

The Khaldunian Influence on Modern studies of civilization; Bennabi's Approach to Civilization as an Example

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The Background of the Study:



Since the publications of Samuel Huntington's now famous article "The Clash of Civilizations" (1993) the concern about civilization has been reintroduced into the debate on the world order in intellectual circles. It has enhanced the previous efforts of philosophers of history and social scientists to establish civilization studies as a distinctive field of research. It paid attention to the importance of the study of civilizations and their importance for an understanding of the global change. Furthermore, the end of the so-called Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union brought to the debate the issue of civilization studies and related questions even though the very category of "civilization" and "civilizations" had been avoided by most intellectual and political circles until recently.

In this context, many researchers and scholars called for the review and re-examination of the works of those leading civilizationists (Sanderson, 1995: 15) among the historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and philosophers who explored, at length, issues such as the causes, emergence, rise, interactions, achievements, rise, interactions,

achievements, decline, and fall of civilizations. The list of those leading civilizationists includes among others, Ibn Khaldun (732-808AH/ 1332-1406AD), Comte (1798-1857), Spangler (1880-1936 AD), Weber (1864- 1920AD), Durkheim (1858-1917AD), Toynbee (1889-1975AD), Sorokin (1889-1968AD), Kroeber (1876

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1960AD), Braudel (1902-1985AD) etc (Huntington, 1996, 40).

As for the Muslim World, since the early twentieth century there were efforts to view history from a civilizational perspective. Among the leading thinkers and leaders of those efforts, Malek Bennabi (1905-1973) a thinker of profound ideas, and leading Muslim Algerian intellectual, stands as one of the civilizationists who has been considered as the most distinctive Muslim thinker since Ibn Khaldun (Jad'ân 1988: 416).

He also stood as one of the few original thinkers who have succeeded in making remarkably systematic contributions. He set out in search of the universal laws and fundamental principles that govern human societies and civilizations and determine their destiny in history.

From the 1940's until his death in 1973 he wrote numerous books and articles providing penetrating insights into the philosophy of history, sociology, social and historical change and pressing cultural and civilizational issues which have engaged prominent thinkers of all ages as well as different cultural traditions.

However, the central theme of Bennabi's thought was always the study of civilization, in general, and the attempt to provide solutions to

the state of the Muslim civilization in particular. In other words, the state of Muslim civilization was the starting point for Bennabi to study civilization and to theorize about this issue.

Since his early years, Bennabi was attracted by the stagnation that the Muslims have been suffering from. Therefore, he was involved in many intellectual and activist movements and efforts to reactivate the civilizing process in the Muslim world. However, the various efforts made by various quarters seemed to Bennabi as fruitless because of the lack of clear vision and a methodology to approach the matter.

As asserted by many, Bennabi directed his efforts to reactivate the dynamism of Muslim civilization by developing his approach to the study of civilization in general and Muslim civilization, in particular. While many activists and intellectuals tended to resolve the present dilemma of the Muslim world in terms of economics, or politics or ideology, he emphasized the role of ideas as the catalyst behind the growth of civilization. That is because civilization, as Bennabi maintains, is not an accumulation, but rather a construction and architecture (Ibrahim, 1991).

Drawing upon a deep understanding of Islam, a sound assimilation of the insights of the social sciences and a proper grasp of the dynamics of human society and history, Bennabi adopted an etiologically approach that allowed him to gain considerable insights into the performance of human societies and the workings and dynamics of culture and civilization seen from a universal perspective (Bariun, 1993: ix).

He had directed all his efforts to resolve the societal problems within the framework of civilization. In other words, he considered civilization as the intelligible unit with which to study the sociohistorical phenomena. In this regard, he viewed civilization as the core of any study of human conditions in their short term or long-term scales. He said:

"The problem of every people, in its essence, is that of its civilization. And it is not possible for any people to comprehend and resolve its problem, if it does not elevate its thought and capacities to the level of the great human affairs and speculate deeply in order to understand the factors which construct and deconstruct the civilizations" (Bennabi, 1981: 19).

Any reader who becomes acquainted with Bennabi's treatise on civilization will find that the

vocabulary and ideas of his thought are a mixture of and a result of the examination of the works of many leading thinkers and may not be totally new if taken from a partial perspective. This does not mean, however, that his ideas are drawn from the existing sources and put side by side as heterogeneous elements. Bennabi's thought is, indeed, an organized totality, or a system into which all concepts, terms and ideas, whatever their origin, have been integrated with an entirely systematic interpretation.

The previous passage does not imply Bennabi's total distinctiveness. Rather, it suggests looking for the common elements that he shares with the other figures of civilizationist thought.

Compared to other thinkers and civilizationists, Bennabi's approach to civilization still needs to be analyzed and deeply understood. It is still not fully uncovered and implemented. He has, especially, developed his approach to civilization to present a diagnosis of the phenomena that dominate the contemporary Muslim world and explain their origins and how to get rid of them as phenomena of backwardness (Talbi, 1991: 1). The latter suggests that Bennabi's approach to the different issues related to the study of civilization and its course in history has a great



importance in the intellectual milieu for the diagnosis of the Muslim civilizational crisis.

As mentioned previously, although Bennabi's work has been available in French and Arabic since the late 1950s, his ideas or methodological approach to the study of the various problems of Muslim civilization, seldom received serious scholarly attention before the 1980s ('Ārif, 1993: 252). In many instances, he was rather misunderstood and even sometimes misrepresented by different and conflicting ideological quarters (Bennabi, 1998: 9-10 from the introduction by the translator).

Some of those who are interested in his thought consider him as a writer, thinker, and probably the first social philosopher and social scientist the Muslim world has seen since the time of Ibn Khāldun (Rachid, 1978:12). Others consider him a "philosopher-visionary for the entire *Umma*" whose concern about the decadence of the Muslim civilization led him to analyze the causes of the decay and to provide solutions ('Ārif, 1993).

Despite these later acknowledgments, it has been those aspects of Bennabi's work which do not reflect the depth of his thought that have caught the attention of the reader. Accordingly, issues of culture, civilization, the cyclical

conception of historical development and social change, and the relevance of all these to the present and immediate preoccupations of Muslims have been at the centre of attention for most of the writings about him. However, little heed, if any, has been given to the fundamental theoretical and methodological framework underlying Bennabi's treatment of such issues.

In other words, little and superficial consideration has been given to the roots of his approach to civilization and to the sources from which Bennabi had developed his concepts, terms, and approach. To the my humble knowledge, to date there is no such serious attempt to uncover the underlying structure of Bennabi's thought in order to understand the originality, the credibility and the authenticity of Bennabi's ideas in tackling the malaise of Muslim civilization.

In the same context, Mesawi (1991) and Hassan (1991) asserted that the significance of Bennabi's thought derives from his scientific training combined with a historical, sociological, and philosophical outlook which enabled him to fathom the depths of European civilization and gain a deep understanding of its culture as well as from his original thinking and analysis of the *Umma's* strengths

and weaknesses. Therefore, Hassan asserted that Bennabi's scope ranged over social, political, economic, moral and theological speculations (Hassan, 1991).

In this context, it is the attempt of this paper to look into one of the roots of Bennabi's approach to civilization, that is the influence of Ibn Khaldun and the Khaldunian thought and contribution to civilization studies on the ideas of Bennabi.

Accordingly, the following passages are an examination of Ibn Khaldun's contribution to the study of civilization and his impact on Bennabi's thought, and particularly, the latter's approach to civilization.

Ibn Khaldun's Contribution to the Study of Civilization:

In his *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun has pioneered the endeavour of investigating the history for detecting its laws and patterns. His study of the nature of society and social change led him to evolve what was a new science, which he called '*ilm al-'umran*, the science of civilization. ((Lacoste, 1984: 142; Khalifa, 1972: 1; al-Husari, 1961: 175-177; Ritzer, 1994: 28-29; Richter, 1984: 240).

With Ibn Khaldun, a shift in the study of human conditions has occurred. He was aware of the patterns governing the movement of human conditions in history.

Furthermore, he perceived that the mere chronicling of events was best a beginning task to the historian. However, what was needed was

In the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun developed an important study of history. He shifted the study of history from mere chronicling of events to an explanation and identification of the patterns of change in history (*Tabaddul*) (Ibn Khaldun, 1986: 1/58).

He was acquainted with the basic principles of analysing the civilizing and decivilizing processes. As Lauer put it, those principles are the following:

"(1) The social phenomena follow lawful patterns: (2) The laws are operative at the societal level, (3) the laws of the social process must be discovered through gathering much data and observing relationships among the variables, (4) similar social laws are operative in societies that are structurally similar, (5) societies are characterized by change, (6) and the laws that apply to the change are sociological, not biological or physical, in nature" (Lauer, 1991: 35).

Furthermore, his study of history was first conceptualised through the use of "the states and dynasties" as the intelligible unites of analysis. Through the study of states, he



developed his concepts of the stages and cycle.

Relying on his own experience and his knowledge of Muslim history, he found that states throughout Muslim history come and go and every one has followed cyclical life span that undertakes stages from birth to death (al-Wardi, 1977: 180).

Therefore, he conceptualised the life cycle (birth, growth, and death) as universal pattern and common to all organisms (Ibn Khaldun, 1995: 158-160 & 1986: 1/343-346). Therefore, he applied this pattern to the life span of the state (Dynasty) which is an organism that born and goes through life cycle, ending with the decline and death. And because the state consists of humans as its members, thus, its life span is affected by their life period. Thus, the state would live for three generations, each generation being equal to the age of an individual reaches its mature age (forty years) (Ibn Khaldun, 1995: 195 & 1986: 1/344).

For Ibn Khaldun, the state witnesses three stages in its life span; the stage of birth, the stage of development, and lastly the stage of disintegration (Ibn Khaldun, 1995: 160 & 1986: 1/346).

Ibn Khaldun did not maintain his division of the number of stages, because when he came to discuss

the three stages of birth, development and disintegration he discussed four stages as the following;

Firstly, the first generation is the founding generation which is the Bedouin generation where the primitive and the Bedouin life characterize the stage. The '*Asabiyyah*' (*) is still at its zenith and the '*Asabiyyah*' members (the tribe) still adheres to the tribal customs and its simple life. The members of the '*Asabiyyah*' share the power and the glory (Ibn Khaldun, 1995: 159 & 1986: 1/344-345).

Secondly, is the second generation which witnesses the advent of the sedentary life and takes over the place of the simple Bedouin life. The members of the '*Asabiyyah*' shift, gradually, from the state of hardship to well established life and continue developing the state until they reach the luxury and fertility. Therefore, they move from sharing spirit to the absolutism of the ruler (Ibn Khaldun, 1995: 159 & 1986: 1/344-345).

After that the '*asabiyyah*' starts losing its motivating power and its bounding feature and witnesses the beginning of its fracture. However, its members maintain many features of the first stage because of what they catch up from the previous generation and saw their situation as



well as their adherence to the spirit of *'Asabiyyah*. Although they lost some characteristics of the first generation, they were still keen to reclaim the glories of the predecessors (Ibn Khaldun, 1985: 159 & 1986: 1/345).

Thirdly, the third generation witnesses that the members of *'Asabiyyah* forget totally the Bedouin life with its characteristics and they forget also the motives of bravery and courage. The spirit of enjoying luxury life reaches its culmination in this generation. The luxury culture spreads and the society enters into extravagant life styles that are oriented toward comfort and self-indulgence.

The spirit of solidarity which *'asabiyyah* offers will lose its bounding and motivating force. Therefore, the members of the society become cowards and unable to defend their society against the enemies. Consequently, the ruler uses others instead of his *'asabiyyah* members to defend the state and thus, the state starts dying.

Fourthly, it is the age of the fourth generation in which the lineage link disappears, the *'Asabiyyah* disintegrates and the state defeated and collapses.

It is interesting, here, to mention that Ibn Khaldun firstly divided the life span into three general generations. But, when he discussed

the features of every generation he added the fourth one. However, with some analysis of the fourth generation, it denotes that it is not generation to be added to the previous. Instead of that, it is mere extension of the third one.

Furthermore, in accordance with the four generations, Ibn Khaldun divided the process of civilization, in his terms; the state, into five stages. Besides, those generations are intertwined with five phases or stages of the state. They start by the birth stage that corresponds to the first generation, the domination and luxury stages which correspond to the second generation, the beginning of decline stage which corresponds to the third generation, until the stage of decline which corresponds to the fourth generation (Ibn Khaldun, 1995: 163-165 & 1986: 1/353-355).

Ibn Khaldun's cycle of the states and dynasties would not be understood without his concept of *'Asabiyyah* which he considered as the force that motivates the historical change, he elaborated the idea of *'Asabiyyah* as the major motivating force of the rise, growth and disintegration of dynasties and states.

However, Ibn Khaldun was of the view that the *'Asabiyyah* alone does not create considerable development, which means that in

order for the group to maintain dominance and build a big dynasty, it needs also the religious idea (Ibn Khaldun, 1995: 147).

For Ibn Khaldun, the *'Asabiyyah*, in the beginning of the state building helps to bound the members of the group to each other and make them defend the state. However, because the *'Asabiyyah* has two aspects; bounding aspect and competing aspect, it needs the religious idea. The latter prevents people from self-profit competition and mutual envy between people and guides the efforts towards the truth (Ibn Khaldun, 1995: 147 & 1986: 1/320).

In addition, the religious idea would not accomplish its objectives without the presence of the *'asabiyyah* which supports and carries as well as defends it. For Ibn Khaldun, it was the case of all prophets who depended on groups and families, though Allah (God) supported them with any thing in existence (Ibn Khaldun, 1995: 148).

At this point of discussion of Ibn Khaldun's contribution to the study of civilization it is important to conclude with saying that the quest of universal patterns in history, the idea of cyclical movement of dynasties and states and the notion of *'Asabiyyah* were the leading ideas which made a clear contribution to civilization study by Ibn Khaldun,

and thus have their importance in Bennabi's approach to civilization.

Ibn Khaldun's Impact on Bennabi's Approach:

Bennabi's connection with Ibn Khaldun could be traced back to his early age. It was in his secondary school when he came into contact with *The Muqaddimah*. However, that relationship had developed along his entire intellectual career, especially after he confined his entire life to the study of the civilization. Thus, he was, like Ibn Khaldun, concerned with the study of civilization as phenomenon that should be treated in an analytical method to uncover its patterns (Bennabi, 1981: 71).

It is also the agreement among many scholars who regard Bennabi as the second Ibn Khaldun in his ideas, method and concern (Jad'aan, 1988: 416; Bariun, 1993: 115; al-Khatib, 1993: 53). Besides, Bennabi acknowledged Ibn Khaldun's contribution to the development of philosophy of history, especially the idea of the cyclical movement of civilization. He proclaimed also that Ibn Khaldun is the genius who discovered the pattern of history and the father founder and master of Arab Sociology in the middle ages. Furthermore, he indebted some of his core ideas to Ibn Khaldun (Bennabi, 1981: 49; 1984: 20).

He contends that Ibn Khaldun was the first historian who discovered the logic of historical development of history. That is because before Ibn Khaldun, Bennabi asserts, "the history was a kind of continuity of series of events", but Ibn Khaldun had given "a new perspective to history, since he linked history with the idea of causality that denotes his awareness about the meaning of continuity of events" (Bennabi, 1984: 27 & 1981: 62).

Beside the idea of causality in history which attracted Bennabi to Ibn Khaldun's thought, the notion of the cycle of civilization was another point which attracted Bennabi's attention and criticism of Ibn Khaldun.

In his *Islam in History and Society*, Bennabi sees that it was Ibn Khaldun who, inspired probably by Islamic psychological factors, "disentangles the notion of cycle in his theory of the three generations" (Bennabi, 1988: 7). Moreover, Bennabi was of the view that Ibn Khaldun's notion of the cycle of civilization raises two points;

First, Ibn Khaldun was bounded by such political terms that reduced his pioneer ideas. Therefore, the terminology "masks the profoundness of the idea by reducing the dimensions of a

civilization to the scale of the dynasty" (Bennabi, 1988: 7).

Second, although Ibn Khaldun's term of '*Asabiyyah*' is narrow; it invites us to emphasize the transitory aspect of civilization. The use of '*Asabiyyah*' and the interpretation of the movement of rise and fall of dynasties, although it reduced the dimensions of a civilization to one of its products, it carried in its womb a profound idea of the transitory or the cyclical course of civilization (Bennabi, 1988: 7).

In this regard, a full approach to civilization was hidden and masked by the lack of terminology in Ibn Khaldun's time. As Bennabi asserts in the following quotation:

"It was possible for Ibn Khaldun to be the first one who could be capable to extricate the pattern of the historical and civilisational movement. Unfortunately, the terminology of his age stopped him at one of the products of civilization, which is the state, instead of civilization itself. Consequently, we did not find in what Ibn Khaldun has left except a theory about the development of state, whilst, it was useful if his theory presented to us the development of civilization itself" (Bennabi, 1981: 62).

In Bennabi's view, the notion of the cyclical movement opens the

door of examination of the course in its both processes of rise and fall as well as the conditions of both. It allows also the discussion not only of the conditions of progressive development but also the factors of decline; Although Ibn Khaldun did not perceive a complete method to approach the phenomenon of civilization (Bennabi, 1988: 8).

In other words, Bennabi's attitude towards Ibn Khaldun has two aspects; first he was influenced by Ibn Khaldun's general approach to the historical change and his quest for universal terms to understand the course of civilization. Second, Bennabi differed from Ibn Khaldun in many points.

While Ibn Khaldun used the state as the intelligible unite of socio-historical study, Bennabi went beyond the use of "state" which he considered as a product of civilization to use civilization itself as unite of historical study, although there is no doubt that among the sources of Bennabi's notion of cyclical movement of civilization was the Ibn Khaldun's (Bennabi, 1991: 172).

Moreover, while Ibn Khaldun gave specific life span for the state, Bennabi left it open with focus on the dynamism and transitory nature of civilization (Bennabi, 1981: 98 & 1989: 23).

The other leading idea, which seems that Bennabi was influenced by Ibn Khaldun, is the notion of the motivating force that gives the birth to the civilizing process, although they differ about its meaning.

Ibn Khaldun sees that human civilization in its motion has patterns and follows constant laws. Those patterns he called *Tabai' al-'Umran*, patterns of civilization (Ibn Khaldun, 1995: 42 & 1986: 1/76). Therefore, those changes occur throughout history have motivating force behind them. The latter he called *'Asabiyyah* which is psychosocial bond that ties the members of the group and based on kinship or common religion (Ibn Khaldun, 1995: 146 & 1986: 1/319).

However, Bennabi used the notion of religious idea, which he developed, upon his evaluation and study of the anthropological and historical recordings. In addition to the Qur'an, the archaeological findings, for Bennabi, were among the main sources that helped him to establish his idea of the presence of religion in the historical development of human civilization. Bennabi's examination of the history of civilizations helped him to postulate the religious idea as the motivator of the civilizing process (Bennabi, 1986: 198 & 1983: 69).

Another point, which their views differ about, was whether the

historical process of rise and fall of civilizations is open or determined. It seems from close analysis of Ibn Khaldun's conception of cyclical movement of dynasty and his analogy of the age of the state with humans that he was determinist. He postulated a civilization as the culmination of the process of growth of the dynasty or the state that, in turn, marks the beginning of the unavoidable end.

Ibn Khaldun's organicist view led him to consider that humans and dynasties have the same life span, although their durations may differ according to the conjunctions. However, he considered the life span that he conceptualised as a rule which no dynasty may go beyond. If the dynasty reaches the fourth stage, the decline becomes unavoidable and the resume of the growth cannot happen (Ibn Khaldun, 1986: 1/343, 346 & 1995: 165).

Bennabi on the other hand, rejected the determinist view of history. He was of the view that the social phenomena were not like the physical phenomena. He saw the historical movement as patterned movement. However, the latter does not mean a deterministic view of history. Rather, those patterns governing the sociohistorical phenomena do not present us with any kind of absolute determinism.

They pose on the human will a certain challenge to which he has to respond creatively in order to liberate himself from a narrowly conceived causality (Saeed: 1993: 20; from Bennabi's introduction to Saeed's book).

Upon his evaluation of Ibn Khaldun's conception of determinist view of history, Bennabi saw that Ibn Khaldun's conceptions although it opened our minds to see the transitory and dynamic aspect of civilization, he formulated it in such organic phenomena.

Accordingly, he was of the view that in biological process the internal contradictions lead the being to its development and then to its disintegration. However, in the social phenomena this fatality is limited or rather conditioned, because the direction and the term of evolution depend on the psychotemporal factors on which an organized society could, in a certain measure, act by regulating its life and pursuing certain ends in a coherent manner (Bennabi, 1988: 7-8 & 1989: 28).

In other words, whatever the existential conditions of a society, they can be traced to the psyche of its members (Mesawi, 1998: 156). If those members could change their realm of ideas according to their religious ideal, they would be able to enter into civilizing process. In

this regard, we can understand Bennabi's assertion on the primacy of ideas as well as the postulation of the human as the premiere device of civilization. Thus, for Bennabi, the change in human souls is priori to any sociohistorical change of the human condition and there is no determination in historical change.

To conclude with, it seems that the most influential Khaldunian idea on Bennabi's approach is Ibn Khaldun's general way of thinking, general approach, and the notion of cyclical movement of civilization. The latter helped Bennabi to understand the presence of causes and patterns in history and the transitory aspect of civilization.

Table1: Comparison between Bennabi and Ibn Khaldun.

The ideas	Bennabi	Ibn Khaldun
Motivator	Religious idea	Mainly the 'Assabiyyah + religion
Determinism	Non determinist	Determinist
Types of Society	Natural society Historical society	Bedouin Sedentary
The causes of decline	The breakdown of social relations network, the breakdown of the religious idea from its ideal, the colonizability	Luxury, The decline of 'Asabiyyah, the absence of the religious restraint (Wazi')
Stages	Pre-civilized, civilized, post-civilized	Three generations: birth, growth, Death

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- (*) 'Asabiyyah is the tribe feelings or ties that bound the members of the same tribe. However, it may mean also the group feeling as could be understood from reading the content of the *Muqaddimah*.
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