

## **Ibn Khaldun and the Foundations of Classical Islamic Sociology: 'Umrān, 'Asabiyyah, Social Change, and Political Authority**

**Azza Shoumu**

Universitas Islam Negeri Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung, Indonesia

Corresponding Email: [azzashoumulq1@gmail.com](mailto:azzashoumulq1@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRAK**

Sejarah intelektual sosiologi secara konvensional selama ini dinarasikan melalui kemunculan teori sosial Eropa pada abad kesembilan belas. Genealogi semacam ini, bagaimanapun, berisiko mengaburkan bentuk-bentuk awal penyelidikan sistematis mengenai masyarakat yang berkembang dalam tradisi intelektual lainnya. Salah satu yang paling signifikan di antaranya adalah pemikiran sosial 'Abd al-Rahmān Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406), yang melalui *Muqaddimah* mengembangkan kerangka konseptual yang luas untuk menjelaskan kehidupan manusia dalam masyarakat, solidaritas kolektif, otoritas politik, saling ketergantungan ekonomi, dan transformasi peradaban. Artikel ini mengkaji kembali pemikiran sosial Ibn Khaldūn sebagai suatu bentuk teori sosial Islam klasik yang memiliki koherensi internal, bukan sekadar sebagai padanan awal dari sosiologi modern. Dengan menggunakan penelitian kepustakaan kualitatif dan pendekatan deskriptif-interpretatif, penelitian ini merekonstruksi hubungan antara 'ilm al-'umrān, 'asabiyyah, *badāwah*, *ḥadārah*, agama, otoritas politik, dan perubahan peradaban. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa konsep-konsep tersebut membentuk suatu sistem teoretis yang bersifat relasional, bukan sekadar kumpulan konsep yang terpisah-pisah. 'Ilm al-'umrān menyediakan landasan epistemologis dan analitis untuk mengkaji pola-pola kehidupan manusia dalam masyarakat; 'asabiyyah menjelaskan pembentukan dan reproduksi kekuatan kolektif; *badāwah* dan *ḥadārah* mengidentifikasi konfigurasi organisasi sosial yang berbeda; sementara agama dapat memperkuat sekaligus mengarahkan kembali solidaritas menuju tujuan politik dan moral yang lebih luas. Otoritas politik muncul dari kapasitas kolektif yang terorganisasi, tetapi pada saat yang sama juga mengubah kondisi-kondisi sosial yang menopangnya. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa Ibn Khaldūn tidak seharusnya direduksi secara sederhana sebagai "bapak sosiologi" dalam pengertian kronologis, tetapi juga tidak semestinya dikeluarkan dari sejarah pemikiran sosiologis hanya karena sosiologi modern belum terbentuk pada masanya. Ibn Khaldūn lebih tepat dipahami sebagai salah satu teoretikus Muslim klasik terkemuka yang mengembangkan kosakata konseptual yang otonom untuk penyelidikan historis-sosiologis. Rekonstruksi semacam ini berkontribusi pada upaya kontemporer untuk memperluas perspektif dan mendekolonisasi sejarah teori sosial.

Kata kunci: Ibn Khaldūn; 'ilm al-'umrān; 'asabiyyah; teori sosial Islam; sosiologi historis; peradaban..

### **ABSTRACT**

The intellectual history of sociology has conventionally been narrated through the emergence of European social theory in the nineteenth century. Such a genealogy, however, risks obscuring earlier forms of systematic inquiry into society developed in other intellectual traditions. Among the most significant of these was the social thought of 'Abd al-Rahmān Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406), whose *Muqaddimah* developed an extensive conceptual framework for explaining human

association, collective solidarity, political authority, economic interdependence, and civilizational transformation. This article reexamines Ibn Khaldūn's social thought as an internally coherent form of classical Islamic social theory rather than simply as a premature equivalent of modern sociology. Employing qualitative library research and a descriptive-interpretive approach, the study reconstructs the relationships among 'ilm al-'umrān, 'asabiyyah, badāwah, ḥaḍārah, religion, political authority, and civilizational change. The analysis demonstrates that these concepts constitute a relational rather than a fragmented theoretical system. 'ilm al-'umrān provides the epistemological and analytical foundation for investigating patterned human association; 'asabiyyah explains the formation and reproduction of collective power; badāwah and ḥaḍārah identify differentiated configurations of social organization; while religion can intensify and redirect solidarity toward broader political and moral purposes. Political authority emerges from organized collective capacity but simultaneously transforms the social conditions that sustain it. The article argues that Ibn Khaldūn should neither be reduced to a "founder of sociology" in a simplistic chronological sense nor excluded from the history of sociological thought because modern sociology did not yet exist. He is more appropriately understood as a major classical Muslim theorist who developed an autonomous vocabulary for historical-sociological inquiry. Such a reconstruction contributes to current efforts to pluralize and decolonize the history of social theory.

**Keywords:** Ibn Khaldūn; 'ilm al-'umrān; 'asabiyyah; Islamic social theory; historical sociology; civilization.

## Introduction

The history of sociology has frequently been organized around a familiar narrative in which systematic social theory emerged primarily from nineteenth-century Europe through the writings of figures such as Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber. Although these thinkers made foundational contributions to the development of modern sociology, treating their intellectual traditions as the exclusive point of departure for systematic reflection on society produces a narrower genealogy than the historical record warrants. Social order, collective life, political authority, economic organization, and historical transformation were subjects of sustained intellectual reflection in a variety of civilizations long before sociology became an institutionalized academic discipline.

Within this broader intellectual history, Ibn Khaldūn occupies an exceptional position. Writing in the fourteenth century, he did not merely chronicle political events or transmit historical reports. He developed a conceptual framework for examining why societies emerge, how groups acquire collective power, how political authority becomes established, why civilizations become prosperous, and how the very processes associated with political consolidation and material development can contribute to subsequent decline. His *Muqaddimah* therefore represents not simply a historical introduction but an ambitious attempt to establish principles through which historical and social phenomena could be critically understood (Ibn Khaldūn, 1967; Alatas, 2006).

The importance of Ibn Khaldūn for contemporary social theory has been emphasized by scholars who have questioned the Eurocentric boundaries of the conventional sociological canon. Alatas (2006) argues that Ibn Khaldūn should be

incorporated seriously into the history of sociological thought, while his later study demonstrates that Ibn Khaldūn was encountered by European intellectuals during the formative period of modern sociology (Alatas, 2022). Ardiç (2017) similarly shows that Khaldunian scholarship has become important for reassessing the Eurocentric construction of classical social theory.

Yet the argument that Ibn Khaldūn was a “founder of sociology” can itself create a conceptual problem. The term sociology refers to a modern academic discipline with particular institutional, methodological, and epistemological characteristics. Those characteristics did not exist in fourteenth-century North Africa. To describe Ibn Khaldūn simply as an early European-style sociologist risks imposing a later disciplinary framework upon an intellectual tradition that possessed its own categories, assumptions, and objectives. The more productive question is therefore not whether Ibn Khaldūn was “really” a sociologist in the modern sense, but whether his work constitutes a systematic form of social inquiry that can legitimately enter the history and theory of sociology without being reduced to it.

This distinction is increasingly significant in contemporary debates concerning the pluralization and decolonization of social theory. Recent scholarship has emphasized that non-Western intellectual traditions should not be incorporated into the canon merely as historical “precursors” to supposedly universal European theories. Rather, they should be examined as potential sources of concepts and analytical questions in their own right. The renewed study of Ibn Khaldūn is especially relevant to this project because his work developed an elaborate vocabulary for examining collective organization, solidarity, state formation, social differentiation, religion, political authority, and civilizational change (Alatas, 2006, 2022; Ardiç, 2017).

The present article therefore proposes a relational reconstruction of Ibn Khaldūn's social thought. Rather than examining *‘ilm al-‘umrān*, *‘asabiyyah*, *badāwah*, *ḥaḍārah*, religion, and political authority as isolated concepts, it asks how these ideas operate together as components of a broader explanatory framework. The central research question is: How do Ibn Khaldūn's principal social concepts form an integrated analytical framework for explaining social organization, political authority, and civilizational transformation?

This article makes two principal contributions. First, it reconstructs Ibn Khaldūn's social concepts relationally, emphasizing their mutual dependence rather than treating them as separate doctrines. Second, it situates this reconstruction within contemporary debates concerning the history, plurality, and decolonization of sociological theory. The argument is not that Ibn Khaldūn anticipated every aspect of modern sociology. Rather, it is that he developed a distinctive form of classical Islamic social theory whose conceptual resources remain analytically significant while retaining their historical specificity.

The designation of Ibn Khaldūn as a “founder of sociology” has played an important role in introducing his ideas to modern readers. Nevertheless, the designation

becomes problematic when interpreted as a claim of simple chronological priority. Modern sociology emerged from a specific institutional and intellectual context involving industrialization, secularization, bureaucratic state formation, capitalism, urbanization, and the development of modern universities. Ibn Khaldūn operated within a very different intellectual and historical environment.

The appropriate comparison therefore concerns analytical problems rather than disciplinary identity. Ibn Khaldūn investigated many questions that remain central to sociology: How is social cohesion produced? Why do groups acquire political power? How does authority become institutionalized? What happens to solidarity when societies become materially prosperous? How are political institutions related to social structures? And why do political orders transform or decline?

Alatas (2006) argues that the marginalization of Ibn Khaldūn from conventional sociological histories reflects a broader problem in the construction of sociological knowledge. Non-Western thinkers have often been treated as objects of historical interest rather than as contributors to social theory. This distinction is important because the issue is not merely one of adding another name to an established canon. It concerns the criteria by which intellectual contributions are recognized as theoretical.

Ibn Khaldūn's relevance therefore lies in the conceptual autonomy of his work. His social analysis was not derivative of modern European sociology because it preceded the latter by several centuries. At the same time, it should not be transformed retrospectively into an exact equivalent of contemporary sociology. The more historically defensible position is to understand his work as an independent intellectual formation that can enter into dialogue with modern social theory.

Recent scholarship reinforces this interpretation. Alatas (2022) shows that Ibn Khaldūn was not merely rediscovered retrospectively but entered European discussions during sociology's formative period. Consequently, his reception becomes part of the history of sociology, while his original theoretical framework remains historically distinct.

The study of Ibn Khaldūn also raises a broader epistemological question: whether social theory should be understood as the product of a single intellectual genealogy. Ardiç (2017) emphasizes that contemporary Khaldunian studies have contributed to questioning Eurocentric assumptions about classical social theory. This does not require rejecting European social theory. Rather, it requires recognizing that concepts for understanding society have emerged from multiple historical settings.

This approach is particularly relevant to Islamic studies because Islamic intellectual traditions did not separate history, politics, ethics, theology, economics, and social inquiry according to the institutional divisions characteristic of contemporary universities. Ibn Khaldūn's work reflects this intellectual interconnectedness. His analysis of political authority is inseparable from his understanding of social solidarity; his discussion of economic production is connected to settlement and political organization; and his treatment of religion intersects with questions of collective cohesion and legitimacy.

Consequently, the concept of “classical Islamic sociology” should be employed as an analytical designation rather than a claim that sociology existed institutionally in fourteenth-century North Africa. It identifies a systematic mode of social inquiry developed within an Islamic intellectual environment.

## Methodology

This study employs qualitative library research using a descriptive-interpretive approach. The purpose is not to test causal hypotheses through contemporary field data but to reconstruct the internal logic of Ibn Khaldūn’s social thought from primary and secondary sources.

The principal primary source is Ibn Khaldūn’s *Muqaddimah*, particularly his discussions of human association, *‘ilm al-‘umrān*, *‘asabiyyah*, *badāwah*, *ḥaḍārah*, political authority, religion, economic life, and dynastic transformation (Ibn Khaldūn, 1967). The analysis treats the *Muqaddimah* as a theoretical text rather than merely a historical document.

Secondary literature was selected according to conceptual relevance and scholarly quality. Particular attention was given to peer-reviewed studies published in internationally recognized journals, including *International Sociology*, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, *The Journal of North African Studies*, *Contemporary Islam*, and related outlets. The literature base combines foundational studies with more recent scholarship so that the reconstruction is connected to current debates.

The analytical procedure consisted of four stages. First, the principal Khaldunian concepts were identified and reconstructed from the primary text. Second, these concepts were organized into five analytical domains: social organization, collective solidarity, social differentiation, political authority, and civilizational transformation. Third, relationships among the concepts were examined in order to identify their internal theoretical logic. Fourth, the resulting interpretation was compared with contemporary scholarship to distinguish Ibn Khaldūn’s original conceptual structure from later sociological categories.

This method is appropriate because the central objective is conceptual reconstruction. The study does not claim to measure *‘asabiyyah* or empirically test Ibn Khaldūn’s cyclical model. Instead, it asks how his concepts work together as an explanatory system and what their relationship implies for the history and theory of sociology.

## Results and Discussion

### Ibn Khaldūn’s Historical and Intellectual Location

Ibn Khaldūn was born in Tunis in 1332 and lived through a period characterized by political instability, dynastic competition, shifting alliances, and changing centers of authority across North Africa and the wider Islamic world. His involvement in political and

administrative affairs exposed him directly to struggles over power, legitimacy, loyalty, and collective organization. These experiences provided an important empirical background for the development of his historical and social analysis.

Nevertheless, his intellectual contribution cannot be explained by biography alone. Ibn Khaldūn was educated within the Islamic scholarly tradition, including jurisprudence, theology, language, philosophy, and history. His approach to historical reliability and causation therefore developed in an intellectual environment in which historical inquiry was connected with moral, political, religious, and philosophical reasoning.

This context is essential for avoiding anachronism. Ibn Khaldūn's social theory emerged neither outside history nor outside religion. His analysis of society was embedded in an Islamic intellectual worldview while simultaneously demonstrating a striking concern with empirical patterns, causal explanation, and historical regularities.

His originality lies partly in the methodological principle that historical reports should be evaluated against what is socially and materially possible. A report concerning population, political authority, economic resources, military capacity, or collective behavior cannot simply be accepted because it has been transmitted by an earlier authority. It must be examined against the structural conditions of society. This orientation provides one of the strongest foundations for identifying the historical-sociological dimension of his work (Alatas, 2006).

### ***‘Ilm al-‘Umrān: Establishing the Object of Social Inquiry***

At the center of Ibn Khaldūn's intellectual project is *‘ilm al-‘umrān*, usually translated through terms such as civilization, social organization, or the science of culture and society. Yet none of these translations fully captures its analytical scope.

Amri (2008) describes *‘umrān* as a heuristic center of Ibn Khaldūn's worldview and emphasizes its dynamic character. Rather than referring merely to a finished civilization, *‘umrān* concerns processes through which human beings inhabit, organize, produce, cooperate, govern, and transform collective life.

This dynamic character is crucial. Society, for Ibn Khaldūn, is not simply a collection of individuals. Human beings depend upon cooperation because individual persons cannot satisfy all their material and social needs independently. Cooperation generates division of labor, economic production, settlement, political organization, and institutional differentiation. Social organization is therefore produced through relations of interdependence.

The concept also establishes a methodological relationship between history and sociology. Historical events become intelligible only when the historian understands the social conditions that make them possible. This means that historical knowledge requires more than the accumulation of reports. It requires knowledge of population, economic resources, political authority, social organization, and collective behavior.

In this sense, *‘ilm al-‘umrān* can be interpreted as an early form of historical-sociological reasoning. Its importance does not depend upon its equivalence to modern sociology. Rather, it demonstrates that systematic reflection on social structures and historical processes existed within a distinct Islamic intellectual tradition.

The distinction is particularly important because contemporary sociology has developed specialized methodologies and institutional boundaries that were unavailable to Ibn Khaldūn. The analytical relationship between the two should therefore be understood through conceptual dialogue rather than historical equivalence.

### **‘Asabiyyah and the Production of Collective Power**

If *‘ilm al-‘umrān* establishes the general field of inquiry, *‘asabiyyah* explains one of the central mechanisms through which collective power is generated.

*‘Asabiyyah* is commonly translated as group solidarity, group feeling, social cohesion, or collective spirit. None of these translations is entirely sufficient. In Ibn Khaldūn's framework, the concept concerns the capacity of people to support one another, defend collective interests, coordinate action, and sustain loyalty.

Its political significance derives from a fundamental proposition: political authority cannot be produced through formal claims alone. Authority requires organized collective capacity. A group must possess sufficient cohesion to mobilize resources, defend itself, compete with rivals, and establish political control.

This is why *‘asabiyyah* should not be reduced to biological kinship. Kinship may generate solidarity, but collective cohesion can also emerge through shared interests, common experience, locality, religion, language, political struggle, or other forms of social identification. Recent scholarship has emphasized this broader interpretation. Abou-Tabickh (2022), for example, interprets *‘asabiyyah* as an essential condition of human association rather than merely a genealogical relationship.

The political importance of *‘asabiyyah* is therefore relational. Strong solidarity can produce political authority, while political authority can subsequently transform the social relations that generated it. Once a group becomes politically dominant, institutionalization, wealth, luxury, and urban life can alter the patterns of solidarity that initially enabled its rise.

This creates a paradox at the center of Ibn Khaldūn's theory: the success of collective solidarity can create the conditions under which that solidarity becomes weaker.

Demirel's (2024) recent reconstruction of Ibn Khaldūn's state theory reinforces this interpretation by emphasizing the sociological foundations of political authority. The state is not treated as an autonomous institutional object detached from society; rather, its transformation is connected to social interaction, collective organization, and changing forms of political power.

---

'*Asabiyyah* consequently performs two analytical functions. It explains the emergence of power and simultaneously explains its vulnerability.

### ***Badāwah* and *Ḥaḍārah*: Social Differentiation and Civilizational Transformation**

The distinction between *badāwah* and *ḥaḍārah* is another central component of Ibn Khaldūn's social theory. It is tempting to translate the distinction simply as rural versus urban society, but such a translation is insufficient.

*Badāwah* refers to a relatively simple form of social organization characterized by modest material needs, close interpersonal relationships, mobility, and dependence upon collective cooperation. *Ḥaḍārah*, by contrast, involves more differentiated occupations, greater material prosperity, urban settlement, institutional complexity, expanded consumption, and more elaborate political organization.

Pribadi (2014) demonstrates that Ibn Khaldūn's distinction concerns social structure and solidarity rather than geography alone. The difference between the two forms of social organization is therefore qualitative: it concerns patterns of interdependence, lifestyle, political organization, and collective cohesion.

Importantly, Ibn Khaldūn's distinction should not be read as a simplistic moral opposition in which *badāwah* is good and *ḥaḍārah* is bad. Urban civilization generates important achievements, including specialization, learning, institutional development, artistic production, and material prosperity.

The tension is structural rather than moral. The same processes that increase material prosperity can weaken the forms of solidarity that initially sustain collective political power.

This produces one of the most sophisticated dimensions of Ibn Khaldūn's theory of social change: development is simultaneously productive and transformative. Prosperity creates new institutional and economic capacities, but it also produces new needs, dependencies, inequalities, and social distinctions.

Accordingly, *badāwah* and *ḥaḍārah* should not be understood as rigid stages through which every society must inevitably pass. They are better treated as analytical configurations through which Ibn Khaldūn identifies differences in social organization and explains transformations in collective life.

### **Religion, Solidarity, and Political Authority**

Religion occupies a distinctive position within Ibn Khaldūn's social theory because it intersects with both '*asabiyyah* and political authority.

Religion can expand the scope of solidarity beyond narrow kinship or local affiliation. A shared religious orientation may provide a common moral framework through which individuals and groups understand collective purposes. In this sense, religion does not necessarily replace '*asabiyyah*; rather, it can intensify and redirect solidarity toward broader political and ethical objectives.

This interpretation is sociological without being reductionist. Ibn Khaldūn does not treat religion simply as an independent theological variable. He examines how religious commitment becomes socially consequential through collective identity, political organization, legitimacy, and action.

The relationship between religion and authority therefore has at least three dimensions. First, religion can strengthen collective cohesion. Second, it can expand the boundaries of group identity. Third, it can provide moral legitimacy to political authority.

Yet the relationship should not be romanticized. Collective religious identity can strengthen cooperation while also becoming embedded within struggles over power and legitimacy. Ibn Khaldūn's broader analytical orientation suggests that solidarity is neither inherently emancipatory nor inherently oppressive. Its consequences depend upon the structures and political relations through which it operates.

Abozeid (2021) demonstrates the continuing usefulness of Khaldunian categories for examining authority, legitimacy, and state violence in the modern Arab world. The significance of such applications does not mean that Ibn Khaldūn provides ready-made answers to modern political problems. Rather, his conceptual framework allows scholars to examine the relationship among social cohesion, legitimacy, and coercive authority.

Recent scholarship also demonstrates that *'asabiyyah* can remain analytically productive when applied carefully to contemporary Muslim social life. Carland and Buckley (2025), for instance, extend Ibn Khaldūn's concept in studying Muslim experiences of Ramadan and argue that existing external sociological frameworks can sometimes overlook internally generated conceptual resources within Muslim communities. Their intervention illustrates the continuing potential of Khaldunian concepts when they are reconstructed rather than mechanically transplanted into contemporary contexts.

### **Political Authority and the Social Foundations of the State**

Ibn Khaldūn's theory of political authority is inseparable from his theory of social organization. Political institutions cannot be adequately understood without examining the collective relations that sustain them.

A political group initially acquires authority through collective capacity. Once established, however, political authority becomes institutionalized. The institutionalization of power creates new patterns of taxation, administration, economic production, urbanization, military organization, and social hierarchy.

The state thus represents both an outcome and a transformative force. It emerges from social power, but once established, it changes the social conditions from which that power originated.

This argument anticipates an important problem in historical sociology: institutions are not external to society but are produced through social relations and

subsequently reshape those relations. Demirel (2024) emphasizes precisely this sociological foundation in his analysis of Ibn Khaldūn's state theory.

The durability of political authority consequently depends not merely upon formal institutions but upon the reproduction of social capacity. When the ruling group becomes increasingly detached from the solidaristic relations that supported its rise, institutional authority may become more dependent upon coercion, administration, and material extraction.

This does not imply that political decline follows automatically or mechanically. Rather, Ibn Khaldūn identifies structural vulnerabilities embedded within the very processes of political consolidation.

### **Civilizational Rise, Consolidation, and Decline**

When *ʿilm al-ʿumrān*, *ʿasabiyyah*, *badāwah*, *ḥaḍārah*, religion, and political authority are read together, Ibn Khaldūn's theory can be reconstructed as a dynamic model of civilizational transformation.

The process can be summarized analytically as follows: *collective solidarity* → *collective action* → *political authority* → *institutional consolidation* → *prosperity and urbanization* → *social differentiation* → *transformation of solidarity* → *political vulnerability*

This sequence should not be interpreted as a deterministic cycle. Ibn Khaldūn's historical analysis is more sensitive than such a reading would suggest. Political outcomes depend on geography, economic conditions, leadership, military capacity, population, institutional organization, and relations among groups.

The cyclical character of his theory is therefore better understood as a theory of recurrent tendencies and structural vulnerabilities than as a rigid law of historical development.

This is one of the reasons Ibn Khaldūn remains relevant to historical sociology. Historical sociology examines institutions through processes of formation, consolidation, transformation, and decline rather than treating institutions as static structures. Ibn Khaldūn's work similarly emphasizes processes and relationships.

Alatas (2022) places this intellectual contribution within the history of sociology by examining the reception of Ibn Khaldūn during the formative period of the modern discipline. Ardiç (2017) further demonstrates how Khaldunian scholarship can contribute to challenging Eurocentric boundaries in social theory.

The significance of Ibn Khaldūn for contemporary theory therefore lies less in claiming that modern societies reproduce fourteenth-century North African conditions than in recognizing the analytical relationship among solidarity, institutionalization, legitimacy, prosperity, and political transformation.

### **Ibn Khaldūn as a Classical Islamic Social Theorist**

The preceding analysis supports a qualified characterization of Ibn Khaldūn as a major classical Islamic social theorist.

The qualification is essential. Calling him simply “the founder of sociology” risks transforming a historically complex intellectual relationship into a chronological competition. Conversely, excluding him from the history of social theory because modern sociology did not yet exist would reproduce the very Eurocentric boundary that contemporary scholarship has increasingly questioned.

A more defensible formulation is that Ibn Khaldūn developed a systematic theory of human association and historical change within the intellectual resources of fourteenth-century Islam.

His conceptual vocabulary forms an internally connected structure:

- 1). *‘ilm al-‘umrān* establishes the analytical field of human social organization;
- 2). *‘asabiyyah* explains collective cohesion and the production of political power;
- 3). *badāwah* and *ḥaḍārah* distinguish differentiated forms of social organization;
- 4). religion can broaden and intensify solidarity;
- 5). political authority institutionalizes organized collective power; and
- 6). civilizational change results from the interaction among these dimensions.

This relational structure is more important than any individual concept considered separately.

The theoretical implication is significant for the sociology of knowledge. The history of sociological theory can be expanded without simply adding Ibn Khaldūn as an honorary precursor to an unchanged European canon. A stronger approach is to recognize his concepts as theoretical resources that originated independently within a different intellectual tradition.

Such an approach also contributes to contemporary debates about decolonizing knowledge. Decolonization, in this context, should not mean replacing one intellectual canon with another. It should mean creating a more historically accurate account of how theoretical knowledge has been produced, transmitted, marginalized, and reconstructed across different civilizations.

Ibn Khaldūn is particularly useful for this project because his work demonstrates that systematic analysis of society was not dependent upon the later emergence of European sociology. At the same time, his work should not be romanticized as an Islamic alternative that renders contemporary sociology unnecessary. The more productive approach is dialogical: modern sociology can engage Khaldunian theory while Khaldunian theory can be interpreted through contemporary theoretical questions.

### **Theoretical Contribution and Contemporary Relevance**

The principal theoretical contribution of this study is the relational reconstruction of Ibn Khaldūn’s social thought.

Much of the existing literature focuses on individual concepts. Some studies emphasize *‘asabiyyah*; others examine *‘umrān*, state formation, religion, economic life, or the distinction between Bedouin and settled societies. These approaches are valuable, but the explanatory power of Ibn Khaldūn's thought becomes clearer when the concepts are read as parts of a single analytical architecture. Three theoretical propositions follow from this reconstruction.

*First*, social order is relational. Political institutions cannot be fully understood independently of the social relationships that sustain collective action. Authority is institutionally expressed but socially generated. *Second*, social development is ambivalent. Prosperity, urbanization, and institutional differentiation generate new capacities while potentially weakening some forms of collective solidarity. Development is therefore neither inherently progressive nor inherently destructive. *Third*, historical transformation is multidimensional. Political, economic, religious, demographic, and social processes interact. No single variable adequately explains civilizational change.

These propositions make Ibn Khaldūn relevant to contemporary sociology without requiring anachronistic equivalence. Contemporary sociology continues to investigate social cohesion, collective identity, institutional legitimacy, state formation, inequality, political authority, and social transformation. Ibn Khaldūn provides a historically distinct vocabulary through which these questions can be reconsidered.

Recent research illustrates the continuing productivity of this approach. Demirel (2024) demonstrates how Ibn Khaldūn's social theory illuminates the foundations of state formation, while Carland and Buckley (2025) demonstrate that *‘asabiyyah* can be conceptually reconstructed for the study of contemporary Muslim social life. These studies suggest that the contemporary relevance of Ibn Khaldūn depends not on treating his concepts as ready-made explanatory laws but on critically translating them into new analytical contexts.

At the same time, caution is essential. Ibn Khaldūn's concepts emerged from a particular historical environment and should not automatically be used to explain capitalism, nation-states, liberal democracy, digital society, or contemporary globalization. Conceptual translation must therefore be distinguished from direct historical analogy.

The question is not whether Ibn Khaldūn already possessed answers to contemporary sociological problems. The more productive question is what contemporary scholars can see differently when they engage seriously with his conceptual vocabulary.

## Conclusion

This study has reconstructed Ibn Khaldūn's social thought as an integrated body of classical Islamic social theory. The analysis demonstrates that *‘ilm al-‘umrān*, *‘asabiyyah*, *badāwah*, *ḥaḍārah*, religion, political authority, and civilizational transformation are not

isolated ideas. Together they constitute a relational framework for explaining how human beings organize collective life, generate political power, develop increasingly complex forms of civilization, and encounter tensions produced by those developments.

*ʿIlm al-ʿumrān* provides the broad analytical field for understanding patterned human association and historical change. *ʿAsabiyyah* explains how collective solidarity becomes a source of social and political capacity. *Badāwah* and *ḥaḍārah* identify differentiated configurations of social organization. Religion can intensify solidarity and orient collective action toward broader moral and political purposes. Political authority institutionalizes collective power, while civilizational development simultaneously creates new institutional capacities and conditions that may weaken the solidarity upon which political authority initially depended.

The study therefore argues for a historically careful but theoretically substantive placement of Ibn Khaldūn within the history of sociological thought. He should neither be reduced to a premodern version of a European sociologist nor excluded from social theory because the modern discipline of sociology had not yet been institutionalized. He is better understood as a classical Muslim thinker who developed an autonomous and systematic vocabulary for studying society, history, political authority, and civilizational transformation.

This interpretation is consistent with scholarship that calls for a more plural genealogy of social theory. The significance of Ibn Khaldūn lies not merely in the fact that he wrote about society centuries before modern sociology. His deeper significance lies in the fact that he developed concepts capable of organizing an explanation of social processes within a distinct Islamic intellectual tradition.

The study nevertheless has limitations. It relies primarily on textual analysis and secondary scholarship and does not empirically test the explanatory capacity of Khaldunian concepts in a contemporary social setting. Future research could therefore investigate how concepts such as *ʿasabiyyah*, *ʿumrān*, and the *badāwah-ḥaḍārah* distinction might be operationalized in comparative empirical studies of social cohesion, political legitimacy, religious mobilization, state formation, communal identity, and social fragmentation.

Such research would move beyond the binary question of whether Ibn Khaldūn “invented sociology.” The more significant intellectual task is to understand how his conceptual system can contribute to a genuinely plural history of social theory—one in which Islamic intellectual traditions are neither romanticized nor marginalized, but critically engaged as sources of theoretical knowledge.

## References

- Abdullahi, A. A., & Salawu, B. (2012). Ibn Khaldun: A forgotten sociologist? *South African Review of Sociology*, 43(3), 24–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21528586.2012.727543>

- Abou-Tabickh, L. (2022). How significant is the term condition (ḥāl) to understanding Ibn Khaldūn's historical and political thought? Al-ʿAṣabiyya as an “essential condition” of human association. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 27(4), 761–785. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2020.1861444>
- Abozeid, A. (2021). Re-reading Ibn-Khaldun in the 21st century: Traveling theory and the question of authority, legitimacy, and state violence in the modern Arab world. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 43(2), 146–171. <https://doi.org/10.13169/arabstudquar.43.2.0146>
- Alatas, M. (2022). Guglielmo Ferrero (1896), Ibn Kaldoun: An Arab sociologist of the fourteenth century. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 35(3), 312–319. <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12376>
- Alatas, S. F. (2006). Ibn Khaldūn and contemporary sociology. *International Sociology*, 21(6), 782–795. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580906067790>
- Alatas, S. F. (2017). Luxury, state and society: The theme of enslavement in Ibn Khaldun. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 30(1), 67–76. <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12152>
- Alatas, S. F. (2022). Reading Ibn Khaldun in the formative period of sociology. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 35(3), 302–311. <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12377>
- Amri, L. (2008). The concept of ʿumrān: The heuristic knot in Ibn Khaldun. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 13(3), 351–361. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629380701844672>
- Ardıç, N. (2017). Khaldunian studies today: The contributions of Syed Farid Alatas. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 30(1), 77–85. <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12156>
- Carland, S., & Buckley, A. (2025). Beyond external theories: Muslims, ʿasabiyya, and the jihad of Ramadan. *Contemporary Islam*, 19, 333–357. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-025-00576-1>
- Chabane, D. (2008). The structure of ʿumran al-ʿalam of Ibn Khaldun. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 13(3), 331–349. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629380701844656>
- Demirel, D. (2024). Sociological and political origins in Ibn Khaldun's state theory. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 37(3), 468–479. <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12473>
- Ibn Khaldūn, A. R. (1967). *The Muqaddimah: An introduction to history* (F. Rosenthal, Trans.). Princeton University Press.
- Mowlana, H. (2024). Ibn Khaldun: His contribution to communication science. *The Journal of International Communication*, 30(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13216597.2024.2303169>
- Pribadi, M. (2014). Ibn Khaldūn's social thought on Bedouin and Ḥaḍar. *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 52(2), 417–433. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2014.522.417-433>
- Sehlikoglu, S. (2025). Genealogy, critique, and decolonisation: Ibn Khaldun and moving beyond filling the gaps. *Open Research Europe*, 4, 14. <https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.16148.2>