

SOCIAL CONFLICT IN IBN KHALDUN'S THOUGHT

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Abstract: *The study of social conflict in the Arab and Islamic reality cannot be approached using frameworks built in contexts different from the unique social and historical context of these societies. Each society possesses social, cultural, and historical characteristics that necessitate a genuine exploration using approaches tailored to this social fabric. We believe that understanding the Arab and Islamic social reality, especially in its conflictual aspect, requires a return to historical and sociological theoretical heritage, including the legacy of Ibn Khaldun. Ibn Khaldun attempted to comprehend social conflict based on the concept of "asabiyyah" (social cohesion) and other variables related to the development of these societies. Hence, our aim is to shed light on social conflict according to Ibn Khaldun, attempting to analyze and simplify the concepts associated with it in this context.*

Keywords: social conflict, social cohesion, social reality, Ibn Khaldun

1. Introduction

Social conflict in the realm of philosophy is known as dialectical materialism, signifying that everything undergoes change and transformation. This logic traces back to ancient Greek philosophy, which views the world as composed of ever-changing particles or atoms. According to materialists, these particles or elements have a material nature, such as fire, air, or the limitless. This perspective is also influenced by the theoretical framework of evolution and advancement put forth by Darwin, asserting that everything in the universe is living matter evolving through conflict with itself and its environment, including social, psychological, and cultural entities. It sees these entities as evolved living matter, generating social systems, patterns, values, and psychological phenomena through their interactions. This perspective is often referred to as historical materialism, especially by Marxists who posit that the governing principle of the universe is the law of continuous motion and change, in contrast to idealistic or static philosophies prevalent in the functional structural framework of social sciences.

The conflict school perceives humans as inherently good, suggesting that the surrounding social conditions are what turn them into evildoers. This viewpoint bears resemblance to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's perspective, asserting that humans are naturally good, but their transformation into participants in an unnatural, artificial society turns them into malevolent beings who kill and plunder. Therefore, the logic of social conflict can be traced back to an unnatural transformation and change in human history.

The French Revolution in France, the Industrial Revolution in England, and the emergence of the working class associated with industrial growth contributed to the rise of an intellectual and philosophical perspective known as the social conflict or class conflict perspective. This perspective draws its epistemological foundations from German idealistic philosophy, especially the dialectics of the German philosopher Hegel, who aimed to continue the work of the French Revolution beyond its perceived failures.

In the following discussion, we will focus on the concept of conflict in the writings of Ibn Khaldun. This approach is closer to the Arab reality as articulated by Ibn Khaldun, leaving behind a sociological legacy worthy of attention and detailed examination.

2. Organizational Conflict under the Lens of Ibn Khaldun's Asabiyyah

Ibn Khaldun's predecessor, contemporary, and subsequent admirers, both from the Arab-Muslim world and the European-Western sphere, have not spared effort in exploring and analyzing the profound intellect of this eminent scholar. While some limited works have sought to highlight weaknesses in his writings, the majority of writings, both in the East and the West, unanimously recognize his immense contribution and scientific leadership in areas of knowledge untouched by his predecessors among scholars, historians, and philosophers. Numerous testimonies from Western intellectual luminaries exempt the researcher from defending the authenticity of Ibn Khaldun's contributions and the historical significance of his ideas.

When delving into the realm of social organization and specifically organizational conflict, a thorough examination of Ibn Khaldun's thought on conflict within political organizations is imperative. Ibn Khaldun focused on the state and various institutions as key organizational entities in his study. In Chapter Six of the Introduction, he discusses the nature of rulers and the nature of governance systems, ranging from despotism and oppression to leniency and justice. The behaviour of subjects, according to Ibn Khaldun, is influenced by the rulers' approach, and if rulers are known for leniency and justice, subjects naturally exhibit cooperative behaviour. (Introduction of Ibn Khaldun, 2005: 220).

Conversely, if rulers govern through coercion and intimidation, subjects tend to become passive and withdraw. When rulers employ a punitive logic, punishments diminish the strength and enthusiasm of subjects, as punishment accompanied by a lack of self-defense leads to the humiliation of the subjects. This dynamic is evident in the relationship between rulers and subjects in disciplines such as discipline, education, crafts, sciences, and religions, where disciplinary actions reduce the resilience of subjects, making it challenging for them to defend themselves, as seen in the case of students of knowledge. (Introduction of Ibn Khaldun, 2005: 271).

In the first chapter of the third section of the "Introduction," Ibn Khaldun links the struggle for power or kingship to personal interests, akin to Durkheim's concept of "la division du travail social." He expressed this linkage using the terms "pleasures" and "desires," considering kingship as an honorable yet coveted position encompassing all earthly experiences and physical pleasures. Consequently, competition arises around it, and few can withstand the struggle unless they overpower others. The contention results in conflict, leading to dominance achieved through Asabiyyah (group solidarity). The struggle between different Asabiyyahs becomes apparent in the pursuit of various pleasures and desires, and it is this conflict that prompts cohesion and collaboration within one Asabiyyah against others. (Introduction of Ibn Khaldun, 2005: 271).

A - The Power of Organization as a Cause for Reduced Conflict Intensity:

Ibn Khaldun adds that formal organization, like a fortress, contains a set of working organizations. There must be a restraining authority that encompasses all other organizations; otherwise, conflict, discord, separation, and dispute become the fate of these organizations. Thus, Abdul Rahman Ibn Khaldun indicates the conflict, but in the language of Asabiyyah. In this specific context, Asabiyyah refers clearly to organizations and the management of conflict. "Then, even if the tribe is divided into separate houses and multiple Asabiyyahs, there must be an Asabiyyah stronger than all of them, overcoming and uniting all the Asabiyyahs into one major Asabiyyah. Otherwise, separation leading to disagreement and conflict will occur." (Introduction of Ibn Khaldun, 2005: 154).

Ibn Khaldun drew attention to the existence of specific social dynamics that the world and social researchers should explore. These dynamics manifest in the form of social conflict led by the factor of "Asabiyyah" or social groups that meet all conditions of cohesion, mutual support, solidarity, and unity, with the aim of achieving their goal – the control and acquisition of authority or "power" in its entirety, along with an economy that matches or surpasses any

potential rival group. Additionally, their goal includes the protection and preservation of governance and power for the longest possible duration. Furthermore, these dynamics encompass the generalization of control over all weaker social groups and the entire society (Fredj Stambouli, 1970: 216).

B- With increasing prosperity, conflict diminishes: Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun points to a highly significant issue, namely that group cohesion weakens when individuals find their livelihood needs met. When people live in prosperity and enjoy a comfortable life, tribalism, roughness, and Bedouin characteristics fade away, according to Ibn Khaldun's expression, indicating their persistence and non-disappearance. This is a result of the state's control and demonstration of its strength, as individuals no longer aspire to compete and struggle for governance. Instead, they harbor other hopes related to acquisition and a comfortable living. Ibn Khaldun states: "...in proportion to its dominance and the state's demonstration of power. If the state is strong to the extent that no one desires to seize its affairs or participate in them, people submit to its authority and become content...Their aspirations do not rise to the level of contention for rule, but rather focus on gain and a comfortable life..." (Ibn Khaldun, Introduction, 2005: 155).

C- Positive Conflict According to Ibn Khaldun: Ibn Khaldun, in Chapter 20 of the Introduction, highlights a crucial human attribute: "competition." He considers competition a healthy phenomenon within an organization, explaining it deeply as a natural inclination and characteristic of humans. Evil, on the other hand, is an animalistic trait. Ibn Khaldun argues that since kingship is a natural state for humans, closer to goodness than evil due to its social nature, people naturally compete for good deeds such as generosity, forgiveness of mistakes, patience in the face of hardship, and fidelity to agreements, even going as far as spending wealth to protect honor (Ibn Khaldun, Introduction, 2005: 158).

D - Wise Leadership as a Conflict Avoidance: We find that Ibn Khaldun did not overlook the element of leadership in his famous introduction in many chapters. For example, he states, "... and submitting to the truth with the caller to it, seeking justice for the oppressed from themselves, sacrificing in their conditions, submitting to the truth, humbling oneself to the poor, listening to the complaints of those in need, adhering to laws and worship, upholding and understanding them and their reasons, abstaining from betrayal, deceit, and treachery, breaking covenants, and the like. We have learned that these are the qualities of good politics" (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 158). The leadership characterized by the virtues mentioned by Ibn Khaldun prolongs the life of the organization and instills tranquility within it. This is an indication of social justice through generous values, directly resulting in the avoidance of conflicts between individuals and groups.

3. The Fundamental Social Processes Discussed by Ibn Khaldun

Ibn Khaldun describes social processes as the ways in which people connect with each other to perform the necessary functions for the maintenance of any social system, working towards its growth and expansion. The interactive energy resulting from people's connections leads to the establishment of social structures for groups. Based on this, interaction - the connection and communication among people - is considered the fundamental social process because it constitutes a central factor in all aspects of human social life. It is behind the organization of various behavioural patterns (systems) from the individual to society.

Since interaction reflects a recurrence in social relationships, sociology views it as the basic unit of research and analysis. Ibn Khaldun examines various forms and models of this interaction as they manifest in social life, whether in the form of cooperation, competition, conflict, consensus, representation, change, etc. (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 158).

In the context of these concepts and issues that modern sociology has embraced and a review of Ibn Khaldun's writings in the introduction, we can observe to what extent Ibn Khaldun's ideas align with this understanding. A close examination of Ibn Khaldun's

discussions on cooperation, conflict, social change, and dynamics supports the relevance of his thoughts to contemporary sociological understanding.

A - "Cooperation: It is not coincidental that Ibn Khaldun begins his social research in the first section by addressing the process of cooperation in society. He considers this social process fundamental to the construction of economic systems.

"He is forced to seek the cooperation of his fellow human beings, for without this cooperation, he cannot obtain sustenance, food, or ensure his survival" (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 47). He must rely on the assistance of his fellow humans to defend against the aggression of animals because an individual's ability to procure food is limited. Gathering a multitude of his fellow kin is necessary for acquiring sustenance for himself and for them.

Moreover, the capacity of an individual human is insufficient to resist the power of certain predatory animals, especially formidable ones. He is incapable of defending against them collectively. As for the weapons required to repel predatory animals, the power of an individual human is inadequate for their manufacture. Therefore, in all of this, collaboration becomes essential "He is forced to seek the cooperation of his fellow human beings, for without this cooperation, he cannot obtain sustenance, food, or ensure his survival. He becomes prey to animals" (Abu Khaldun Sat' al-Husri, 1961: 280).

Some have interpreted Ibn Khaldun's statements on cooperation to assert that economic activity is the primary reality for producing social life. For example, the production of a day's sustenance from wheat requires many cooperative activities, necessitating the gathering of a multitude of one's kin to obtain sustenance for oneself and for them. Through collaboration, an adequate amount of sustenance is obtained for more individuals than the collaborators themselves.

Just as material means of livelihood require cooperation, the survival, continuity, and defense of the human species against sources of aggression also necessitate collaboration (Mohammed Ali Mohammed, 1986: 55-56).

B - Conflict: It was not coincidental that Ibn Khaldun addresses the principle of human aggression against each other, repeating it in several places in the introduction with various expressions and greater clarity. He emphasizes the need for a restraint that prevents this aggression, meaning that when he discusses the social conflict among humans, he is paving the way to talk about the necessity of a political system, meaning kingship, authority, or the state, to resolve this conflict.

Ibn Khaldun states, "Among the traits of humans is injustice and aggression against each other. When one's eye reaches the possessions of his brother, his hand reaches out to take them, unless there is something to restrain him" (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 140). He also remarks, "Injustice is a characteristic of souls, and if you find...someone who refrains from it, perhaps he does not possess the inclination for injustice."

Furthermore, he asserts, "Human beings cannot live and exist except by coming together and cooperating to obtain their sustenance and necessities. When they gather, necessity calls for interaction, meeting needs, and each one extending his hand to take what he needs from others. Due to the animalistic nature of souls, injustice and aggression prevail, some against others. One resists another by means of anger, pride, and the human force inherent in that. This leads to disputes that escalate into fighting, resulting in chaos, bloodshed, and the loss of lives. This leads to the interruption of the species, making their survival impossible without a restraint to prevent one from harming another" (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 208).

C - Struggle for Power: It is noteworthy that, according to Ibn Khaldun, social conflict or struggle does not cease even after the establishment of monarchy and statehood. Ibn Khaldun discusses the different stages of the state and the varying conditions and populations in each stage. In the second stage of the state, the stage of individual glory, the ruler tends to authoritarianism and monopolizes glory without sharing it with his people. Ibn Khaldun states, "The owner of the state seizes glory for himself, monopolizes it, and becomes exclusive

in it" (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 323). This may reach the extent of killing anyone who challenges his exclusivity. Ibn Khaldun emphasizes that those who contributed to the establishment of the monarchy strive to maintain their status and continue participating in glory and the fruits of rule. This leads to animosity between the ruler and his early supporters, and the ruler can only overcome these problems through allies and subordinates, as the nobility of his lineage and tribe obstructs him.

Ibn Khaldun notes that this social conflict for power between the ruler and his early supporters continues for a certain period. If the ruler prevails in this conflict, the state enters the third stage (Abu Khaldun Sat' al-Husri, 1961: 267).

4. Tribalism and Tribal Conflict in Ibn Khaldun's Thought

Some researchers suggest that understanding Ibn Khaldun's views on tribalism and its relation to conflict requires referring to the chapters on tribalism in the second and third books and one chapter in the fourth book.

Ibn Khaldun states, "The dwellings of the Bedouins are only for the tribes, the people of tribalism..." (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 140). Tribalism, according to Ibn Khaldun, is a natural tendency in humans that leads to cohesion and solidarity among individuals of the same lineage. It requires each individual to be persistent and devoted to their tribe, leading to collective responsibility and collaboration in repelling aggression and achieving common goals.

The nature of nomadic life necessitates strong tribalism because defense of the tribe is carried out by the recognized brave individuals, and their defense is only trusted and increased when they are united by lineage and one tribal identity.

"And the people of urban areas, their affairs are related to defending their wealth and themselves to their governor, the ruler who governs them, and the protector who takes charge of their security. They do not have a strong need for tribalism" (Abu Khaldun Sat' al-Husri, 1961: 233).

The importance of tribalism in nomadic life can be seen in the organization of tribes and their leadership. Ibn Khaldun states, "I know that every living group or core of tribes, even if they are one united band in general lineage, there are other tribalistic affiliations among them. These are specific lineages that are more closely knit than the general lineage, such as one clan, one household, or brothers from the same father. Leadership among them is in one portion of them, not in all of them. Leadership remains in that portion, passing from one branch to another, and it does not transfer to the stronger among their branches" (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 145).

Similarly, the importance of tribalism in urban areas is related to the establishment of the state. Ibn Khaldun states, "The ultimate goal that tribalism serves is kingship" (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 135). Tribalism provides protection, defense, and the means to make claims. Ibn Khaldun argues that humans, by their nature, require a restraint and ruler in every society. This control must be achieved through tribalism; otherwise, the ability to control is not possible. This domination is kingship, which goes beyond rulership because rulership is leadership with followers and does not involve coercion in its judgments. In contrast, kingship is dominance and ruling by coercion (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 135).

In summary, the roles of tribalism in social and political life can be outlined as follows:

- ✓ Cohesion and Solidarity: Tribalism encourages individuals to unite, collaborate, and defend collectively. It fosters protection, defense, and common objectives that require collective action.

- ✓ Necessity in Struggles: Tribalism becomes essential in any matter that compels people to fight, such as in the establishment of prophethood, kingship, or a call to action. Fighting is inevitable in such situations, and tribalism is necessary in warfare.

✓ Leadership and Dominance: Leadership can only be achieved through domination, and domination is achieved through tribalism.

✓ Kingship: Kingship is attained through dominance, and dominance is possible through tribalism (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 174).

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