

IBN KHALDUN'S POLITICAL THOUGHT AND RELEVANCE: ABDALLAH SHARIT'S CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The critical review of contemporary Arab socio-politico-cultural in accordance with Abdallah Sharit show little change since Ibn Khaldun's times, as there is no major difference from what is found in the *Muqaddimah*. Arab societies continue to live according to 'asabiyyah, and struggle for political authority still continues to be the governing pattern despite making inroads towards nationalism. Abdallah Sharit explains the credibility and relevance of the Khaldunian concepts, while retaining the firm belief that the insight offered by Ibn Khaldun can potentially meet the needs of present-day Arab states. Within this context, Sharit finds that the ideas of Ibn Khaldun have become critically relevant to the existing socio-political configuration. This study explores both the manifestations and implications of Ibn Khaldun's relevance to the present-day according to Sharit, especially regarding the pertinence of his political thought. It also assesses the relevance of Ibn Khaldun's political thought in light of contemporary socio-political transformations taking place in the Arab world. This research also derives relevant lessons pertinent to our times, especially regarding what Sharit attempted to achieve through his study of Ibn Khaldun; while specifically seeking to emphasize Ibn Khaldun's relevance to the interpretation and understanding of contemporary Arab conditions.

Keywords: Abdallah Sharit, Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 'Asabiyyah, contemporary Arab conditions

Introduction

The thought of Ibn Khaldun's continues to generate interesting intellectual debate in the Arab and Western world. His thought on the state, government, and factors inherent within their rise and collapse, are highly reflective of some of the contemporary and future tracks of Arab society. Ibn Khaldun was greatly intrigued and interested in internal systemic factors acting as the most decisive reasons for decline, while nonetheless acknowledging the impact of foreign invasions and externalities on the decline of states. He holds however, that foreign invasion is only effective to the degree of societal disintegration, or put into other words, the degree to which it becomes difficult for the sense of 'asabiyyah to unite existing social and political powers, or consequently fails to awaken those forces in the face of external aggression¹. Ibn Khaldun illustrates this point as follows:

As a result, the toughness of desert life is lost. Group feeling and courage weaken. Members of the tribe revel in the well-being that God has given them. Their children and offspring grow up too proud to look after themselves or to attend to their own needs. They have disdain also for all the other things that are necessary in connection with group feeling. This finally becomes a character trait and natural characteristic of theirs. Their group feeling and courage decrease in the next generations. Eventually, group feeling is altogether destroyed. They thus invite (their) own destruction. The greater their luxury and the easier the life they enjoy, the closer they are to extinction, not to mention (their lost chance of obtaining) royal authority. The things that go with luxury and submergence in a life of ease break the vigor of the group feeling, which alone produces superiority. When group feeling is destroyed, the tribe is no longer able to defend or protect itself, let alone press any claims. It will be swallowed up by other nations.²

Khaldunian thought continues to elicit engaging discussions in both the Arab and Western world alike, a reflection of its unique comprehensiveness and uniquely deep grasp of numerous relevant contemporary issues and contentions. By virtue of this, it has drawn considerable attention and become worthy of deep consideration and careful scrutiny. Despite the substantial passage of time –more than six centuries following his death–

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¹ Ibn Khaldun (1967), A. *The Muqaddimah*, (F. Rosenthal, Trans., N. J. Dawood, Ed.), London, Bollinger Series, Princeton University Press, p. 246-247.

² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

numerous studies continue to be dedicated to researching Ibn Khaldun's ideas and theories; effectively establishing him as one of the vaunted pioneers of sociology and social sciences as a whole, and one whose proposals and frameworks have transcended both time and geography. The British historian Arnold Toynbee described him in many different ways: "The sole point of light in his quarter of the firmament", "the one outstanding personality in the history of a civilization", "inspired by no predecessors and to have found no kindred souls among his contemporaries", and "the greatest work of its kind that has ever yet been created by any mind in any time or place."³

Though it may be an exercise in difficulty to comprehensively reflect all that Ibn Khaldun investigated in his many writings, any such endeavour must come to terms with his fundamental theory of the state and intrinsic foundations, which it rests upon. Furthermore, it must also take into careful consideration the factors imperative for its advancement and collapse; having the added benefit of being the subject of central focus while also illuminating much of what transpires in contemporary Arab societies. Most importantly perhaps, it provides important lessons for future growth and development.

The recourse to Ibn Khaldun in this research does not seek to repeat proposals made regarding the study of Arab society during his era or even that preceding his, but rather targets the sequestering of that which relates to his era while extracting benefit from the lessons and scientific conclusions reached through a contemporary reading. Within such a context, it is worthy to note this specific field as one in which Algerian thinker 'Abdallah Sharit specialized in. He exerted his utmost efforts in highlighting the relevance of Khaldunian ideas to explain the conditions and circumstances prevailing upon the modern-day Middle East. Sharit felt that the Arab world was characterized by political corruption and the profound absence of any sense of reviving past glories. This in turn drove him to take advantage of the scientific and practical thought of Ibn Khaldun in order to set the foundations for an ideology that would effectively and systematically reform Arabian society beneath its shade, throughout the entirety of its political, social, cultural and economic dimensions. This study poses the fundamental question: Where does the present-day relevance of Khaldunian political thought from the perspective of Sharit rest? Can it enhance and develop a better understanding and interpret the present direction of the recent Arab social revolutions? Moreover, can it reform and augment its unfortunate social and political realities?

An Outline of Abdallah Sharit's Cultural Journey

'Abdallah Sharit is considered as key member of the Algerian intellectual elite who managed to combine thought and action in reform projects targeting an effusive societal renaissance, which initially began with Algeria's liberation from the iron grip of determined colonial powers and their policies of assimilation. He then attempted to free society from the established shackles of retardation and cultural dependency. The scholar's arguments and discourse command both attention and respect from his readers due to its effective ability to wage a protracted intellectual campaign against a status quo that had occupied the minds of the intellectual elite in Algeria for more than half a century on diverse fronts, including ideology and its causal relationship with development, the Arabic language and its relationship to national identity, tradition and modernity, their collective impact on the evolution of Algerian society, the fragility and inability of the Arab-Islamic nation and its relationship to the confinements of the past, or its unconditional acquiescence and acceptance of Western modernity.

Sharit was multi-talented. He was a poet and a litterateur, a critic and an educator, a writer, witty translator, and proficient in both Arabic and French. We find that a number of the writings, teachings and dialogues of Sharit feature the leader of the Algerian Renaissance Sheikh 'Abdu al-Hamid ibn Badis. Sheikh 'Abdu al-Hamid inspired Sharit with ideas of reform based on a platform effecting the proliferation of the Arabic language and Muslim faith in order to achieve positive change through individual behaviour, consequently leading to the advancement of the community. He states: "*My idea is nothing but the extension of the reformative ideas of the revolutionary Ibn Badis*"⁴. He further notes; "It is far better that I become a social reformer, as I am the descendant of Ibn Badis, attempting to complete his project in the field of intellectual reforms"⁵. Moreover, he shared a number of similarities to the ideas of Malek Bennabi throughout his discourse, who was effectively able to draw from an expansive model of the history of Islamic civilization during the Middle Ages, and further

³ A. J. Toynbee (1961), *A Study of history*, United Kingdom, London, Vol. 3, p. 322.

⁴ Darwish 'Abd al-Hamid (1995), *Ibn Badis wa Arauhu al-Islahiyah bayna al-Nazariyyah wa al-Tatbiq*. Vol. 1. Egypt: al-Kitab al-Jami'i. Ed. 1, p. 59.

⁵ Baghurah al-Zawawi (2001), *Hiwar ma'a al-Mufakkir al-Jazairi 'Abd Allah Sharit fi al-Siyasah wa al-Tarikh wa al-Falsafah*. In *Majallat al-Hiwar al-Fikri*. No. 2, p. 20.

extract from the deplorable conditions of the Muslims during his time a set of conclusive conditions and requisites for their anticipated renaissance. In this regard, Bennabi (d. 1973) stressed that their inability and retardation are not inevitably imposed upon them, but rather that the unfortunate realities surrounding them may be bypassed through special conditions. This is a similar point stressed by Sharit in many of his lectures, writings and essays.

His close association with Khaldunian sociological thought influenced Sharit to the extent that he considered Ibn Khaldun the most prominent instructor in Arab-Islamic culture. Sharit devoted an important part of his intellectual legacy to Ibn Khaldun as evidenced by his doctoral degree on his ethical thought, which subsequently inspired his preoccupation with social issues and challenges. This further inspired his dedicated attention to methods for social reform and advancement, alongside a deep admiration for the research methodology formulated by Ibn Khaldun that was considered a revolutionary departure from antiquated methods that had been adopted by the sciences until that time. His unique approach to sociology stemmed from both a good, observation and comparison, and sought to examine and draw conclusions from results to benefit society⁶. This is the sense of realism balanced with the normative ideal that Sharit adhered to. Furthermore, he called for its application in the University of Algeria by relating academic research to Algerian society.

Among the contentions for which Sharit may be criticised however, is a temporary phase in his life where he was somewhat influenced by the existing socialist trend of his time. However, socialist ideas do not appear to have taken root in his ideology, as belied by his other writings and his authentic reformist disposition. In his book, '*al-Mushkilah al-Idiulujiyyah wa-Qadaya al-Tanmiyyah*' (Ideological Problems and Developmental Issues), Sharit asserts that Algeria's adoption of the socialist doctrine would be sufficient to achieve social justice. He rejects the myth of retardation and resistance to foreign domination and invited in its place the reality of the need of Muslims to take full advantage of the economic, political, ethical and social systems applied in Europe so long as they do not contradict the essence of Islam. In this regard, he pragmatically asserts:

The first principle from which we proceed to adopt the socialist doctrine in our lives (...) is that it enables us to achieve two goals: the first is civilizational, in that we exit our current state of retardation to join the ranks of developed nations (...) and the second being humanitarian, in that the lowly classes of our society are awarded society dignity through economic equality⁷.

Sharit derived his understanding of the "cultural revolution" from socialism, by means of which he called for the elimination of cultural differences between the various strata of society; seeking to ultimately eliminate the economic and social disparities between them. The criticism levelled against Sharit here is not due to his interest in socialist ideals, but rather in giving too much attention to the compatibility of means with the end, as reflected in the wider mandate of Islamic reform. His interest in the concept of social inequality however, was justified and rather informing. However, his inherent intellectual tendencies coupled with the influence of the reformist ideas of al-Badisi rendered the influence of socialist thought to a negligible level, as he consistently remained open-minded and willing to accept other ideas and was rather utilitarian in his dealings with it. This may be supported by the assertion that Algeria was in need of such forms of thinking at the time, in order to both shed and counter the difficult cultural realities left by colonialism.

Khaldunian Political Thought According to Sharit

Ibn Khaldun has been extensively studied to the extent that it is often presumed that researchers would be unable to discover anything new amidst his discourse. In spite of this, 'Abd Allah Sharit proved in his thorough and in-depth study '*al-Fikr al-Akhlaqi 'inda Ibn Khaldun*' (The Ethical Thought of Ibn Khaldun) that there are significant dimensions to Ibn Khaldun's thought that have yet to be uncovered. Many considered '*asabiyyah*' unpredictable double-edged sword⁸. Prior to the founding of the state, tribalism constituted the crucial building block for a socio-political configuration providing patronage, aid and food amidst neighbouring tribes. With its wane however, comes destruction as the spread of division and conflict expedites the ruin of the state. Ibn Khaldun states:

⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p.11.

⁷ Sharit, 'Abdallah (1982), *Al-Mushkilah al-Idiyyulujiyyah wa Qadaya al-Tanmiyyah*. Algeria: Diwan al-Matbu'at al-Jami'iyyah, p. 52

⁸ Mehmet Akif Kayapinar (2010), *The Theory of Asabiya in Comparison with the Social Contract Approach (An Interpretive Study In Comparative Political Theory)*, State University of New York, p. 223.

It should be known that, as we have stated, the dynasty can be founded and established only with the help of group feeling. There must be a major group feeling uniting all the group feelings subordinate to it. This (major group feeling) is the family and tribal group feeling peculiar to the ruler. When the natural luxury of royal authority makes its appearance in the dynasty, and when the people who share in the group feeling of the dynasty are humiliated, the first to be humiliated are the members of the ruler's family and his relatives who share with him in the royal name. They are much more humiliated than anyone else. Moreover, luxury has a greater hold on them than on anyone else, because they have a share in royal authority, power, and superiority. Thus, two agents of destruction surround them⁹.

Sharit however, takes a step beyond this; his in depth understanding of Khaldunian thought led him to the realisation that Ibn Khaldun is in actuality referring to the absence of Islamic morality from Arab authorities throughout the various stages of Islamic history. The ailment of the Arab nation does not lie in the dwindling of *'asabiyyah* but rather in the control of ignorant tribal pride and *'asabiyyah* an alternative to Islamic ethical principles in the founding of the state, as well as the moral deviation and negligence of rulers in their management of state resources, leading all too often to the invoked wrath of the citizenry and the untimely demise of the King. Along similar parallels, Sharit is vigilant in introducing his unique analysis, which he divides into several areas:

The Arab State: Principles and Reality

Ibn Khaldun rendered the Arab state as the very essence of his social philosophy. According to Sharit, Ibn Khaldun was the only Muslim philosopher who perceived the Arab state according to its historical realities and not in light of an ideal utopian model that is to be achieved. From here, Sharit is of the view that by means of his diagnostic and descriptive scientific approach, Ibn Khaldun is the only scholar who avoided falling into the abyss separating the theoretical state as perceived and normatively theorized and aspired to be by the philosopher; given the fact that reality that does not quite live up in any way to such a model. Many have fallen into the digression of this debate; including Plato (d. 347 BC), al-Farabi (d. 1270AD), al-Ghazali (d. 1111 AD) and al-Mawardi (d. 1058 AD).¹⁰

Moreover, if Western thinkers, since Aristotle (d. 322 BC) and even Hegel (d. 1831) have to some extent accepted their view of the state, not only as an authorised institution, but as a totality of its territories, citizens, laws, regulations and customs that guide their lives, they nonetheless fail however, to discuss important ethical issues regarding the nature of the relationship between the individual and the community. In this context, they remained without significant progress, until the modern era drew focus towards individuals' duties towards the state and the neglect of individual rights. Despite the concept of the state in the West having slowly expanded to acknowledge the rights of children and women, contempt for the Otheris inherent within systems for advantageous and often profitable exploitation and oppression—something characteristic of the Greco-Roman traditions—, which have remained.¹¹

On the other hand, Sharit emphasizes that Islam alone was able to solve this convoluted equation as it emphasized the individual's duties towards society in as far as it urged the duty of society towards its members. Islam's success in this area however, did not actually translate into political systems, which embodied this integration, with the exception of the mission of Muhammad and the reign of the rightly guided Caliphs¹². The main contention occupying the history of the Orient (*Mashriq*) until the end of the first Abbasid era (750-1258AD) was that of governance, except that the focus of the debate continued to linger around the issue of who was able and eligible to govern and, who alternatively was not. Another raised contention during this time was the question of who could and could not inherit the caliphate.

What characterised political reality from Sharit's point of view was not the deviation of rulers from Islamic principles; but rather the complete lack of political systems and working configurations in the Arab countries in neither theory nor practice. The advent of Islam brought with it general principles that were capable of developing into systems of governance with potential for further evolution and an ability to keep pace with the passing of time and introduction of new generations. Unfortunately, this has not occurred, and in its place governance without consultation was established, something which has characterised Islamic political history,

⁹ Ibn Khaldun. *The Muqaddimah*, p. 246.

¹⁰ Sharit, 'Abdallah (1975), *Al-Firk al-Akhlaqi 'inda Ibn Khaldun*. Algeria: al-Sharikah al-Wataniyyah lil nashr wal-Tawzi'. Ed. 2, p. 243.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 247

¹² Ibid., p. 249

impulsive improvisation and a lack of discipline, and a blurring of the distinction between duties and rights, between authority and the law, and therefore between state, nation and government.¹³ It is deriving from this socio-political reality that the essence of Ibn Khaldun's concept of the Arab state may be said to stem, in effect attempting to span the vast gulf between state and government. Such a demarcation leads to conflict produced by incompatibility between the interests of the rulers and that of the citizens, whether in the nations of the East or West; as Ibn Khaldun merged them into a single melting pot characterised by the conception of a single state. Moreover, while Ibn Khaldun, according to Sharit, was largely successful in his diagnosis of the problems of ethical, social, and economic governance to which he devoted considerable analysis; noting varieties of defects upon which the Arab state rested at the time, he had one significant shortcoming.

According to Sharit, Ibn Khaldun was unable to derive tangible applications from the political evils he studied and experienced, culminating in a better and more appropriate political constitution extending from Islamic law with which he was intimately acquainted. Such a new constitution should have ensured the authority of the governor and rights and responsibilities of the citizens, as well as the mechanisms to monitor the actions of the governor in regard to his treatment of the people who remained vulnerable to looting, tampering and forfeitures would be determined. For Sharit, such a constitution would be formulated along lines similar to the constitutions of the Greeks and Romans¹⁴. Ibn Khaldun proceeded along the fundamental principle that negated the notion that religion is the origin of the state, stressing in turn that the true origin is the nature of social life itself. Following a thorough analysis of his current system, he chose the religious system of the *khilafah*. He also believes that the human association (*'umran*) began with Adam and Eve and that the building of dynasties may happen away from religion. The following illustrates the point further:

Royal authority is an institution that is natural to humankind. We have explained before that human beings cannot live and exist except through social organization and cooperation for obtaining their food and (other) necessities of life. When they have organized, necessity requires that they deal with each other and (thus) satisfy (their) needs. Each one will stretch out his hand for whatever he needs and (try simply) to take it, since injustice and aggressiveness are in the animal nature. The others, in turn, will try to prevent him from taking it, motivated by wrathfulness and spite and the strong human reaction when (one's own property is menaced). This causes dissension. (Dissension) leads to hostilities, and hostilities lead to trouble, bloodshed, and loss of life, which (in turn) lead to the destruction of the (human) species. Now, (the human species) is one of the things the Creator has especially (told us) to preserve.¹⁵

Man was created to gather and associate with others, and in view of his propensity for evil desires, is in need of scruples (authority) which ensures duties and preserves rights to ensure security and peace for all. The manifest evidence for this claim is that Magians who do not have a holy book nonetheless have managed to construct states and leave behind a significant cultural heritage without needing the guidance of a divine religion¹⁶. This should not be taken to mean that religion does not play a decisive role in nation building.

Apart from this period of encroachment, Ibn Khaldun is of the view that *'asabiyyah* is both the pillar and mainstay of kingship.¹⁷ The ruler cannot impose his authority unless he is in a position of invulnerability with respect to his people. Rather, this king is in need of creating solid guarantees to ensure his continuity. His mainstay is generosity, forgiveness and patience in dealing with hardship, attempting to realize the rights of the people, ensuring justice, fulfilling his covenants, maintaining honour, and remaining committed to the law; all surprisingly modern concepts. If these are absent in a king, his reign will end. Religion therefore plays a crucial role in instilling faith, awareness and moral conscience. Ibn Khaldun termed this 'the internal restraint'. However, this restraint is not enough to build a state unless it is supported by rational political systems.¹⁸

Sharit opines that Ibn Khaldun failed to highlight the weakness that characterised the history of the Arab state in the East as opposed to the West, in that it did not adopt any inherent system in its political configuration be it legal, rational or a meld of both. Instead, it depended solely on one; namely the personal interests and desires of the ruler. The first Islamic state was a beautiful but short-lived dream that did not affect the political reality of

¹³ Ibid., p. 250.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 259.

¹⁵ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p.151-152.

¹⁶ Sharit, *Al-Firk al-Akhlaqi*, p. 251.

¹⁷ Kayapinar, *the Theory of Asabiyyah*, p. 223.

¹⁸ Sharit, *Al-Firk al-Akhlaqi*, p. 257.

future Arab states. The ethical examples of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq and 'Umar bin al-Khattab were not developed to cope with the complexity of the Muslim community, which is now inclusive of various nations and cultures, and broad ranges inclusive of different languages, customs and traditions. Solid intellectual efforts were not undertaken to codify the principles of Islam in the form of major systems and specific political constitutions, and what was expected to become politically sophisticated instead regressed to pre-Islamic states in terms of its reliance on the domination of tribal tendencies and *'asabiyyah*. Sharit notes: "Instead of this setback being transient, it turned into a popular habit which was elevated in Ibn Khaldun's thought to the level of social determinism."¹⁹

Sharit's answer to his question regarding how the Arab states –which were effectively bankrupt in the area of constitutional regulation and adherence to principles of Islamic political rule and social justice– managed to produce great and lofty civilizations, he believed, rested with a catalyst-secret within the Islamic faith which permeated and invigorated the soul. Moreover, he notes that the Muslims inherited remnants of ancient Oriental civilizations and their thriving cultural traditions. In his view, this duality was both the reason for the greatness of Islamic civilization as well as its weakness. Its greatness may be traced back to foreign cultural inheritances, the spirit of which was renewed by the Islamic faith. Its weakness however, is due to the loss of the political systems, which governed this civilization, legally and constitutionally structured according to Islamic political principles upon which the state of the Prophet Muhammad and his initial successors rested²⁰. In this manner, Arab nomadism became closely entwined with the rule of the state whereas foreign decadence engulfed social life to blur the parameters upon which the Islamic State was to develop. Thus, to this day the Arab state continues; Bedouin in spirit, yet civilized in appearance.²¹

Many philosophers have fled from this grim reality. They speak at length of an ideal utopia or golden age, with the exception of Ibn Khaldun. He worked hard to highlight the shortcomings of the Arab state to the extent that he thought such maladies were inevitable natural laws of the Arab state. He then surrendered to the belief that the nature of the non-Arab states (Persia and Byzantium) is found in continuity and congruity, whereas conversely enough, the nature of the Arab state is to be scattered and divided.²² He concluded that the malady here is the absence of a constitutional order, which preserves rights and ensures that duties are met.

To the present day, the Arab state is to this time suffering from weak intellectualism, shallow morality, a general atomistic disconnect and growing rift between individual and community, chaotic inefficient management and legal-rational authorities, weak economies, rampant poverty, a complete lack of respect for the most basic rules of *shura* (mutual consultation), the strictly clinging on to power unto death, and a willingness to defend the ruler more so than to defend the country from external threats. According to Sharit, the core of the issue lies in the absence of rational, as opposed to legal policies. Greece, despite the corruption that took place in their moral standards, which legitimised slavery, and entrenched class differences in the society, were able to discuss their political affairs with a great deal of sobriety, rationality, transparency and freedom within councils and associations that consisted of members numbering in the dozens and hundreds at a time wherein Muslims were politically at the fate of an individual's personal intelligence, ability, character and morality.²³

Islam provided Muslims with humanitarian principles that were realised by the West only during modern times, but failed to develop a legal framework and regulatory institutions that could transform such principles into laws that governed the state. Furthermore, they failed to develop these principles as a framework that may be applied and adapted to changing environments and circumstances. From here, the Arab state was further divided into two opposing groups. One within which the governor facilitated the lives and livelihoods of the citizens, the other where the citizens considered the ruler to be the enemy made manifest, deserving nothing but to be overthrown should the opportunity arise; to the extent that Ibn Khaldun considered this mutual hostility a social law necessary in the Arab state.²⁴ Ibn Khaldun says:

Royal authority and power are obtained by a dynasty only through superiority, which comes only after hostilities and wars. Hostility requires incompatibility between the people of the two dynasties and mutual disapproval with regard to (luxury) customs and conditions. The victory of one of the two rivals causes the disappearance of the other. Thus, the conditions of the

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 259-260.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 261.

²¹ Ibid., p. 262.

²² Ibid., p. 263.

²³ Ibid., pp. 274-275.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 278.

previous dynasty, especially the conditions of luxury, are disapproved of and considered detestable and evil by the people of the new dynasty. They disappear among them, because the (new) dynasty disapproves of them. Eventually, however, new luxury customs gradually originate among them. They produce a new sedentary culture. The period in between sees a dwindling and decrease of the first sedentary culture. This is what is meant by disintegration of civilization in a city.²⁵

Schisms in the Arab State:

Since '*asabiyyah*' is the central theme upon which the Arab state operates, excels, declines, unites and divides, Ibn Khaldun awarded it special attention; identifying its negative and positive attributes. Ibn Khaldun indicates that what distinguishes the lives of Arabs is their reluctance to identify themselves with any particular homeland, city or territory. Rather, their real home, which they proudly associate themselves with, is the tribe. As such, it was easy for them to move from one home to another, and from one land to another without feeling a sense of isolation; for the reason that being bound to a specific homeland and departing from it would sadden them, as opposed to the tribe, which is in many regards omnipresent.

'*Asabiyyah*', in as much as it is militant and produces patronage, nonetheless requires a leader. This reality dictates that the following two conditions are met: the numerical strength of the tribe and economic as well as moral strength. The moral requirement gradually faded after Islam, and the first condition became sufficient for the presidency of the tribe or state²⁶. Ibn Khaldun explains that the difference between tribal presidency and political kingship is found in that the latter is the goal of the former. All that the king aspires towards in regards to '*asabiyyah*' is blissful living and sovereignty, and since this is the totality of his ambition, he does not go far in history, but his reign rapidly dissipates, as the king cannot please everyone due to the abundance of demands and aspiration.²⁷ In response, the few seek to seize the state and deprive others from sharing in its blessings, despite their participation in its seizure. '*Asabiyyah*' is thus, by such means, an unremitting silkworm, which weaves its cocoon and then perishes once the metamorphosis is complete.²⁸

In this context, the establishment of the state takes place only through triumph, and triumph can only be achieved through '*asabiyyah*' and collective agreement upon the call, after which an arrogant sense of self-worth and pride is developed, with material bliss quickly becoming the aim. Desires then diverge, causing '*asabiyyah*' to divide because of material interests.²⁹ This perspective leads Ibn Khaldun to conclude that the state, according to the Arabs, is nothing but a fruit seized by those with the longest reach who are then quick to consume it, causing it to breakdown and collapse. This is followed by another who erects upon its previous corpse a new fruit and so forth. Every state comes to enjoy the fruit but none endeavours to nourish the tree. The tree provides all it can in terms of fruits to those who consume, but in the process eventually dries up; effectually causing the entire Arab civilization to dwindle and fade.³⁰

Sharit criticizes Ibn Khaldun's view that schisms are a recurring reality in the Arab state, quite probably a reflection of Khaldun's divergent thought relative to the pessimism regarding the possibility for reviving a rational, legal system similar to caliphate authority. Rather, Sharit considers schisms to be a deviation from the Islamic principles uniting humanity against fragmentation and guarding against a return to pre-Islamic era (*jahiliyyah*). The speed of schisms that takes place in the Arab state and which distinguishes it from foreign states, according to Sharit is found in that the state did not originally develop on moral, ethical or religious principles. It was not formed based on responsibility and a desire to build a glorious civilisation; but was rather formed in aim of achieving material pleasures for the ruler. Sharit attempts to justify his opinion by referring to the State of the Prophet Muhammad, which originated from religiosity not '*asabiyyah*' and which manifested strength and stability at the hands of Abu Bakr and 'Umar ibn al-Khattab. He further supports his view by referring to Eastern nations that managed in some periods of its history to rid itself of the tribal spirit under foreign rule, which led to long-term stability³¹, not to mention foreign nations, which existed for periods longer than that of the Arab state.

²⁵ Ibn Khaldun. *The Muqaddimah*, p. 289.

²⁶ Sharit, *al-Fikr*, p. 283

²⁷ Ibn Khaldun. *The Muqaddimah*, pp. 141-142.

²⁸ Sharit, *al-Fikr*, p. 285.

²⁹ Ibn Khaldun. *The Muqaddimah*, pp. 244-245.

³⁰ Sharit, *al-Fikr*, pp. 286-287.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

While Ibn Khaldun casts responsibility for the ruin of the state on the urbanites, consisting of both the urban and rural folk who are occupied with material comforts and self-advancement as opposed to the nomadic³², Sharit however casts responsibility on both nomadic and urban Arabs alike. This is because even the Arab who persists in his nomadism clutches to the causes of physical dominance and cares for nothing but gathering the greatest number of people capable of taking up arms for the cause of securing the king's comfort, and is also the same person who expedites the process of civilization. Urbanization in this particular individual's view rests solely in sensual pleasures that are not accompanied by work or effort and are therefore doubly destructive: once when he seizes the state and usurps authority, and again when he pursues pleasures and seeks to strengthen the king rather than build a civilisation³³.

The state according to the Arabs is an end in and of itself, and not a means of social organization. No state deviated from this principle except that of the Prophet Muhammad and his early successors, who perceived the state as a weighty responsibility, which led to Islam spreading throughout the world. The conception of state has lost this meaning and turned into spoils or loot for the largest bidder. This concept remains prevalent to this day. It is true that the modern state is described as a state of law, but it may also be argued realistically that it is a state above the law, which controls the state as it wills, sometimes without law, and cannot survive except beneath the shadow of power.

The value of Ibn Khaldun according to Sharit is his courage in treating the problem of governance. It is by means of his audacity and daring that Ibn Khaldun becomes unique in the history of Arab political thought. He clearly elaborated and demonstrated the vulnerability of the Arab state, but had his shortcoming in his excellent identification of the malady but failure to prescribe a remedy³⁴. In Sharit's view, Ibn Khaldun should have referred to the need of the Arab state to mature from its childish state into adulthood and develop a political system based on a clear Islamic constitution respected by the ruler and subject alike. Since history is a lesson according to Ibn Khaldun, Sharit is of the view that Ibn Khaldun's research in this area sets the demand for the rule of law on contemporary states.

Sharit is of the view that we are in need for intellectual elite who excel in political theorizing in order to develop a constitution that draws its general guidelines from Islam and does not deviate from them. This necessity cannot have been lost on Ibn Khaldun, who experienced the effects of corruption, cronyism and the relative lack of intellectual elite first hand throughout his years of service in governance and judiciary. For Sharit, the finer details of this constitution must be borne from current events and contemporary trends in order to be relevant to the times. It should also eliminate the gap between the urbanite and Bedouin in the Arab world, by providing jobs to occupy the nomad to prevent him from leaving his village to move to the city, lest he lose his predatory constitution which renders him productive and furthermore to prevent him from the shame of accepting foreign aid. As for the toughened urbanite with his responsibility for undertaking tiring works, strenuous sport, and organised military life, he is removed from the comfortable life to which he is accustomed. This is not a fad in the history of nations and societies, but rather forms the basis for differentiating between nomads and urbanites, and this duplication has prevented us from realising an organised Arab state and integrated civilization³⁵.

Sharit concludes that Ibn Khaldun's analyses are not devoid of limitations. He has depicted the weak Arab state and its inability to control its reality as an unavoidable social inevitability. He failed to realise that if this were true, Prophet Muhammad would not have succeeded in changing the circumstances of his Ummah. Similarly, his successors would not have succeeded in building a strong Islamic state that stretched from the Gulf to the Atlantic. Ibn Khaldun succeeded in demonstrating that the inconsistency of the Arab state is due to its dispersion of *'asabiyyah*, deviation from the rule of law to the rule of the sword, and the weakness of the urbanite and their moral corruption, but seemingly missed highlighting the weakness of Muslim intellectuals who were unable to establish a renewed political constitution deriving its spirit from Islam. They were content in preaching to and advising rulers, or retaining their comfortable positions in their mysticism and reclusion³⁶.

Sharit then inquires as to the secret for the continuation of this shortcoming in the political theorizing of the educated elite in the contemporary world. Is it an intellectual habit inherited from our Arab ancestors? Or is it the fear of rendering the tyrant ruler responsible? Whatever the reason, Sharit is convinced that the matter is temporary, and that the tyranny of rulers will disappear when a generation of intellectuals appear who are

³² Ibn Khaldun. *The Muqaddimah*, pp. 246-250.

³³ Sharit, *al-Fikr*, p. 292.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

conscious of political responsibility, and when the homogeneity of the population is achieved and not one destructive nomad nor corrupted urbanite remains among them, and when action turns into a well-established doctrine. For Sharit, only then can a state be formed that is governed by law, where the ruler does not dare to oppress the subjects, because he is responsible to the citizens and supervised by them so as not to deviate; while the citizens further monitor the state and prevent it from being threatened. In such a state, the citizens participate with their government in forming the state³⁷.

The Problem of Finance and Morality of the State

Ibn Khaldun accurately diagnosed the forms of injustices practiced by the state on its citizens and identified three fundamental reasons. The first being the state's deviation from the principles of Islamic law, which does not permit debt except in minimal amounts. The second is the state's deviation from simple nomadic nature where life is limited to the basics while delving in luxuries, fun and pleasure knows no bounds. The third reason is large spending on the military when the tribal spirit of the state is weakened; with the ruler then introducing various types of taxes and duties that are imposed on sales, and the capital of traders and farmers³⁸. Trade and agriculture diminish so long as they are not profitable, and the state then undertakes trading and agriculture for its citizens. By this, markets fail and livelihoods are threatened. When the ruler vies for the wealth of his own entourage, and each is plundered according to his rank, the ruin of civilization draws near. Ibn Khaldun associated economic crises with Shari'ah, law and ethics on the one hand, and civilization and urbanization on the other. He advocated that all that led to the advancement of civilization was a by-product of the commands of Shari'ah, and all that hindered advancement of the result were the prohibitions of the Shari'ah³⁹.

Sharit commends Ibn Khaldun's unique treatment of economic problems in that he avoided the common approach of shallow preaching, but instead investigated the depths of the matter, stressing that this method of research if followed by others before him and after him would have led to the maturation of political thought among the rulers and Arab subjects alike. Furthermore, these issues would have become common material taught in academic institutions, and have slowly penetrated into our political culture and intellectual traditions. Moreover, it would have mobilized our community to combat the forces of tyranny and oppression. However, this appreciation did not prevent Sharit from criticizing Ibn Khaldun's view that this dangerous moral deviation is an unavoidable social inevitability found in the history of the Arab state. He overlooked the example of 'Umar ibn 'Abdul-'Aziz who encouraged work as opposed to unemployment as prescribed by Islam, which did not detract from state funds, but on the contrary doubled its income. This was not previously known in the history of human societies, to the extent that not a single person was found to whom charity or zakat (alms) could be given.

The foregoing discussion led Sharit to emphasize that the essence of the fiscal instability or prosperity was reflected by the lack of religious principles. Islamic conquests no longer constituted the means of spreading Islam among idolatry societies, but rather as a means for profit and comfortable livelihoods, liquor, concubines, slaves and silk. Islamic conquests regressed to the state of *jahiliyyah* and were redirected against their persons in order to overthrow and usurp the glory of other Islamic states. The role of seizing the livelihoods of nations was gradually replaced by rivalry within a single country and at times one tribe and one dynasty. Money became the divider of states after the principle of propagating Islam had once been the primary cause of its unity. While it is true that the moral principle in the management of public funds is insured in Islam by the Qur'an and Hadith, and that early caliphs stressed its importance of abiding by this, however it did not translate into formal legal-rational authority and socio-political apparatus, which obliged and bound the ruler and citizenry alike.

When Sharit reviewed what was written in the history of Islamic thought regarding economic spending, stability and prosperity, he found that it was an aggregate case of individual opinions, and personal intellectual efforts that had little obligatory import⁴⁰. This indicates that the financial and economic crises we find throughout the history of the Arab state once more point towards constitutional problems. The absence of laws as deterrents, independent monitoring bodies, and public awareness of rights and duties encouraged rulers to act without responsibility, mispend and effectively loot public funds. Sharit makes note here, "Religion was placed as the foundation of the edifice, its builders however, were nowhere to be found in the Arab state"⁴¹.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 316.

³⁸ Ibn Khaldun. *The Muqaddimah*, p. 249.

³⁹ Sharit, *al-Fikr*, p. 346.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 346.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 327.

The Arab State between Austerity and Luxury

Sharit questions whether the rapid deterioration of the Arab state is attributed to being unaccustomed to lives of luxury. Moreover, did the sudden transformation from a life of drought and austerity to the opposite cause it to become similar to the famished entity that has lost its will to control its cravings as proposed by Ibn Khaldun or is the real reason perhaps due to its weak internal structure and failure to mature from a stage of religious preaching to a stage of legal institutions that would ensure that the state is respected and functioning properly? In light of his history, he questions as to whether it has lived its entire history in a state of lawlessness and is therefore closer to the conception of an armed gang as opposed to the concept of a real state.

Whatever the real reason may be, Sharit criticized Ibn Khaldun significantly regarding his opinion that the emergence and rapid deterioration of the Arab State are natural human phenomena. He intrinsically associates luxury with the king, and portrays the delinquency of rulers towards the life of amusement and comfort as an unchangeable social law. Furthermore, he perceives the collapse of states as something normal; for Ibn Khaldun, states much like their human counterparts, have determined lifespans than cannot be exceeded. Ibn Khaldun strives to support his opinion with philosophical arguments and historical evidence.

Ibn Khaldun realised early on that his theory of *'asabiyyah* with its moral association that unites efforts toward achieving glory and kingship is quickly overwhelmed by material impulses, which are keen on securing food, clothing, bedding and utensils at the cost of manhood, courage and boldness. Here, pride is transformed into humiliation, self-restraint to corruption and capitulation to pleasures. This is reflected in the structure of the state whereby its roots run dry and its branches crumble⁴². This indicates that the cause of the collapse of the Arab state throughout its long history was not caused, in accordance with the perspective of Ibn Khaldun by external revolutions or foreign incursions, as much as it was caused by internal decay. External factors merely completed its collapse.

According to Sharit, Ibn Khaldun was largely successful in his description of the urbanite. His analyses coincide with what was written by Karl Marx in that the bourgeois who cares naught but for his personal happiness and well-being, and is far removed from the interests of the state. "He was correct when he pointed out that the rot that infects the ruling class rapidly descends to other classes of the community for the reason that people follow the religion of their kings. Intellectual life and morals began to rot along with religious and political, economic and social indicators, until it becomes necessary to burn the filth, which is the obligation of the emerging state"⁴³.

Sharit goes so far as to highlight Ibn Khaldun's wisdom on this issue. He cites the views of thinkers and philosophers that came centuries later such as Gustave Le Bon, Karel, Durant, and Toynbee, in terms of their emphasis that the collapse of a civilisation is not an act of God, nor can it be attributed to aggression waged by external enemies. Fallen civilisations did not face death at the hands of a killer; but rather suicide was the singular cause of their ruin⁴⁴. However, Sharit nonetheless wonders and mulls over Ibn Khaldun's position. The phenomenon of the collapse of states is not subject, according to him, to unknown causes. Rather, it is controlled by objective factors of human workmanship. Interestingly, in spite of this, he failed to recognise that there are human solutions to human errors. He depicted the world as being determined and did not differ with the Sufis who recognised the threat of luxury upon the society and the individual. In this regard, they did not do anything to close the doors of desires other than to consider it prohibited and avoid it⁴⁵. As such, Ibn Khaldun completed half the journey and left us to complete the remainder. If we were to examine the history of the Roman state with its regulatory policies, we would realise the secret for its centuries' long stability, making it the first school to educate the West on legal sciences, state policies, and constitutional models.

Ibn Khaldun has exhibited a desperation born of philosophy to address the problem of governance. Similarly, when he rationalised that the Arab predicament is the imposition of the past in the present and the future, he was articulating his belief that what transpired in the past will inevitably recur in the future, and that there is no hope for human change⁴⁶. This led Gaston Bouthoul to describe Ibn Khaldun's theories as essentially being based being desperate determinism. While it is true that we discovered through his rare genius and great boldness centuries long corruption of the ruling classes prevalent throughout Arab states, but in spite of this, it did not

⁴² Ibid., p. 361.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 363.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 365.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 371.

⁴⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, chap. "Once senility has come upon a dynasty, it cannot be made to disappear". p. 245-246.

reach the level of inviting for a search for something new that can change this grim reality⁴⁷. On this note, Sharit returns once more to the weakness of political thought, which further facilitates the practices of the ruler and is responsible for the serious complications that have befallen the morality of the Arab state to this day.

Arab Society between Periodicity and Evolution

Sharit questions if Ibn Khaldun's methods form the subject of evolution and whether he realises its dimensions. He further asks if this was included in his thought in the form of passing references while researching other topics. He answers his own queries by asserting that it is arbitrary to claim that Ibn Khaldun took the subject of evolution as a specific research subject in the way modern philosophers did. However, he still managed to come up with something new for which he was preceded by none⁴⁸. Though Aristotle, the Brethren of Purity (10 Century AD), Miskawayh (d. 1030AD), Ibn Tufayl (d. 1185AD), and al-Qazwini (d. 1277AD) arranged creation in varying degrees on the scale of living organisms, their ideas did not turn to the idea of real evolution except through Ibn Khaldun. Living organisms, according to Ibn Khaldun, do not simply stagnate in their occupation of these varying degrees of creation; but rather transform themselves from one degree to another⁴⁹. Ibn Khaldun infused the idea of evolution with this element of movement, which does not move in any direction and manner it pleases, just as it does not regress; but rather continuously ascends towards a superior state. This form of evolution is fuelled by objective reasons, and is subject to the most elaborate system of ranking imaginable. Thus, the idea of evolution is composed of five elements: movement, progress, compliance to the principle of causality, a system, and finally, characterized by not stopping at the end⁵⁰. Sharit questions if those concepts of evolution may be applied on the socio-political organism of the state.

In his analysis of the nomadic and urban phases, Ibn Khaldun acknowledged the advancement of the nomadic over the urban. This is because the village is the origin of civilization, and from it extends cities. Moreover, the origin of all actions is necessity and that which completes it is a branch thereof. This precedence, according to Ibn Khaldun, does not occur innocently, but human will clearly intervenes. Urbanisation is the goal to which the nomad aspires, whereas the urbanite does not accept a return to the past. Thus, develops the state according to Ibn Khaldun from the stage of nomadism, which is dominated by '*asabiyyah*' and which was capable of subjugating neighbouring tribes that were less in number and strength (leadership stage), to the stage of monopolising glory, supporting the king, and dispensing with the '*asabiyyah*' that constituted its first stimulant (the stage of kingship), to culminate in a state of extravagance and waste. In such a scenario, the ruler of the state squanders that which was gathered by his predecessors and devastates what they have built leading to the ruin of the state (the stage of collapse). Ibn Khaldun refers to this condition as follows:

Once group feeling has established superiority over the people who share (in that particular group feeling), it will, by its very nature, seek superiority over people of other group feelings unrelated to the first. If the one (group feeling) is the equal of the other or is able to stave off (its challenge), the (competing people) are even with and equal to each other. (In this case,) each group feeling maintains its sway over its own domain and people, as is the case with tribes and nations all over the earth. However, if the one group feeling overpowers the other and makes it subservient to itself, the two group feelings enter into close contact, and the (defeated) group feeling gives added power to the (victorious) group feeling, which, as a result, sets its goal of superiority and domination higher than before. In this way, it goes on until the power of that particular group feeling equals the power of the ruling dynasty. Then, when the ruling dynasty grows senile and no defender arises from among its friends who share in its group feeling, the (new group feeling) takes over and deprives the ruling dynasty of its power, and, thus, obtains complete royal authority⁵¹.

Ibn Khaldun excelled in his rendition of the ethics of the state; illustrating how those with authority acquired morals created by the conditions of each stage unsuitable for other phases. The state develops from seizing power and authority from the ruler, to a stage of monopolising glory, then to the stage of emptiness and meekness in order to gain the fruits of the king, then to the stage of being content with submitting to the customs of predecessors; finally completing its development with a stage of extravagance and waste, expediting its ruin⁵². However, Sharit is of the view that this idea does not mean evolution in its true sense as in to progress

⁴⁷ Sharit, *al-Fikr*, p. 386.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

⁴⁹ The periodization and the connection of the living worlds in Ibn Khaldun's thought is significantly different from today theory of evolution.

⁵⁰ Sharit, *al-Fikr*, p. 391.

⁵¹ Ibn Khaldun. *The Muqaddimah*. p.108.

⁵² Sharit, *al-Fikr*, p. 399.

from one stage to its superior, rather the Khaldunian concept of state follows the cycle of maturation, which is characteristic of human life (childhood, youth, maturity, aging and old age). This is an inevitable cycle and is not an intended development. While it is true that Ibn Khaldun worked hard to demonstrate the element of movement from one phase to another, a progression towards completeness, its compliance to the principle of causality, in so long as *'asabiyyah* is directed towards the king. The ethics of the kings and their consequences are what drive us to extinction, not to mention the system that is constantly repeated from one stage to another. However, this material evolution is in reality a moral setback and a backwards regression, not a forward advancement. The state remains faithful to the principle of lasting change after the stage of kingship, however from the moral perspective, corruption and decay are associated with this stage as opposed to mental maturity and perfection thereby leading to a better future⁵³.

In this manner, Sharit opines that the concept of periodicity reached by Ibn Khaldun has intellectual and cognitive worth and has occupied the minds of the twentieth century. Scientists continue to observe in the physical universe Ibn Khaldun's observations on the emergence and advancement of the state, as well as its weakness and collapse. His theories enable us to predict and therefore control. This is the point for which Sharit criticised Ibn Khaldun. He reached the concept of periodicity, but considered it inevitable in the case of the state and not subject to change. By this, he annuls the human ability and will for continuous improvement and his ability to change the course of events⁵⁴.

Discussion and Analysis

According to Sharit Islam provides the Arab state with the ethical principles absent from the Greco-Roman civilizations. However, it moved in a direction that was neither Islamic, Greek nor Roman. It continues to be a state without principles to direct it or laws to protect it with exception to the first forty years of Islamic history. The foregoing clearly explains Ibn Khaldun's analysis of the reality of the Arab state in its legal dimension, and its sole commitment to reality based on ignorant practices that were characteristic of authority before Islam. These ignorant practices led Ibn Khaldun to discuss schisms in the Arab state. It is formed on the absence of religious or rational principles that unite its ranks and give it one voice. Moreover, its adoption of *'asabiyyah* significantly contributed to its division. This is because the cohesion and unity of purpose prior to achieving power is quickly replaced by the rush to power, and the usurpation of its blessings, which lead to division and conflict, as well as the acceleration of the state's ruin. Ibn Khaldun concludes that economic and fiscal problems had a significant impact on the ethics of the state, whereby the growth of Islamic conquest and the flow of spoils led governing authorities to a scramble for wealth. This additionally led to many class equity grievances that deepened the gap between the ruler and their subjects, and contributed significantly to the general deterioration of the economic and social environments.

In his discussion of the problem of finance, Ibn Khaldun accurately describes the ethics of the rulers as ranging from austerity and luxury. He dedicated great care to the phenomenon of luxury, which surpassed other countries and took a profound, rapid and continuous toll on the Arab state. In addition, Ibn Khaldun analysed the relationship of the Arab state with the outbreak of internal revolutions that played a major role in the erosion of the state. This dialectical argument between the luxury of the state and chaotic society is not conducive for development according to Ibn Khaldun. Rather, it quickly leads to aimless circularity. Each state emerges from austerity and ends in luxury and decadence, followed by another state originating from the same source only to end up with the same fate.

Through this perspective, Sharit concludes that a critical view of the reality and nature of contemporary Arab societies reveals that its components have not changed significantly from the Ibn Khaldun's time and the diagnoses contained in his *Muqaddimah*. These communities continue to be based on tribal, clan, sectarian and ethnic partisanship. Similarly, the struggle for power and dominance remain the law that governs its destiny. Over the second half of the twentieth century, Arab societies have journeyed along the path of the Arab national project to build state and society. This project however, has failed. Whether in a unitary state or region, partisanship has returned in force, causing the concepts of Ibn Khaldun to once again occupy Arab minds as the course of events have lent his concepts credibility.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

Along a related parallel, it is worthy of note that Sharit differed fundamentally from his contemporary Malek Bennabi in regards to the interpretation and adaptation of Khaldunian theory, though they both sought the same ends, both being geared towards sweeping reform. For that matter, we find that Sharit's interpretation of Khaldunian theory is far more methodically analytical, and comprehensive, encompassing a wide range of the issues, which Ibn Khaldun brought to bear. This is at odds however, with Bennabi's approach to intellectual reform and political theory by means of building upon a selection of Ibn Khaldun's concepts, with focus on society, intellectualism and the creative ethos; lacking the depth of engagement found within Sharit's discourse.

While Bennabi's thought may be characterized by a more conceptual bent, it may be noted that primarily speaking a distinguishing point between the two contemporaries is in that Bennabi was more included towards analyses and assessment on the basis of a Khaldunian-inspired civilizational theory, while Sharit made use of a less abstract form of social scientific critical analysis that was no less influenced by Khaldunian thought. In essence, where Ibn Khaldun perceived a grand overarching cycle of nations fuelled by socio-civilizational impetus, Bennabi saw a cycle of civilizations, Khaldunian requisites, conditions and mechanisms leading to its success or wane. In effect, Bennabi's transcended Khaldun's critical insights into development and the growth of nations, culminating in his seminal works on civilization, while Sharit evaluated and critiqued Ibn Khaldun's thought in a context made all the more relevant by modern times.

For Sharit, Ibn Khaldun granted ample space for the issue of the collapse of the state and its contributing factors. From among his views, the relevant according to Sharit is the focus on the primacy of internal factors in the collapse of the state and for them to be considered a proven factor for collapse. Ibn Khaldun does not exclude foreign invasion as a factor for the demise of the state, however he suggests that such an invasion succeeds by the extent to which a state has reached a degree of disintegration wherein it becomes difficult for *'asabiyyah* to unite social and political forces, or to prepare them to confront external aggression. In this sense, Ibn Khaldun's ideas remain, according to Sharit, relevant as witnessed daily by the course of events and conflicts in the Arab world. Ibn Khaldun awarded the issues of tyranny, corruption, the monopoly of power and the imposition of taxes on masses a crucial role in the disintegration and decay of the state. He stressed that preserving the position of the king permanently requires overarching reforms that span political, social, economic and cultural dimensions. According to Sharit, this advice is needed by contemporary Arab states in a manner no less urgent than that demanded by Ibn Khaldun in his time. The recent Arab revolutions are living testimony of this.

Ibn Khaldun's unprecedented scientific and methodological observations regarding the problems of governance in Arab society in different eras and different places rendered him in the eyes of Sharit the greatest scholar to have directed sociologists on the right track for the study of social realities. His trajectory in this area was free from haphazardness and contained no improvisation or metaphysical and theological interpretations. Furthermore, his interpretations and analyses emerged from within the womb of Arab society, and were not imported from the periphery of various rational or social environments. This alerts the enlightened that human sciences, which we import from abroad without regard to our peculiar problems and realities, are akin to the import of precise and complex machinery without preparing those with the intellectual and practical training to operate them. The partial science or partial machines that are the result of our own intellectual and cultural competencies are far better than fully importing a science, or a complex device from abroad that collects dust and is altogether neglected as we have yet to perfect its use.

Ibn Khaldun has uncovered our shortcomings and our weaknesses in scientific thought. He was not afraid of one day being accused of attacking his nation, or rejecting its heritage and civilization. At this juncture, Sharit invites the elite Arab intelligentsia to refrain from concealing flaws, and colouring history for successive generations with verbal grandeur regarding nationalism, religion, language, literature and civilization, and to begin the process of intellectual maturation and adopt the courage to expose shameful and revealing truths. What afflicts Arab states today, ranging from chaos, tyranny and corruption should not be considered a setback, or a form of decay, but rather a logical continuation of a poor historical and civilizational past that needs to be overcome.

Conclusion

Setting aside Sharit's recognition of the greatness position of Ibn Khaldun, he did not hesitate to criticize him on the following: First, his position in determining the Arab reality, which he rationalised and analysed in an unprecedented fashion. Ibn Khaldun reached the middle of the road as if he did not have faith in the will of

humanity who had created miracles over the course of their lengthy civilization. Secondly, his neglect of the problems related to governance such as the problem of family, the splitting of the Arab family, the problem of slavery and the detrimental effects on morality of a privileged Arab society, in addition to the inviolable mentality regarding politics. Thirdly, his neglect of the problem of responsibility, virtue, and values and their role in politics. The material aspect of politics have dominated its morality causing Ibn Khaldun to neglect the problems of constitution and its role in curbing the moral and ethical deviation of the governing bodies, and urging them to preserve the rights of citizens, justice and social equity. Sharit nonetheless, concedes that it is not fair to criticise Ibn Khaldun's shortcomings as his ideas should be initially understood in the context of his time and era and should not be evaluated according to the cultural, historical or economic conditions of today.

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