

# Ibn Khaldun's Theory of Social Change: A Comparison with Hegel, Marx and Durkheim

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In this article I shall compare and contrast Ibn Khaldun's ideas about sociohistorical change with those of Hegel, Marx, and Durkheim. I will discuss and elaborate Ibn Khaldun's major ideas about historical and social change and compare them with three important figures of modern Western sociology and philosophy.

On reading Ibn Khaldun one should remember that he was living in the fourteenth century and did not have the privilege of witnessing the social dislocation created by the industrial revolution. It is also very difficult to categorize Ibn Khaldun within a single philosophical tradition. He is a rationalist as well as an empiricist, a historicist as well as a believer in human agency in the historical process. One can see many "modern" themes in his thinking, although he lived a hundred years before Machiavelli.

Lauer, who considers Ibn Khaldun the pioneer of modern sociological thought, has summarized the main points of his philosophy.<sup>1</sup> In his interpretation of Ibn Khaldun, he notes that historical processes follow a regular pattern. However, whereas this pattern shows sufficient regularity, it is not as rigid as it is in the natural world. In this regard the position of Ibn Khaldun is radically different from those philosophies of history that posit an immutable course of history determined by the will of divine providence or other forces. Ibn Khaldun believes that the individual is neither a completely passive recipient nor a full agent of the historical process. Social laws can be discovered through observation and data gathering, and this empirical grounding of social knowledge represents a departure from traditional rational and metaphysical thinking.

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Societies which are structurally similar operate under similar laws. The laws that govern societal change are sociological and not biological or physical in nature.

The universal applicability and validity of Ibn Khaldun's historical analysis is a separate issue and is not the subject of this paper, but I believe that his theory of social change is a precursor to modern sociological theories of change. I do not know whether Hegel, Marx, and Durkheim knew Ibn Khaldun's work, but Ibn Khaldunian themes are evident in their philosophies. On the basis of the above discussion, I believe that he was an important founder of the science of human history.

Abu Zayd 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) was a Muslim historian, philosopher, statesman, economist, sociologist, and pedagogue.<sup>2</sup> He was the first social thinker to explain historical processes explicitly on the basis of sociological laws. Before I attempt an in-depth analysis of some aspects of Ibn Khaldun's philosophy, I present a short biography. One studies the biography of a thinker for two reasons: to overview the sociohistorical context of the author's thought; and second, to consider the likely impact of salient events in the life and personal experiences of the author on his or her thinking. By understanding Ibn Khaldun's life, one may develop a better insight into his vision of life and society.

## Ibn Khaldun's Life

Ibn Khaldun was born on May 27, 1332, in Tunis. Ethnically, he belonged to the Arab tribes of southern Arabia. His family immigrated to Muslim Spain in the eighth century and in 1248 (just before the fall of Cordova) moved to Morocco.<sup>3</sup> Prior to his birth, his family had held important administrative and political positions both in Muslim Spain and in the North African Muslim states.<sup>4</sup>

His autobiography identifies the books he read and the teachers under whom he studied. At a very early age he assumed important political and administrative offices; because of his involvement in political conspiracies, however, he received occasional prison terms as well. He frequently changed his loyalty to different rulers for pragmatic considerations.

No matter how high his own position or that of his ancestors before him at one or another northwest African court, no matter how close he was to a ruler, he never felt bound by "group feeling," as he might have called it, or by the ties of a common cultural heritage. He considered the rulers as employers and his position a job to be done, no more no less. In a sense, this attitude enabled him to view them as an impartial observer, even when he was deeply involved.<sup>5</sup>

In a politically uncertain situation, the struggle for existence and quick adaptability are the highest virtues. To maintain moral integrity in such

an environment is a difficult project, especially for Ibn Khaldun, who "had an unmistakable taste for living and taking an active part in this world. That seemed to imply the necessity of using, not only prudence and tact, courtesy and generosity, but also flattery and bribes."<sup>6</sup>

Ibn Khaldun wrote many books, but he is primarily known for *al-Muqaddimah* and *Kitab-al-Ibar*. By the time he wrote *al-Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun was in his early forties. The previous twenty years had been spent in active participation in the political affairs of Western Islam and in studying and searching for the answers to the problems arising from his political activities. He had personal and first-hand experience of the many important contemporary events of the region, and he had also privileged access to official documents relating to them. His family background and his own personal involvement in contemporary politics entitled him to have direct access to data that was essential to produce a memorable work like *al-Muqaddimah*. His occasional imprisonment and constant suffering attest to his deep involvement in political affairs. Moreover, his official duties had brought him in close contact with many important persons: ambassadors, officials, rulers, tribal chiefs, and scholars, from whom he obtained first-hand information regarding events in which they had taken part or events about which they knew by virtue of their official or social positions.<sup>7</sup>

Ibn Khaldun's main project was to study and understand the nature and causes of the conditions prevailing in the Islamic world of his time and, in particular, the decline and disintegration of the Islamic society in Spain and North Africa. He was trying to discover the ultimate causes for the social and political developments in the Muslim world. In other words, he was interested in the process of social change in the Muslim world at the macro-historical level.

For Ibn Khaldun, the science of cultural and social history—the task of history—is not just to narrate the stories of kings and dynasties but to discuss and explain the internal dynamics of events. History is the science that deals with the social phenomena of human life. The scope of history embraces all aspects of life, i.e., war and peace, diplomacy, government, trade, commerce, art, philosophy, and religion. The interplay of all these forces produces a variety of social lives. In order to explain the social change or decline in the Islamic world, he sought help from history and not from metaphysics or theology. He realized that he discovered the science of society (sociology) or the science of human construction (*'ilm al-'umran*). He would not separate the discipline of history from any social science dealing with society because for him, history was the way to understand social truth. But he never considered history as truth in itself. History and sociology for him were not two separate disciplines, rather, they were analyzing two different aspects of the same reality.<sup>8</sup>

His historical juncture enabled him to study the past seven centuries of the Islamic world and to look for the underlying causes that shaped the rise and fall of Muslim societies. In looking for causes, he came to the conclusion that history cannot be explained in terms of the motives, ambitions, aims, purposes, or the strength of will and intellectual power of individuals. It was not just the character of the group but rather, the general social conditions that determined the outcome of history. He also believed that many differences among groups are created by environmental factors such as climate, quality of soil, and availability of water and food. For a full understanding of social and political developments, one must take into account all these factors. In his analysis of societies, Ibn Khaldun does not believe that history is teleological, that history has a place in a universal cosmic plan, that it is the realization of an eternal idea, or that it moves toward perfection. "There is no hint of a divine purpose gradually unfolding in the course of history. The facts are observed, correlated, and explained without any effort to fit them into a theistic interpretation to justify the way of God to man."<sup>9</sup> Compared with Islam, where everything unfolds according to God's plan, Ibn Khaldun's position is very radical and secular.

## Hegel's Philosophy of History— The Organizing Force

For Hegel, the design of the world (the meaning of the world) could be discovered by the study of history. He assumed that societies are designed to exist as they now exist. By scientifically investigating history one can discover the plan of the world, the plan of human destiny. Hegel's philosophy of history follows the contours of an analogy: the organic phenomenon of self-creation, self-organization, and self-development. Hegel developed his ideas on history using the analogy of the organizing force, the force that directs and coordinates the development of the organism from the seed to the adult form. The emergence of a plant from the seed seems to imply that the plant is designed with the final form of the plant "in mind" from the beginning. The design is stored as a plan within the seed toward which the organism strives. Similarly, for Hegel, history is an organic entity that unfolds according to a designed rational process. Thus, he envisions history as the inquiry into the essential destiny of reason. The assumption of a "designed rational process" leads Hegel to suppose the most important question to bring to the study of history: What is the ultimate design of the world?<sup>10</sup>

The regular and continuous transformation of the organism provided Enlightenment as well as Romantic thinkers with evidence of reason at work in nature. This conclusion was drawn from the fact that regular organic transformations were manifestations of a rational process—a

rational process which, moreover, was susceptible to discovery. Given these presuppositions, Hegel was led to conclude "that [the] history of the world presents us with a rational process." In other words, reason was more than abstraction or mere concepts—it was the substance of the universe, or more specifically "that by which and in which all reality has its being and subsistence."<sup>11</sup>

The teleological principle, or "goal orientedness," is the basis of Hegel's conception of Spirit. Hegel makes Spirit intelligible by analogy with the seed, that with which "the plant begins, yet it is also the result of the plant's entire life."<sup>12</sup> Spirit may be understood by analogy to be a seed or an egg which "attains by its own efforts; it makes itself actually which it always was potentially."<sup>13</sup> The supposition emerges from the analogy, almost by itself, that the teleological principle must be at work in the development of human society as well.

The most questionable assumption in Hegel's philosophy is closely connected to the notion that history is explanation rather than description, that all of history is an unfolding of the present. This providential plan is not concealed from our view, Hegel reasoned, because intelligence reveals itself in actual existence. Thus, what exists is justified by reason. By applying the general principle of reason to the concrete events of the past, we can deduce the concrete events in the present from the principle of reason. According to Hegel, history contains no surprises because historians can deduce concrete events from a "principle."

## Islamic Orthodoxy Versus Philosophic Inquiry

The character of Ibn Khaldun's philosophic works reflects the tensions of his time, specifically, those between Islamic orthodoxy and free philosophic inquiry.

Orthodoxy's ultimate source of truth was the Qur'an, while philosophers believed in the primacy of reason. Ibn Khaldun had to accommodate both views, and his philosophy sometimes shows the tension between revelation and reason. Ibn Khaldun skillfully tries to reconcile revelation to reason. Unlike Hegel, however, his reason is not some sort of universal force or logic unfolding in time; rather, it is the human capacity to observe and explain. For Hegel, history was metaphysically grounded and epistemologically knowable through our rational faculties. Like other historicists, however, Ibn Khaldun rejects the ontological fixity of history and believes that historical patterns or laws can be known to us through observation and rational articulation. Those historical laws are not metaphysically grounded but are products of our observation of the world around us. Ibn Khaldun's organismic model is not an *a priori* ontogenetic process within which history unfolds, but is rather an inter-

actional pattern bounded by time as well as spatial factors. Ibn Khaldun is often criticized for propounding a cyclical version of history where people are passive recipients of pre-given historical forces and where there is no room for human agency. As an historicist he does believe in the inevitable course of historical laws, but at the same time he thinks that by knowing those laws a civilization can prolong itself.

## Society and the Individual

History is not only the narrative of the satisfaction of human needs but also the story of their emergence and development. Whereas animals live in their instinctually determined world, human needs are social and historical in nature. All social institutions are designed to meet human needs and are historical in nature.<sup>14</sup> For Marx, history is a process in which human needs find expression, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction. Unlike the needs of animals, human needs are not fixed, and they change according to changes in material conditions. "This is why labor, the creative interchange between men and their natural environment, is the foundation of human society. The relation of individual to his material environment is mediated by the particular characteristics of the society of which he is a member."<sup>15</sup> In this respect, Ibn Khaldun is close to Marx. Marx grounded the process of historical change within the context of the material condition of a society, while for Ibn Khaldun material forces play an important role but are not the only factors. Some readings of Marx suggest that history is a movement from primitive communism through slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and finally communism—a sort of teleological progress determined by material forces—but for Ibn Khaldun there is no ultimate *telos* or end stages in history. According to Ibn Khaldun, culture is not a thing-in-itself; rather, it is the product of human interaction, and it must have reference to what is natural to man and woman. The essential power of human beings is their reflective and deliberative capacities. In addition to their capacity for making things by the agency of their discerning reason, humans have the capacity to organize their relations with other fellow humans for the realization of some good, not in things but in actions, i.e., engagement in collective activities for the realization of individual needs through collective good. This means that the life of a solitary individual is inconceivable, the existence of man and woman cannot be complete except together with other members of species, because of an individual's incapacity to perfect his or her existence and life in isolation. The incomplete nature of individuals makes them sociable, and that is why they are by nature in need of cooperation in absolutely all of their needs.<sup>16</sup>

## The Social Character of Man

Ibn Khaldun, like Marx and Durkheim, believes in the social character of human needs. Cities, towns, and villages show the transition and various stages in human history and also indicate that human needs vary from one situation or time to another situation and time. Indeterminacy of human needs creates room for human sociability; culture and civilization are the mechanisms through which human needs are adjusted to the material circumstances of the time. This cooperative predisposition of human beings makes them distinct from the animal world which is instinctively predetermined.

Ibn Khaldun believes in the dynamic nature of civilizations. Societies move from simple organization to more complex organization. According to Ibn Khaldun there are two types of civilizations: the desert (*badawa* = bedouins) civilization, found in outlying regions and mountains; and sedentary (*ḥaḍārah*) civilization, found in small communities and cities.<sup>17</sup>

Ibn Khaldun classified mankind into two groups, nomads and citizens, the nomadic life preceding and producing the other. This is the most significant classification and shows the transition from one to the other.

Nomadic and sedentary cultures are structurally different; their structural differences are based upon their material differences. It should be known, observes Ibn Khaldun, "that differences of condition among people are the result of the different ways in which they make their living."<sup>18</sup> The level of needs and necessities is another factor that differentiates the two social orders. In the desert culture, social organization is designed to meet basic needs and "does not take them beyond the bare subsistence level, because of their inability to provide for anything beyond those things." For this purpose they adopt agriculture and animal husbandry. "They cannot avoid the call of the desert, because it alone offers the wide fields, acres, pastures and other things that the settled areas do not offer." But in the sedentary life, "inhabitants of cities adopt crafts as their way of making a living, while some adopt commerce. They earn more and live on a level beyond the level of [bare] necessities, and their living corresponds to their wealth".<sup>19</sup>

The categories of nomadic and sedentary people are explanatory tools for the understanding of movement in history. He was simply contrasting one group of people with another. "Ibn Khaldun's 'Bedouins' were not, as a rule, nomads living in the desert, but were those who dwelled chiefly in villages and practiced agriculture and animal husbandry for a livelihood."<sup>20</sup> Ibn Khaldun made it clear that their social organization and cooperation for the needs of life and civilization, such as food, shelter, and warmth, do not take them beyond the bare subsistence level because of their inability to provide for anything beyond those things.

The subsequent improvement of their conditions and acquisition of more wealth and comfort than they need cause them to rest and take it easy. Then they cooperate for things beyond the (bare) necessities. They use more food and clothes and take pride in them.<sup>21</sup>

Ibn Khaldun believes in "movement" from primitive to civilized culture. The very transition proves that the bedouin precede sedentary people. It means that the bare necessities of the desert life are prior to the luxuries and comforts of the sedentary social organization.<sup>22</sup> So the toughness of the desert life precedes the softness of sedentary life. Hence, temporally sedentary conditions follow desert conditions.

By putting primitive, pristine desert culture prior to that of the sedentary, Ibn Khaldun came to the conclusion that the earlier stage, the purer the culture and the less prone it is to many frailties. That is why in many respects bedouins are morally better than settled people. Desert people are closer to the first natural state and more remote from the evil habits of sedentary people. In this sense the desert people can be reformed more easily than sedentary people. Sedentary people are not restrained by any sense of control, because the bad customs of behaving openly in an improper manner in both words and deeds have taken hold of them.<sup>23</sup> Desert people, Ibn Khaldun argues, are not corrupted by the artificial life of big cities and in this sense are easily amenable to moral teachings. Here Ibn Khaldun's position is very close to that of J. J. Rousseau, who also does not like the artificiality of civilized societies.

Ibn Khaldun has nostalgia for the good old days, and he thinks that "this development toward luxury carries its own penalty with it in the form of causing degeneration. The pristine simplicity and rudeness of manners (often called 'desert life' and 'desert attitude') that flourished in small human organizations become corroded."<sup>24</sup>

Ibn Khaldun thinks that under the natural laws of change, primitive desert people cross into sedentary life. The desire for power, riches and leisure moves primitive people toward civilization. Either they create their own civilization or conquer an existing one, because they have strength, endurance, and above all inner cohesion and solidarity. These virtues are necessary for founding a new civilization.

Thus, to Ibn Khaldun, "civilization or the culture centered around life in cities, is the natural completion of the life begun in primitive culture and the end to which human nature has been moving ever since the creation of the simple forms of communal life." Viewed in relation to that end, primitive culture is an incomplete culture. It merely satisfies men and women's necessary ends. In contrast, civilization tends to take care of those needs which are natural nonetheless, but still latent in the human soul and waiting for its realization. The desert nomadic culture necessarily moves and realizes itself in the creation of civilization, and civilized institutions are destined for the satisfaction of these desires.<sup>25</sup>



Hegel, Marx, and Durkheim also believe in the multiplication of human needs as well as the development of new institutions for the satisfaction of those needs. The following words of Durkheim are reminiscent of Ibn Khaldun:

Thus it is an historical law that mechanical solidarity, which first stands alone, or nearly so, progressively loses ground, and that organic solidarity gradually becomes preponderant. But when the mode of solidarity becomes changed, the structure of societies cannot but change.<sup>26</sup>

Durkheim's typology of mechanical and organic solidarities is very close to that of Ibn Khaldun. In the mechanical solidarity existing in the bedouin civilization, life is very simple, and relationships among people are close and personal. The organic solidarity seen in the sedentary civilization is marked by an excessive division of labor, great luxury, and impersonal relationships. For Durkheim, the term "mechanical solidarity" does not signify that it is produced by mechanical and artificial means. We call it that only by analogy to the cohesion that unites the elements of an inorganic body, as contrasted to that which forms a unity out of the elements of a living body. What finally justifies this term is that the link that unites the individual to society is wholly comparable to that which attaches a thing to a person. The individual consciousness, considered in this light, is a simple appendage of the collective type and follows all of its actions, as the possessed object follows those of its owner.<sup>27</sup>

Mechanical solidarity is characterized by a strong collective consciousness or group solidarity. According to Durkheim, "the mechanical solidarity . . . is a more or less organized totality of beliefs and sentiments common to all the members of the group: it is a collective type."<sup>28</sup> As far as mechanical solidarity is concerned, "society" is a more or less closely organized totality of beliefs and sentiments common to all the members of the group: It is the collective type. By contrast, the society to which we are bound in organic solidarity instance is a system of differentiated and specialized functions which are united in definite relationships. Mechanical solidarity can be strong only to the degree that the ideas and tendencies common to all the members of the society are greater in number and intensity than those which pertain to each individual member.<sup>29</sup> Organic solidarity is characterized by the loss of common sets of beliefs and sentiments, and is also shaped by the functional interdependence created by the division of labor in society.

Where mechanical solidarity is the main basis of societal cohesion, collective consciousness completely envelops individual consciousness and therefore presumes identity between individuals. Organic solidarity, by contrast, presupposes not identity but difference between individuals

in their beliefs and actions. The growth of organic solidarity and the expansion of the division of labor is, thus, associated with increasing individualism.<sup>30</sup>

The development of organic solidarity is contingent upon the declining significance of collective consciousness. Contractual relationships generated by the division of labor in society will replace the personal and communal bonds.<sup>31</sup> But the erosion of collective consciousness does not mean that society will degenerate into chaos; rather, new social modes will facilitate the growing cult of individualism. This is not to say, however, that collective consciousness is likely to disappear completely. Rather, it increasingly comes to consist of very general and indeterminate ways of thought and sentiments, which leaves room for a growing variety of individual differences.<sup>32</sup>

For Ibn Khaldun, the loss of group cohesion (*asabiya*) ultimately leads to the demise of civilization, while for Durkheim, the cult of individualism and contractual obligations substitute for the loss of collective consciousness. Durkheim is aware of the limitations of organic solidarity, and he knows that the corresponding loss of collective consciousness cannot be completely replaced by contractual obligations.

Disintegration of collective consciousness creates anomie (moral deregulation), and anomie will produce moral individualism which is the hallmark of organic solidarity. Loss of *asabiyah* will also create moral and economic individualism, but it will end up in the destruction of a civilization. According to Durkheim, social change occurs as societies become more complex and move toward progressive liberation of an individual from collective consciousness. With this process also emerges the moral ideals which stress the right and dignity of individual human beings. With the division of labor, the role of the State also increases, and the State becomes the major institution that protects individual rights. "The progression of State, is thus directly bound with the progression of moral individualism and with the growth of the division of labor."<sup>33</sup> For Durkheim, the breakdown of collective consciousness creates a greater role for the institution of the State, while the loss of *asabiya* for Ibn Khaldun begins the decomposition of the State. So the loss of solidarity in both cases generates two different types of social changes.

Hegel sees the movement of societies in the following three moments:

1. *Particular altruism—the family*: In this mode (an individual) relates to other human beings with a view of their collective, rather than his or her individual interests in mind.
2. *Universal ego—civil society*: In this sphere, an individual treats others as a means to his or her own ends. One's aims are mediated through the needs of others. The more the other people are dependent on a need which the individual can supply, the bet-

ter his or her own position becomes. Everyone acts according to what one perceives as enlightened self-interest.

3. *Universal altruism—the State*: It is a mode of relating to a universe of human beings not out of self-interest but out of solidarity, out of the will to live with other human beings in a community. In this respect, the State is analogous to the family, but its scope is different and the nexus is based on free consciousness, not on biological determination.<sup>34</sup>

In particular altruism one participates in family business with the overall interest of the family in mind. Universal ego is characterized by the instrumental relationship in a society. People treat each other as a means to their own personal ends. The needs of others are used for personal enhancement, and everyone behaves according to enlightened self-interest. In universal altruism, which is the highest form of social consciousness, individuals in society identify their interest with the collective well-being of society.

Hegel believes that the institution of the State will transcend the contradictions between the individual and community. Individual interest will become identical with the interest of the community. Ibn Khaldun thinks that contradictions between individual and community will be enhanced with the emergence of the institution of the State. In the genesis of the "State," Hegel sees the realization of community—the *telos*, the reason—while Ibn Khaldun sees the disintegration of community.

Marx's approach to sociohistorical process is based on a materialist interpretation of history. Marx sees human history as a process marked by stages of development. Various historical stages are conceptualized as modes of production. Modes of production are further divided into the forces of production and the social relations of production. The forces of production are comprised of the "means" (factories, land, raw materials, and so forth) and "tools" (including technology and machinery), as well as the skilled labor, necessary to produce wealth.<sup>35</sup> Marx sees various historical stages in the following way: The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stand in constant opposition to one another, carrying on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open, fight that ends each time either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes.<sup>36</sup>

Each historical stage and its corresponding mode of production is not a self-contained closed system but rather a dialectical set of relationships. When the forces of production such as technological science, equipment, factories, and the forms of division of labor develop, the social relations between classes are affected. "This sets in motion the process of revolu-

tionary change, that is movement from one mode of production to another.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, the movement of history is shaped by the struggle between the haves and the have nots, mediated by material factors. But ultimately Marx is optimistic that relationships based on conflict will be overcome and resolved in the communist society, where all classes will be abolished and the institution of the State will wither away. As far as the elimination of the State is concerned, I think both Ibn Khaldun and Marx would agree. But with regard to what happens afterwards, they would come to very different conclusions. For Marx, the end of the State will usher in a new era in which the contradictions between the classes will be resolved in a higher community. (Unlike Hegel, Marx considers the State as an instrument of class domination.) For Ibn Khaldun, the genesis of State for Ibn Khaldun means the beginning of community disintegration.

Ibn Khaldun, Hegel, Marx, and Durkheim all believe in various stages in the historical process. Though all these stages end up in different places, there is convergence on one point, and that is the dynamic nature of the historical process. All of them base their historical analysis on sociological factors.

### *Asabiyah*: The Motor of Social Change

Ibn Khaldun believes that the motor behind the rise and fall of civilization is *asabiyah*. *Asabiyah* is a key analytical tool in his methodological scheme. Literally, *asabiyah* means group feeling, group solidarity, and group consciousness. According to him, *asabiyah* plays a crucial role in the development and the degeneration of societies and civilizations. Ibn Khaldun borrows this term from the pre-Islamic Arab culture, also known as *ayām al-jahiliyyah* (days of ignorance). Before the advent of Islam the term was used by Arabs of the desert to “signify unity of thought and action, and social and economic cohesiveness among the members of the same tribe. *Asabiyah* was an instrument of defense as well as of aggression.”<sup>38</sup>

Ibn Khaldun’s use of the term is noteworthy because it has been much used in Muslim literature in a different meaning. Generally, Islam condemns *asabiyah* as a quality and state of mind. Traditionally, it is considered to mean “bias,” or, more specifically, “blind support of one’s group without regard for the justice of its cause.”<sup>39</sup> Ibn Khaldun exalted the term *asabiyah* from its narrow particularistic meanings to a higher status in his social philosophy. Within the conceptual framework of *asabiyah* he studied the interplay of environmental, psychological, sociological, economic, and political forces.

For Ibn Khaldun, *asabiyah* is an associative sentiment: unity of purpose and community of social, political, and economic interests.

*Asabiyah* is a "we-feeling" among people, without which no social or political organization can survive. For Ibn Khaldun *asabiyah* is a very important and complex theoretical tool. It could be generated by common beliefs, common goals, common economic interests, common culture, common language, common sufferings, or a common enemy. *Asabiyah* is not just group solidarity, it is the combination of the group solidarity with a political will to power and an organized leadership. According to Lacoste, "*asabiyah* refers to the influence of leaders of men in a very specific historical context."<sup>40</sup> Group awareness with a desire to defend oneself and to press one's claim produces *asabiyah*. Ibn Khaldun believes that *asabiyah* is the major force behind all social change. It will be safer to say that *asabiyah* is an intersection of many forces—both material and nonmaterial—and its complexity cannot be reduced to a single variable.

In his opinion, the development of civilization is a continuum with *badawah* (tribal life) and *ḥaḍārah* (settled life) as its two ends. As each society moves from its primitive stage to the advanced level of organization, it tends to undergo dramatic changes in its norms and ideals. Each step toward *ḥaḍārah* means some diminution of *asabiyah*, which is the essence of the communal life of tribal people. With the emergence of settled urban civilization, *asabiyah* starts decreasing. By the time a civilization reaches its advanced stage, *asabiyah* has already disappeared.<sup>41</sup>

*Asabiyah* in its earliest stage is conceived as a result of the natural human desire for cooperative collective life which distinguishes human beings from animals. Out of this tendency, the nucleus of a social group is formed. A number of individuals identifying themselves as a single group (in a certain geographical unit) bind together (in its earliest formative phase) by common familial ties. This natural cooperative urge finds concrete expression in the formation of *asabiyah*. *Asabiyah* becomes an instrument of social cohesion and a defensive system in case of an attack on the material interests of the tribe. Thus, common ancestry and cultural experiences of life reinforce each other in the development of social solidarity (*asabiyah*). In the genesis of *asabiyah*, common ancestry plays an important role, but later material interests of the group sustain it.

For Ibn Khaldun, *asabiyah* is the major force, the binding element in society, the feeling that unites members of the same family, tribe, nation, or empire and which in its widest acceptance, says A. R. Nicholson,<sup>42</sup> is equivalent to the modern term *patriotism*. *Asabiyah* is the vital energy of states. In it they rise and grow; as it weakens they decline. Ibn Khaldun also refers to another important factor in the formation of *asabiyah*, religion. He recognizes that it may be the only means of producing social solidarity. Thus he lays down the proposition that "the Arabs are inca-

pable of founding an empire unless they are imbued with religious enthusiasm by a prophet or a saint." Ibn Khaldun "hardly ascribes to religion so much influence as we might have expected from a (14th century) Muslim philosopher,"<sup>43</sup> but still he recognizes the importance of ideological forces in the creation of *asabiyah*.

*Asabiyah* cements the relationship of a tribe or a group of people. But whenever there is an increase in the size of people, the *asabiyah* of the group may be shaken over the passage of time because of dissension within the ruling family, leading to conflicting loyalties and struggle for undisputed power. The subgroup with the strongest inner feeling of solidarity overcomes other subgroups with weaker solidarity and rules them through coercion and suppression. In other words, the stronger a group's *asabiyah*, the greater its chances to rule and dominate other groups. This is natural since, like the elements that constitute a natural body, a multitude of powers cannot form a harmonious whole, except when arranged hierarchically with an undisputed leader at the top. Here Ibn Khaldun's position is very close to that of Thomas Hobbes,<sup>44</sup> according to whom the state of nature was marked by an internal struggle among a group of people. It was after the emergence of leadership that war of all against all was overcome.

Once superior solidarity emerges within a group, it tends to subdue the lesser solidarities and bring them under control. The result is a greater solidarity (*asabiyah kubra*) that unites the conflicting factions and directs their efforts to fight and subdue other groups. The process of expansion and unification continues until a point is reached when newly formed solidarity is able to conquer the dominion of another State or to establish new cities.<sup>45</sup>

Basically, Ibn Khaldun focuses on the institution of the State, because it is only in politically organized communities that the role of *asabiyah* is crucial. The institution of the State creates conditions that are conducive to the development of business and economic activities, and the rise and fall of a civilization is closely tied with the power of the State.

The problem of the creation of the State, the stages through which it passes, its various forms, and the causes of its decline are the central problems of Ibn Khaldun's science of culture.<sup>46</sup> The destiny of the State or of civilization is closely tied to the factors that strengthen as well as weaken *asabiyah*.

## Factors That Create *Asabiyah*

1. Power: According to Ibn Khaldun the greatness of a community is often judged by the organization of its power structure. The potency and effectiveness of *asabiyah*, to a great extent, depends upon how power is budgeted in society and the ability of those who hold power to galvanize

the scattered and incoherent group feelings into an action-oriented cohesive unit. Ibn Khaldun believes that *asabiyah* is very powerful in tribal egalitarian democracy. Economic conditions in the tribal society are such that the leader of the tribe is always dependent on the goodwill of society. This tribal consultative and egalitarian society is very democratic in spirit and strong in *asabiyah*.<sup>47</sup>

2. Leadership: The second most important factor in the formation of *asabiyah* is leadership. The confidence and trust that a leader inspires among the people and the prudence with which he leads them will determine the extent of *asabiyah* that a group possesses. Such an arrangement unquestionably makes *asabiyah* and leadership interdependent, and on their successful partnership depends the survival of civilization.<sup>48</sup>

Ibn Khaldun believes that tribal leadership is more than just leadership. In the beginning the leader's authority is moral, but later it becomes a political force. He increases his power by undermining tribal egalitarianism. Solidarity declines as tribal society moves from primitive to settled conditions, but "in order to maintain *asabiyah*, the tribe is constantly drawn into conflicts with other groups. The excitement of battle fosters a feeling of unity in the face of an illusory common danger."<sup>49</sup>

3. Religion: Ibn Khaldun values religion or ideological forces (to use the contemporary term) on utilitarian grounds in the creation of *asabiyah*. Religion helps individuals to resolve some of the insoluble mysteries of life but also acts as an extremely powerful factor in socialization and facilitates unity of thought and action among its followers. He is thoroughly convinced of the important role of religion in society, which is by no means surprising, given he was a Muslim in the fourteenth century. While describing the significance of religion in society, he administers a note of warning that religion only provides crutches of support to *asabiyah* but does not replace it.<sup>50</sup> For Ibn Khaldun, religion is "a factor" and not "the factor" in the maintenance of *asabiyah*. If other conditions are lacking, then mere religious forces cannot sustain *asabiyah*.

## Factors That Weaken *Asabiyah*

1. Wealth and Corruption: The major victims of growing prosperity are the civilization and ruling dynasty. Ibn Khaldun elaborately discusses the devitalizing effect of wealth and the accompanying corruption and ease-loving attitude on *asabiyah*. Among the things that corrupt sedentary culture is the disposition toward pleasures and indulgence. Naturally, all kinds of luxuries are available in cities. In such an environment the desire for a variety of pleasurable foods and cuisines increases. The avenues through which sexual desires are satisfied also get multiplied, such as prostitution and homosexuality. Homosexuality

contributes more to the destruction of the (human) species than adultery, since it leads to no human beings being brought into existence, while adultery leads to the social nonexistence of those who are in existence (i.e., the bastards).<sup>51</sup>

In the same vein, Durkheim says that through the power wealth confers on us, it actually diminishes the power of things to oppose us. Consequently, it lends strength to our desires and makes it harder to hold them in check. Under such conditions, moral equilibrium is unstable and it requires but a slight blow to disrupt it.

Thus we can understand the nature and source of this malady of infiniteness which torments our age. For man to see before him boundless, free, and open space, he must have lost sight of the moral barrier which under normal conditions would cut off his view.<sup>52</sup>

Ibn Khaldun believes that wealth per se is not bad. It is only when it is acquired through extralegal means and is extravagantly used in public that it undermines group solidarity. Both Durkheim and Ibn Khaldun believe that with the increase in wealth and urbanization comes a corresponding increase in individualism and a decrease in social solidarity. The ease-loving people lose their fighting spirit, and most of them are unwilling to die for their country. Their comfortable lifestyle and meek attitude show that their *asabiyah* has reached its nadir. According to Rosenthal, three interrelated factors produce this development and accelerate the eventual "senile decay" of the dynasty: indulgence in luxury, loss of *asabiyah*, and financial trouble. The desire of the ruling group to gain exclusive control over all the sources of power and wealth brings about strained relations and, eventually, a fatal estrangement between the dynasty and men whose *asabiyah* supports and maintains it. Its members thus come to need military support from outside sources and must have money to procure it. Furthermore, their growing addiction to luxurious habits also requires more and more money. To raise the needed sum, they must increase the tax load and try to open new sources of revenue. Finally, the point of diminishing return is reached in tax collections and other schemes for securing added revenues.<sup>53</sup>

A densely populated big city with a variety of resources can easily absorb the initial shocks of the monetary and economic injustices. "Because of the great variety of conditions and the manifold productivity of a particular city, any loss may remain concealed. Its consequences will become visible only after some time."<sup>54</sup> Unlawful taxes and frequent attacks on people's property remove the incentive to acquire and gain property. With the loss of incentive, people do not make much effort to acquire new property.

Civilization and its well-being as well as business prosperity depend on productivity and people's effort in all directions in their own interest and profit. When people no longer do business in order to make a living,



and when they cease all gainful activity, the business of civilization slumps, and everything decays.<sup>55</sup> One of the most important factors which hastens the destruction of a civilization is the unjustified imposition of tasks and the use of the subjects for forced labor. This is so because labor belongs to the things that constitute capital. Gain and sustenance represent the value realized from labor among civilized people. All their efforts and all their labors are means for them to acquire capital and to make a profit. They have no other way to make a profit except through labor.<sup>56</sup> The following quotes from Marx's works show striking similarities between his and Ibn Khaldun's views on the alienating aspect of labor and its impact on society:

The product of labor is labor embodied and made material in an object, it is the objectification of the labor.<sup>57</sup>

Capital presupposes wage labor; wage labor presupposes capital. They condition each other, and each brings the other into existence.<sup>58</sup>

In what does the alienation of labor consist? First, that the work is external to the worker, that it is not part of his nature, that consequently he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself, has feeling of misery, not of well-being, does not develop freely a physical and mental energy, but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. The worker therefore feels himself at home only during his leisure, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work is not voluntary but imposed, therefore it is forced labor.<sup>59</sup>

For Ibn Khaldun, the unlimited appropriation of property creates inequality among people, and at the same time people develop deep suspicion regarding what is happening. The products of prosperity and victories are harvested by the ruling dynasty and their entourage. This unjust distribution of wealth creates an environment where the sense of belonging is almost gone,<sup>60</sup> and people are generally estranged not only from their government but also from their work and labor, because they do not appropriate the complete fruit of their labor and hard work. So as far as the alienating aspect of the unfair appropriation of labor is concerned, both Ibn Khaldun and Marx are in agreement. Unlike Ibn Khaldun, Marx believes that unfair appropriation of labor will create a surplus value, which will pave the way for the capitalist accumulation of wealth.

Increasing inequalities between the rich and poor will result in the crisis of capitalism, which will ultimately result in a socialist revolution. The problematic aspect of labor is bound up with its social nature, without which a society cannot function, and is hence inescapable. For Hegel labor is the mediation through which human beings are related to their fellow beings. But Hegel adds a further dimension: In production, men

and women produce not for themselves but, on a reciprocal basis, for others as well. Labor becomes social labor, and men and women's aims in the process of labor are not only their individual aims, but the broader interest of community through which they realize themselves: Labor for all and the satisfaction of all. Individuals serve each other and sustain themselves, only here has the individual for the first time an individuated being; before that it has been only an abstract and untrue entity.<sup>61</sup>

Hegel is aware of the alienating impact of labor. The dialectical nature of social labor is thus evident, on the one hand, by creating sociability—a universal dependence of each on all, it makes man into a universal being. On the other hand, this reciprocal satisfaction of needs creates a hiatus between the concrete individual and his particular and concrete needs. By working for all, the individual does not work for himself any more. An element of distance and a need for mediation is consequently thrust between his work and the satisfaction of his needs. Social labor necessarily entails alienation.<sup>62</sup>

Ibn Khaldun's "forced labor and economic extortion," Marx's "labor and alienation," Hegel's "social labor and alienation," and Durkheim's "division of labor and anomie" generate social change but in different directions. For Ibn Khaldun, the change is some sort of cyclical process; for Hegel and Marx, it is the realization of *telos*; and for Durkheim, it is the progress of individualism. For Ibn Khaldun and Marx, the unjust appropriation of labor sets the stage for social change. In both cases it is the dissatisfaction of the people with the status quo that removes the existing regimes by one method or another. Hegel recognizes the alienating impact of social labor, but he is optimistic that the progressive role of the State will overcome such contradiction. Durkheim is aware of the problems of the division of labor and its corresponding generation of anomie, but he is also optimistic that a new society based on contractual obligation will facilitate moral individualism.

2. Power: According to Ibn Khaldun, misuse of power is one of the main factors that undermine *asabiyah*. He thinks that power is like a narcotic of the mind, and its abuse can have an intoxicating influence on its users. Abuse of power produces resentment and frustration in a group. When members are disenchanting with leadership, they lose faith in the objectives of the group. Power is a blessing when it is shared, but extremely baneful if used as a monopoly in the hands of a person or a group. The moment power is used as an instrument of exploitation, centrifugal tendencies become rampant in society. Because of cut-throat competition among various contenders to power, bonds of unity among various elements of the population are wrecked.<sup>63</sup> Lord Acton echoed the words of Ibn Khaldun when he said, "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely."<sup>64</sup> Abuse of power makes people perceive power as illegitimate, and in order to sustain this illegitimate power,

power becomes an end-in-itself and the ruling class uses fraudulent methods for its maintenance. Describing the impact of the abuse of power on society, Ibn Khaldun says, "the corrupting influence of power demoralizes the social system and produces a climate of thought and emotion in which *asabiyah* tends to become ineffectual. The frequent use of power leaves the masses depressed and they drift toward deceit and treachery."<sup>65</sup> The selfish use of power destroys the strength of *asabiyah*, and with the passage of time society loses its *raison d'être*. Decision-making chambers become dominated by a intrigue-ridden clique, and the environment of trust that was created by *asabiyah* is no longer there.

The major victim of the abuse of power will be the State, ruling dynasty, and society in general. A civilization is like an individual and has a life span like a biological organism. Within three generations it completes its course and ends up in oblivion.<sup>66</sup>

Based on the conceptual framework of *asabiyah*, a State undergoes a dynamic process of growth and dissolution. The process is natural and causal, which resembles that of a life cycle. While explaining the downfall of the State and civilization within his grand theoretical scheme, Ibn Khaldun is of the opinion that it is ultimately tribal egalitarian democracy that is responsible for the creation of State authority, but over the passage of time the authority of the State increases at the expense of tribal *asabiyah*. The contradiction between tribal egalitarianism and the emerging elite weakens the communal structure, and in the process the authority of the State is consolidated. *Asabiyah* is the major force in the creation of the State, but the creature eventually destroys the creator. The complex social and economic organization of urban life replaces the austere and simple life of the desert society, which was the precondition for the generation of *asabiyah*.

As soon as the ruler achieves power, he becomes involved in a struggle against the very forces on which his power is based. To take one final example of Ibn Khaldun's dialectical logic: In his attempt to extend his power over his tributaries, the ruler has to recruit mercenaries, and in order to pay them he has to increase taxation. The subsequent downturn in economic activity leads to a fall in tax revenues, and he tries to compensate for this by increasing taxes once more. Poverty and discontent lead to rebellion. But in order to suppress them, he needs still more mercenaries and more taxes to pay for these, thereby provoking new revolts. For Ibn Khaldun, the study of the destiny of political entities is the study of the many intertwined and dialectical contradictions that cause them to develop, change, and decay.<sup>67</sup>

There is no doubt that abuse of power and economic exploitation play a very important role in his theory of social change, but Ibn Khaldun also explores other manifold factors involved in the process of social change. He examines the influence of the physical environment on people, the

form of primitive and advanced social organization, intergroup relationships, the nature of leadership, urban life, and various cultural phenomena (arts, crafts, sciences, and so forth). In other words, he not only makes a bold new advance in trying to ascertain causal factors in change, he also recognizes that those factors would be numerous and diverse.

Hegel believes that history is pregnant with change and that the historical process is just the realization of that potentiality. Marx thinks that ultimately economic forces are the engine of sociohistorical change. For Durkheim the division of labor and the corresponding development of individualism and anomie are responsible for movement in history. Ibn Khaldun's position in each of the three thinkers is clear.

## Conclusion

Ibn Khaldun offered a very modern interpretation of social change although he did not live in a modern world. In this sense he is one of the founding fathers of sociology and the philosophy of history. In his quest for laws, he did not lose sight of human agency in the historical process. We may call him a soft determinist, i.e., a determinist informed by human agency. He has made profound contributions to the empirical scientific method and to contemporary sociological thinking.

## Notes

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