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Alatas, S. *Applying Ibn Khaldun: The Recovery of a lost Tradition in Sociology*. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.

In this book, Professor Sayed Alatas attempts to merge the contributions of scholar and historian Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406)—particularly Khaldun’s invention of the science of *Umran* (or the “science of social organization”)—into modern sociology. Alatas’ efforts open the door to the discussion of two important controversial issues: (1) the fact that neither Arab nor Western scholars give Ibn Khaldun’s contribution to modern sociology adequate attention, which is reflected in sociology courses across universities today and (2) determining the best means of incorporating heritage notions and themes (like those of Khaldun’s *Umran*) into modern sciences. Alatas¹ is a professor of sociology at the National University of Singapore, and his study reflects his affiliation with the South Asian Social Science Department’s interest in the Islamic heritage and texts of Islamic civilization. This interest is widespread in Malaysia and Singapore and produced many of the civilizational Islamic studies in many fields of social science.

At the beginning of his book, Alatas presents some basic information about Ibn Khaldun, including his biography, his experience, and his works. Alatas outlines his own approach in focusing on the elaboration of general Khaldunian sociology, with the aim of providing examples of systemic applications of the Khaldunian theory of state formation to specific historical cases. Alatas focuses on Khaldun’s prologue and his book of history (*Kitab Al-Abar*). In his first chapter, Alatas presents Khaldun’s scientific project of “the establishment of the science of history,” in which Khaldun decided to transform the practice of collecting history from that of collecting uninvestigated tales to a science based on investigation and the correction of any historical tales that could not be verified. Khaldun wrote his prologue to explain his approach of studying history; in his prologue, he coined and applied theories that he referred to as the science of human society. His prologue includes five main elements of this (then-new) science: (1) *Al-Umran*, meaning ‘the development’ (2) *Al-Umran Al-Badawi*, meaning ‘the Bedouin development’ (3) the state, (4) *Al-Umran Al-Hadari*, meaning the ‘urban development’ and (5) “crafts,” referring to ways of living and occupation. Alatas considers Khaldun’s main contribution to be his “theory of state formation”—though Khaldun’s contribution to the modern sciences is arguably more comprehensive than this and could be said to include his approach to the writing of the history of civilization and human society, including its political, economic, cultural, and religious elements. Alatas focuses on the subsequent application of this political theory to the study of human society in general, setting the stage for the founding of modern sociology. Khaldun attempted to write a comprehensive, accurate, and scientific history for human society in the Maghribian region, and he presented human society and its history as a multifaceted entity that included political, economic, cultural, and religious elements (although for unclear reasons Khaldun did not write explicitly about this multifaceted-ness). He wrote only about the political history of the Maghribian region in his book (*Kitab Al Abar*)², and he did not build upon the approach he laid out in the prologue.³

¹ Alatas has traveled to many Arab and Islamic countries. In addition to his readings of the works of Western scholars studies about Ibn Khaldun, Alatas has checked out many of the studies written about Ibn Khaldun by scholars in these countries. These readings, together, gave him a panoramic map of the studies of Ibn Khaldun’s texts.

² Hassan Osman. *The Methodology of History Research*. Dar El Maaraf, Cairo, 2000, P. 145.

³ Ibn Khaldun did not apply the methodology he suggested in his prologue in writing his book of history. “*Kitab Al- Abar*” was similar to many of previous books that were written about the history before Ibn Khaldun. He committed some mistakes that he criticized in his prologue. One of the major weaknesses in “*Kitab Al-Abar*” is that Ibn Khaldun focused only on the political history of the Maghrib, he did not apply his theory about the rise and decline of states, which included the wealth role in the formation of the states and the maintenance of them.

Alatas then presents Khaldun's approach to interpreting the rise and fall of states. Khaldun used a multidisciplinary methodology that included political, economic, cultural, and religious dimensions. Khaldun also submitted one of the most efficient interpretive models of the movement of history, especially in the Islamic world. This model focused mainly on six factors: (1) religion, or "The Law of Life" *El Shariah*, (2) the human being, *El Insan (Asabiyyah)*, (3) political authority, *al-mulk*, (4) the value of justice, *al-adl*, (5) development, and (6) wealth, *al-mal*.

Alatas believes that Khaldun's theory of political economy needs another variation, however, to be most effective (and to be included in modern sociology). Khaldun wrote about the political economy of the Maghribian regimes in order to present better explanation of the rise and fall of dynasties. Alatas further integrated into Khaldun's theory of political economy the Marxist and Weberian concepts of modes of production and the relations between coexisting modes of production.

In doing so, Alatas paved the way for integrating Khaldunian concepts with those of neo-Khaldunian theory. Alatas took some steps to do this as follows: (1) He located Khaldun's position within the field of modern sociology; (2) he prepared a detailed description of Western studies interested in Khaldun's literature; (3) he criticized the marginalization of Khaldun in modern sociology and university courses; (4) he assessed Khaldun's theory of the formation of the state; and (5) he submitted a literature review of pre-modern readings on Ibn Khaldun's ideas. Finally, Alatas examined the Khaldunian narrative of state formation with respect to the rise and fall of the state in Morocco and pointed out the weaknesses in the Khaldunian narrative and suggested the need for modes of production. However, according to many studies, Ibn Khaldun himself realized the role of economic factors in the formation (and fall) of states. Certainly, it should be noted that when he referred to "wealth," he did not have developed ideas about the political economies theorized by the likes of Marx and Weber, but he did not overlook the role of economy in his analysis.⁴

Alatas integrated four modes of production in the Khaldunian theory to provide the political economic background for understanding the rise and fall of the state. Every mode of production consists of the relations of production and its forces, as follows: (1) The Asiatic mode: The entire economic surplus is appropriated by the state, and the state is the legal owner of lands and manufacturing property. (2) The prebendal feudal mode: The central feature of this mode is that the fief was granted by the lord to a vassal in return for military services, as was the case in Europe. (3) The petty commodity mode: In this mode, production for the market is carried out by producers, who own their means of production; in this mode, the production is for the purpose of exchange. (4) The pastoral nomadic mode: The means of production consist of certain species of domestic animals and land unsuitable for cultivation. Alatas provides these four modes, with detailed explanation of each one, and used them to explain the political economy in four case studies, two historical ("The Ottoman State" and "The Safavid State"), and two contemporary cases ("The Syrian State," and "The Saudi State"). Alatas submitted each case with unique analysis in the neo-Khaldunian framework, and he discussed the political economy of each case using comparative analysis of some other studies of the political economy of each case. He thus developed a major element in the Khaldunian cycle by focusing on the political economy role in this cycle (beside *Al-Assabiya* and religion).

⁴ M. Umer Chapra. "Ibn Khaldun's Theory of Development: Does it help explain the low performance of the present day Muslim World?" delivered at the Harvard University Forum on "Islamic Finance into the 21st Century", held on 9-10 October 1998 and published in the Proceedings of the Forum, MA: Harvard University, Cambridge, 1999.

This book represents a unique experience of trying to develop intellectual heritage and integrate it into modern history. Irrespective of the two micro-reservations pointed out above about Ibn Khaldun (namely, not using the approach he built when he wrote the history book, and the limitations that his recognition of the role of wealth in the formation state would have had, given the limited economic theories prevalent at that time), Professor Alatas overtook the traditional debates about Ibn Khaldun, and the ideological functioning of his heritage in the Arab and Islamic world. Alatas submitted a model of studying Khaldunian heritage to enrich modern sociology by submitting the contribution of a non-western thinker like Ibn Khaldun. These contributions will increase the interpretative ability of modern sociology to explain, study, and analyze the social phenomena in Arab and Islamic countries.

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