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for thought in Historical Sociology. In this regard, one should look beyond the linguistic and formal confinements. Ibn Khaldun's visions and method are expressed systematically in his notions of *Asabyya* and *ebar*. *Asabyya* conceptualizes a kind of intersubjectivity which signifies peculiar type of concrete and internalized social bounds taking shape through time and space and subject to change. Therefore, meaningful actions, which are the results of human relation with the surrounding environments, form *Asabyya* and stand in a dialectical relation with power, namely by founding and challenging it. This would in turn lead to *social change* as a historically multifaceted process.

Asabyya is not a culturally or temporally bounded concept. It is a concept which can do service to the theoretical explanation of the essence and mechanism of change in social and political spheres of life in any time and place. The conceptual framework build by Ibn Khaldun proposes that the "periphery" in each society, or in the "world" arena, can challenge the "center" and bring about changes in an existing "life-world". Also, the notion of *umran*, which has the strong connotation of change, and as the subject matter of the "science" that Ibn Khaldun speaks about, can provide various disciplines in social and human sciences with conceptual and theoretical framewok to explain complex social phenomena. *Asabyya* does have both subjective and objective dimension within itself and can address the question of the "how" and "why" of social change. "Life-World", be it *badavi*, modern, or any other type, can be understood better in its various aspects, especially as regards changes like "nation building", "revolutions" or "the struggle against colonial domination", if analyzed by a theoretical elaborations benefited from Ibn Khaldun's *Umran*.

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Endnotes

1. The notion of "Life –World" (Lebenswelt) has been a central notion in phenomenology and "Life Philosophy. Due to the proximity of its meaning to what Ibn Khaldun meant by *Umran*, it is used here.

2. Rosenthal has translated Ibn Khaldun's *elm* (knowledge) as "science", where as "science" with its modern connotations is not what Ibn Khaldun has intended to say. He actually is speaking about a new field of knowledge which, as he himself insists had no precedence.

3. Yves Lacoste believes that *umran* is a "very complex" notion which "covers everything from geographical and demographic notion of *oikoumene* (the settled world) to sociability." (Lacoste, 1984, p. 93)

4. The root concept of *Umran* (عمران) is *amara* (عمران), meaning "building up. Rosenthal has translated *Umran* as "civilization", which is very far from what Ibn Khaldun meant by the concept, this becomes obvious when considering the two types of *Umran* which he identifies as nomadic (*badavi*) and settled (*hazari*).

5. There is a considerable similarity between *umran* and the German concept of *Lebenswelt* in Weber's Life philosophy.

6. *Verstehen*, according to Dilthey, provides the historian with the means to look into the historical information with 'sympathetic intuition' and without exclusive reliance either upon facts as such or upon abstract syllogism. (Dilthey, 1961, pp. 64-82) It is, therefore in contrast to reasoning that *Verstehen* and *embar* propose a better historical appreciation of facts and events.

Embar is also reminder of the Weberian method of 'interpretative sociology'. In his methodological discussions Weber refers to "meaning-full adequacy" as:

The interpretation of a coherent course of conduct is "subjectively adequate" (or "adequate on the level of meaning"), insofar as, according to our habitual modes of thought and feeling, its component in their mutual relation are recognized to constitute a complex of meaning (Weber, 1978, p. 11)

Conclusion

There is much in Ibn Khaldun's *Al-Muqaddimah* that can provide material

(2) Dialectic of Domination and Revolution

Besides what has been mentioned in regard to *badavi* and *hadhari* as two social structures, Ibn Khaldun also refers to another aspect of their interrelationship, namely to the dialectic of domination and revolt.

Ibn Khaldun considers *Asabyya* to be a rebellious force, just as it has been the source of power. According to him, where there is no *Asabyya* there is no rebellion:

[I]t is easy to establish a dynasty in lands that are free from group feelings (*Asabyya*). Government there will be tranquil affair, because seditious and rebellious are few, and the dynasty does not need much *Asabyya*. (135)

But, where *Asabyya* is present the social and political dynamics are different. In Ibn Khaldun's view, "city" (*hadhari*), which signifies political and economic power, exercises domination over the "periphery" *badavin*, which signifies lack of power. According to him:

[I]n the city there is either a king whence *badavin* have to submit to him. The chief obliges the *badavin* ... to submit to him, by will or by force. (334)

Signs of change, however gradually appear. With the entropic process of degeneration in the "city", its gripes over the *badavi* periphery is weakened and then challenged. The peripheries, which are under the dominant control of the center, now seek release from it and therefore tend to revolt against it: "At any time ... there is much opposition to a dynasty and rebellion against it." (122)

As the result of the weakening of the center's *Asabyya*, a new revolutionary *Asabyya* is formed in the periphery that challenges the existing, though faltering, power of the center. This rebellious undertaking happens when: [A] rebel revolts, or, by inviting people around himself, gathers power. (332-333) Therefore:

Whenever one tribe is destroyed, another takes its place and is refractory and rebellious as the former one had been. (109)

Initially, rulers ... have to accept and follow the customs and norms from prior to their own time; they undertake much of it and remember the habits of the previous generation. But there appear changes in their norms and differences with the previous generation show up. (Weber, 1978, pp. 231-232)

Ibn Khaldun accordingly explains how such new political orientations ultimately result in the break up of *Asabyya* and consequently the break down of the existing system:

If the ruler uses force and is ready to mete out punishment and eager to expose and to count their sins, [his subjects] become fearful and depressed and seek to protect themselves against him through lies, ... and deceit If the ruler continues to keep a forceful grip on his subjects, *Asabyya* (group feeling) will be destroyed. (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 25)

Hence:

The feeling of the people of the dynasty become diseased as a result of the contempt in which they are held and the hostility of the ruler . The great danger inherent in this situation reverts upon the dynasty. There can be no hope it will recover from that illness. (133, 111)

So, new economic and political situation dominates the *umran* and new interrelationships between the new authority and its original *Asabyya* take shape. These interrelationships have dialectical characteristics and orient towards entropy:

These changes continue with the following governments and finally lead to contradictions. (147)

This would finally end in a total political degeneration, whence there exist no concrete relationship between the social basis of power, namely *Asabyya*, and the power structure. (25) At this point, *Asabyya*, which provided the basis for the rise of the *hadhari* authority, rises in a different social locality, namely in *badavi*-periphery (of power) as the will to resistance against the *hadhari*-center. This is the moment of the second dialectic, namely that of Dialectic of Domination and Revolution.

Dialectic of *Umran* in Ibn Khaldun and Social Change

(ديالكتيك عمران تغيير اجتماعي و ابن خلدون)

The concept of 'Asabyya' which lies at the heart of Ibn Khaldun's thought is a force whose nature and evolution are basically dialectical. (138)

According to Ibn Khaldun, the new riches obtained by center-*badhari* extension of power would lead to luxury and despotism, which are the economic and political aspects of concentration of power. Such concentration of power, however, first weakens *Asabyya*; then, in a dialectical turn, the very system loses its *Asabyya*, without which it cannot withstand disintegration. In Ibn Khaldun's view, such changes are the result of the process of transformation from the nomadic life (*badavi*) to city-life (*badhari*). In this process, new economic relations overtake the old ones and the way of life changes:

[W]hen a tribe acquires victories due to the power of *Asabyya*, it obtains riches and lives in luxury and growth of livelihood. Therefore, the habits ... of luxury and sinking deeply in the pursuit of pleasure brakes the *Asabyya* down. (Lacoste, pp. 15 7, 116)

Or as Lacoste puts it:

It is basically the emergence of *umran badhari*, luxury and comfort, which leads to the disappearance of *Asabyya* within the ruling tribe. (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 109)

A similar process of change also takes place in the political sphere. For Ibn Khaldun "the destiny of political entities" is that of "many intertwined and dialectical contradictions". (Lacoste, 1984, 113) In this relation, Ibn Khaldun first uses the notion *al enferade bel majd* that is basically what Max Weber later called *sultanism*. According to Weber, *sultanism*:

[T]ends to arise whenever traditional domination develops an administration and a military force which are purely personal instruments of the master. Only then, the group members are treated as subjects. Previously the master's authority appeared as a pre-eminent group right, now it turns into his personal right. (158)

Ibn Khaldun too explains the process of change taking place in the nature of political authority from *riasa* (rulership) to *al enferade bel majd* (despotism):

the historical outcome of the political and economic expansion of the *umran badavi*. In this formation the natural hardship of primitive life is overcome and the pursuit of luxury and pleasure becomes prevailing pattern and norm. As the result, the sense of mutual belonging and the intersubjective togetherness weakens and the *Asabyya* gradually leaves the scene. (143) The *badhari* formation also tends to expand and dominate any neighboring *badavi* collectivities.

The significant point regarding this dual scheme, however, is that, unlike Marx and Durkheim, it is not a temporal dualism, but a simultaneous co-existence. In fact, one can say that the simultaneity of these two structures and their mutuality is one of distinctive aspects of Khaldunian theory.

6. *Dialectic of Asabyya*

Ibn Khaldun's theory of social change consists of four dialectical moments. The first moment is the change from *badavi* to *badhari* formation. The second moment is the historical and structural process of change in the relationship between newly formed *badhari* system and other already existing *badavi* collectivities. These collectivities now come to be the power vicinity of the new *badhari* power system. The third moment is that of the internal disintegration of the *badhari* formation. And finally, comes the moment of resistance by the dominated *badavi*-periphery against the *badhari*-center. Ibn Khaldun has explained such multifaceted mechanism of change by the dialectical role of *Asabyya*. Therefore, one can refer to two dialectic of *Asabyya*:

1. Dialectic of *Asabyya*, ascendance, decay.
2. Dialectic of domination, *Asabyya*, revolution.

In the first dialectic, Ibn Khaldun deals with the process of change from *badavi* to *badhari* formation mediated by *Asabyya's* will to power. In the second dialectic, he explains the recurrent process of domination and revolutionary change mediated by *Asabyya's* will to resist.

(1) *Dialectic of Asabyya, Ascendance and Decay*

In Ibn Khaldun's theoretical scheme, there is a dialectical relationship between *Asabyya* on the one hand and both the ascendancy and fall of political power, on the other. Regarding the dialectical aspect of *Asabyya*, Lacoste says:

4. *Asabyya*, Political Power and Social Change

Ibn Khaldun's *Asabyya* bears significant theoretical implications for political and social thought. Ibn Khaldun repeatedly refers to *Asabyya* as the social base of political authority. According to him:

The goal to which *Asabyya* leads is political authority. This is because *Asabyya* gives protection and makes possible mutual defense, the pressing of claims, and every other kind of social activity... . This is because political authority results from superiority. Superiority results from *Asabyya* The superiority through which political authority is achieved is the result of *Asabyya* and of the great energy and rapacious habits that go with it. (100)

Ibn Khaldun, however, deals with the relationship between the social base and political authority as a moment in his conceptual framework for a Historical Sociology. He actually is more interested in questions regarding the double process of formation and transformation of political systems:

I have covered everything that I could regarding the origin of races and states. Also, the reasons for revolution and decay of nations in the past, and what comes to be (107, 125, 138)

This theoretical concern is expressed by Ibn Khaldun to be the core of his *Elm al Umran*. *Asabyya* can therefore explain the power relationship within social structure and the course of socio-historical change.

5. *Asabyya* and *Umran*

With such a conception of *Asabyya*, Ibn Khaldun refers to *umran badavi* (nomadic life) and *umran hadhari* (settled life) as two types of social formation each with its peculiar state of *Asabyya*. Perhaps these two types can be considered in a Weberian sense, as two "Ideal Types" extendable to various historical periods and cultural spheres.

In Ibn Khaldun's view, the *badavi* formation pertains to a very simple economic structure, a harsh life-environment, and a strong sense of togetherness and egalitarianism. The *hadhari* formation, however, is

proves that they are closely related to his basic intellectual method. (Lacoste, 1984, p. 158)

3. *Asabyya*

The central notion in Ibn Khaldun's Social Philosophy, which he does often use as a "general theoretical formulation", is *Asabyya*. As a concept *Asabyya* is rooted in a-s-b which denotes binding and is derived from the verb *asaba* which means 'he twisted'. (103) It means 'men twisted together' by some form of proximity. *This notion* was founded upon Ibn Khaldun's conception of Man defined as both an "ideal and a material being." Ibn Khaldun distinguished Man "from the other living beings by certain qualities peculiar to him." These "qualities" are those of "ability to think" which leads to sciences and crafts; his "need for restraining influence and strong authority"; his concern with the various ways of acquiring the means of life", and finally, his need for "companionship and for the satisfaction of human needs, as a result of a "natural disposition", towards co-operation. (42-43) This does not, however, mean that *Asabyya* is a psychological term. *Asabyya* refers to "a very complex sociopolitical reality with important psychological implications, and not "to feelings or a psychological attitude." (Irwin, 1997, pp. 470-471)

As such, *Asabyya* is a form of "intersubjectivity" which carries social life through time and space. *Asabyya* thus can be conceived of as an intersubjective-inner sense of belonging which plays an objective role in social life by mediating between individual and group life. *Asabyya* has also been translated variously as 'the vitality of the State' 'the life of the people', '*Lebenskraft*', 'public spirit', "*esprit de corps*", 'social solidarity', 'group cohesion' and 'common will'. (Lacoste, 1984, p. 103) *Asabyya*, therefore, is as much a reminder of Durkheim's *ame collective* as it is a kind of Weberian *genossenschaft*.

[B]ecause the only meaning of belonging to one or another group is that one is subject to its laws and conditions, as if one had come into close contact with it. (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 98)

Then, *Asabyya* can be defined as:

1. A sense of personal belonging to a group
2. A common group feeling and/or mentality
3. The reference point for meaningful collective action
4. An intersubjective will.

that of ‘connecting two points’. The concept *ebarat* (clause) as the linguistic means for communication also comes from the same root. *Ebar* also means ‘going beyond borders’, ‘moving from without to within’, and ‘migration’, ‘translation’, or even ‘removing a ruler’. (Mahdi, 1964, p. 65) *Ebar* is thus:

[D]eep penetration into the thoughts and disposition of someone else and also internalizing the reality of an event or a matter. (Lacoste, 1984, p. 180)

As such there seems to be a synonymity between *ebar* and the notion of *verstehen* (understanding) in the methodological hermeneutics of Dilthey and Interpretive sociology of Max Weber.⁶ *Ebar*, like *verstehen*, is oriented towards the meaning which resides *behind* the social phenomena. Ibn Khaldun further complements his approach to historical understanding by using the notion *basira* (insight). To actually achieve an understanding of history, Ibn Khaldun considers two elements of *basira*, namely, “critical” and “dynamic”, as indispensable. In his introductory remarks, he refers to the significance of these two elements by alerting historians for being too easy towards historical facts. He suggests that one should apply “critical” judgments to these facts. According to him:

[T]he intelligent critic must judge for himself as he looks around, examining this, admiring that, and choosing the other. (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 24)

The “dynamic” element, on the other hand, rests upon Ibn Khaldun’s concern for the impact of change on the reality under investigation. As he puts it:

[A] hidden pitfall in historiography is disregard for the fact that with the change of periods and the passage of time conditions within nations and races change. (25)

Ibn Khaldun then tries to reverse this “hidden pitfalls” by the use of a dialectical method which he applies to the analyses of social change. Although in the first instance, it might seem anachronistic to consider Ibn Khaldun’s method as dialectical, yet:

The frequency, with which Ibn Khaldun uses dialectical arguments, especially in the most original passages in his work,

ranks that exist within them. Also with different kinds of gainful occupations and ways of making a living, with the sciences and crafts that human beings pursue as part of their activities and efforts, and with all the other institutions that originate in civilization through its very nature. (Ibid.)

With such conception, Ibn Khaldun's "new discipline" can be taken as *ilm al umran* (the science of life-world)⁵, a "science" which undertakes to formulate a comprehensive framework to study the formation and transformation of socio-political structures. A science with concerns regarding

[T]he origin of races and states and the contemporaneousness of the early nations. Also, the reasons for revolution and decay of nations in the past, and what comes to be such as state and nation ... and what has come to pass and what can come to be. (43)

Above all, however, the essential characteristic of *umran* is change:

[T]he nature of the world, norms and conventions of nations, and ways of life do not remain in a similar way, but change through time and are transformed from one state to another. (24)

2. *Ebar* as Method

Ibn Khaldun pursued to find answer for questions such as: "how and why things are as they are", and "how the men who constituted a dynasty first came upon the historical scene" (8, 25, 26). For him it was significant to "understand events resulting from changes and revolution." (Rosenthal, 1968, pp. 114, 202, 203). Such 'understanding' is attainable only, in Ibn Khaldun's view, if one applies suitable methods for historical knowledge. Therefore, he proposed to do historical study by what he called *ebar*. *Ebar*, as defined and applied by Ibn Khaldun, is a method by which the unknown facts "neglected and hidden from the eyes, like oppression, are discovered"; a method, by which "prejudice and "partisanship", obscuring "the critical faculty and preclude critical investigation", are avoided. (8, 9, 35)

Ebar is the plural of *ibra*, a word rooted in *ibr* which means "passing on, over, through, by, or beyond". It seems that the underlying meaning of the concept, in both its subjective and objective dimensions, is

asks "questions about social structures or processes" which are understood to be "situated in time and space." (Skocpol, 1987, p. 2) Or, as defined by Denis Smith it is a "rational, critical and imaginative" effort which "looks for the mechanisms through which societies change or reproduce themselves." (Smith, 1991, p. 1) Furthermore, Philip Abrams identifies Historical Sociology with "Sociology" itself, which considers it to have been historical from its very point of inception. In his view: "[H]istorical sociology has always been a core element of sociology as the way sociological work is to whole." (Abrams, 1982, p. 6)

Such definitions are indicative of close proximity to what Ibn Khaldun had as early as 15th century (A.D) elaborated in his *Al Muqaddimah*. Although he is well known as a precursor in sociological thought, his enterprise goes deeply into the notion and problem of change in the life - world.¹ Here, it is this very point that is attempted to be explained in a conceptual framework from which contemporary Historical Sociology can benefit much, namely that of Dialectic of *Asabyya* (solidarity). To do so, first the major elements of *elm al Umran* are introduced. Then, the "Dialectic of *Asabyya*", as the core of Ibn Khaldun's social philosophy is addressed.

1. *Elm al Umran* as a "new discipline"²

Ibn Khaldun has spoken of discipline which considers as "entirely new". This discipline is, according to him, "an independent science with its own peculiar object." (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 39)³ According to Ibn Khaldun any topic "that is understandable and real requires its own special science." He then speaks of this science as *umran*⁴ (life-world) and social organization", the discussion of which is, according to Ibn Khaldun "something new, extraordinary, and highly useful." Ibn Khaldun distinguishes this science from that of Aristotle's *Politics*, which he considers as a science which is "concerned with the administration of home or city in accordance with ethical and philosophical requirements". He also distinguishes his "new science" from rhetoric which is concerned "with convincing words whereby the mass is moved to accept or reject a particular opinion." (Ibid.) *Umran*, however, as described by him

deals with such conditions affecting the nature of life - world as, for instance savagery and sociability, group feelings, and the different ways by which one group of human beings achieves superiority over another. It deals with royal authority and the dynasties that result in this manner and with the various

Introduction

Ibn Khaldun has been known as a philosopher of history and as a sociologist. Mohsen Mahdi refers to the distinguishing aspects of Ibn Khaldun's Historiography which not only seeks to "pass through" history, but intends to "pass beyond it" and "reveal its secrets" through "the analysis of the nature and causes of historical events." (Mahdi, 1964, p. 6) Also, Ibn Khaldun's *al-Muqaddimah* has been described as "the first known attempt in writing on 'Structural History'". (Loyd, 1996, pp. 11-65) From a different perspective, Robert Cox refers to Ibn Khaldun's ideas for reconsidering the conventional principles in the study of international relations. According to him, the essential aspect of what Ibn Khaldun called *Asabyya*, can be considered as a significant methodological tool for the study and the understanding of change in the world arena. (Cox, 1992)

Notwithstanding the considerable merits of these characterizations, none does actually represent the theoretical significance and potentials which Ibn Khaldun's enterprise pertains to. As Yves Lacoste notes, Ibn Khaldun is a thinker who has taken great steps in Social Thought. According to him, Ibn Khaldun's views are not confined to his own time but can now be fruitfully used in social-historical studies. (Lacoste, 1984, p. 2) In agreement with Lacoste, it can also be claimed that Ibn Khaldun's "new science" has been undertaken to interpret social life and has led to the centrality of change in human society and history. This discipline, which has been a precursor for social philosophy, presented an explanation for the nature and the mechanisms of such change. Of course, Social Philosophy is considered as to have been founded by Thomas Hobbes. (Habermas, 1973, pp. 41-60) This designation, however, has been made in a contradistinction from Aristotle's Political Philosophy. Aristotle's political philosophy had significant practical implications, namely that of citizens' engagement in the *polis*, which Hobbes' philosophy lacked. Ibn Khaldun's social philosophy, however, while having precedence over Hobbes's social philosophy in studying social life-world, it did yet have philosophical-practical implications for the engagement of the citizens in politics by the notion of *Asabyya*.

Social Philosophy, in its later development, was fundamentally concerned with the issue of *social change, so much* so that "sociology", as a discipline, founded its essential arguments upon this notion which has recently become the subject matter of a newly emerged field in social sciences known as Historical Sociology. This discipline is the field of study which

Dialectic of *Umran* in Ibn Khaldun and Social Change

Abbas Manoochehri *

Abstract

In the last three decades, Historical Sociology has appeared as a discipline concentrating on "social change" as its subject matter. The notion of "social change" has, however, been in the center of Ibn Khaldun's "new science". The purpose of this paper is to elaborate on Ibn Khaldun's theory of social change (umran) and its implications for contemporary social thought.

Keywords: *Ibn Khaldun, Social Philosophy, Historical Sociology, Umran, Dialectic, Asabyya, Ebar.*

*. Associat Professor, Department of Political Science Tarbiat Modarres University
E-mail: manoocheri@yahoo.com