p. 6)

While the most successful tribes and societies attained power due to their strong Assabiyah, Khaldun observed that this very element was instrumental in understanding their eventual decline. In his view, the trajectory of civilizations mirrored the life stages of an individual, encompassing birth, maturity, and demise.

The initial stage involved the birth of tribal societies characterized by courage and resilience to hardship. These societies exhibited the strongest Assabiyah because their survival relied entirely on collective solidarity. As these tribal societies ascended, they matured and aspired to a settled lifestyle, giving rise to more intricate urban societies and civilizations. Although these civilizations tended to be wealthier than their tribal predecessors, over time, they became lethargic and complacent, forgetting the qualities that initially elevated them.

These communities, as described by Khaldun, supposedly came to rely on foreigners for protection when they lost the ability to defend themselves. Their rulers had to impose more taxes to keep up with their citizen's ever-increasing desire for material goods and luxury, which put a strain on their limited resources. An ever-increasing tax load, according to Khaldun, sows the seeds of discontent inside a society, which in turn weakens Assabiyah and causes internal strife. The result was societal collapse into anarchy and ruin, which left the place open to conquest by a stronger, more united tribe.

### **Adab Elements in Ibn Khaldun's Thoughts**

The notion of civilization is thoroughly examined in *Al-Muqaddimah* by Khaldun. In particular, he explores the concept of Adab, which encompasses intellectual sophistication, cultural decorum, and refined manners that are essential to the establishment and continuity of a civilization. According to Khaldun, Adab is crucial to the development of civilization and has a role in the success or failure of cultures. From his point of view, Adab is an important barometer of cultural and intellectual development that determines whether or not a civilization will endure. (Sulaiman & Hussain, 2022, p. 7)

Furthermore, Khaldun connects his concept of Adab with the notion of Asabiyyah which is social cohesion which binds people together. The theory is that Adab can be understood as a key component of Asabiyyah, which has to do much with the development and endurance of any Civilization. Thus the concept of adab as described by Khaldun forms a major part of his philosophy framework. He stresses the need for Adab in civilization's growth and preservation, enshrining it as instrumental to what he sees as a circular pattern of social ascent and decay. This close-knit association between Adab and Asabiyyah underpins their combined contribution to the civilization of human intellectuality.

Ibn Khaldun proposed a symbiotic relationship between Adab and Asabiyyah. Adab was the bind that Asabiyyah held to feed and perpetuate itself in early civilization. The way to avert the inevitable decline of Asabiyya was through promoting Adab, essentially practices that involve education, arts and ethical

behaviour. In short, Asabiyyah gave birth to a civilization whereas Adab nurtured it and kept it growing. It was the balance of this interaction between these two elements that helped to create a healthier, wealthier society. This importance of Adab and Asabiyyah which Khaldun stressed has been some profound observations in understanding how the process that leads to the rise or fall of a civilization unfolds.

### Conclusion

Khaldun explored what made civilization and Adab, in the Al-Muqaddimah, could give us a fresh look at tides pivotal enough for societies that took major turns in human categorization. According to Khaldun, civilizations devolve in a cycle from their first phase of Asabiyyah until they collapse. According to him, Asabiyyah (bond of social cohesion) was critically important in the longevity and prosperity of a community but its power came with an expiration date where it started civilizations on an upward trajectory only for them to stagnate or descend back into tribal backwardness. Khaldun also emphasized the importance of Ilm (knowledge) in building a healthy and prosperous society.

Furthermore, the ideas on civilization and the Adab of Khaldun are still objects being studied internationally. His enduring relevance remains with us as we struggle to get through the permutations of a complex modern world. The wisdom of Khaldun encourages reflection on the complex interplay leading to the decline and rise of civilizations, which prompts us to wonder how Adab is necessary for strengthening society.

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