

Axis 2: Pioneers of sociology : Ibn Khaldoun, Auguste comte

I. Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406)

Ibn Khaldoun investigated theories of society, the basis of sovereignty or asabiyah (social solidarity), and the rise and fall of states. Born in Tunis, Tunisia, where his parents died of the plague in 1349, Khaldun spent most of his life in North Africa and Spain. His family's Andalusian origin suggests that his Spanish background provided Khaldun a different perspective, and unique from the Muslim mainstream in Northwest Africa and the East.

Khaldun is one of the most significant figures in the history of the Muslim World. The reputation of the *Muqaddimah* as a significant work has brought Khaldun much attention. Khaldun taught his theories on society, the basis of sovereignty or asabiyah, the rise and fall of states, and other subjects presented in the *Muqaddimah*. Khaldun described social phenomena and situated them in the flow and perspective of historical events.

Khaldun's "New Science": Ibn Khaldun's "New Science" is interpreted as the science of human social organization, commonly interpreted as sociology. Khaldun stated that this science has "its own peculiar object — that is, human civilization and social organization. It also has its own peculiar problems- that is, explaining the conditions that attach themselves to the essence of civilization, one after the other".

From Khaldun's perspective, civilization is the product of human interaction. Indeed, culture is not a thing in itself. The essential ability of human beings is their reflective and deliberative competence; furthermore, human beings have the capabilities to arrange their relationships with other fellow human beings.

The fundamental principles of the new science are:

- ✓ the subject matter of the new science is human association ;
- ✓ its problems are the essential modes of culture ;
- ✓ its method is demonstration ;
- ✓ its end is making of truth from falsehood in historical reports.

Khaldun maintained that he was presenting a new science that consisted of the following areas: human civilization, primitive societies, the states, the cities, the crafts, the occupations, and the sciences.

Khaldun's Typology : Khaldun classified societies into a dualist typology which includes Badawa (rural) and Hadara (urban) societies as understood by Western sociologists. Defined briefly, nomadic or rural means “inhabitant of the desert” or “the desert dweller,” whereas urban refers to “inhabitants of cities”.

Rural society (Badawa Umran). To explain the concept of Badawa in his typology, Khaldun argued that primitive people are tied to the desert because of their agricultural life style. Since settled areas do not provide wide fields and pastures for animals, their social organization is organized upon bare subsistence.

Urban society (Hadara Umran). The notion of urban society implies a secondary phase of social organization. People live clustered in cities that constitute countries. The economic arrangement of society is centered upon commerce and crafts, in addition to agriculture and husbandry. There is a higher level of life observed in terms of comfort and luxury as opposed to rural society.

Khaldun's Conflict Theory

Khaldun explained that social solidarity plays a fundamental role in the rise and fall of societies and civilizations. Therefore, social solidarity functions “constructively” or “destructively.” Khaldun’s concept of conflict theory was based upon social solidarity. On the one hand, social solidarity results in consequences causing an increase in social group adaptation. On the other hand, social solidarity generates negative dynamics which destroy social groups.

Khaldun's social solidarity. Khaldun asserted that social solidarity is a vital function in explaining the cyclical theory of social change. He extended this term to indicate a universal theoretical framework concerned with examining human social organization. Khaldun mentioned the following features while describing the essentials of asabiyah: “associative sentiments, unity of purpose, community of social and economic interests, and oneness of feelings and emotions”. Given these characteristics, he put forth a new essential idea that served a major role in the transformation of society, relating a new dynamic driving force. Each society transforms from primitive stages to advanced stages of civilization, from rural to urban. Social solidarity plays a major role in the rise and fall of human civilization which is intrinsic in the sense that he talks about the society’s birth, growth, maturity, decadence, senility and demise that structure “the transformations of physical nature and seem somehow to reflect

the ceaseless motion of material, finite being in its restless striving and constant failing to reach changelessness and perfection”.

Khaldun's Cyclical Pattern

Khaldun analyzed society empirically. Moreover, he explained social phenomena by an evolutionary principle of social development. He conceptualized societal development as being parallel to the life stages of an individual: birth, maturity, and death. From this, Khaldun developed a spiral theory of social evolution which depicted a transformation from primitive life to civilized urban life (Bogardus, 1960). Khaldun believed that the dynastic cycle is as “a self-destroying but ever-rebuilt bridge between two worlds”.

Khaldun contended that “dynasties have a natural life span like individuals”. According to astrologers and physicians, the natural life span of human beings is 120 years, which is the maximum time period for states as well. Khaldun believed that a dynasty lasts no longer than three generations. The life span of a generation matches the life of an individual, which is forty years. This time period allows one to achieve maturity and growth. Araki (1983) summarized that Khaldun perceived that the cycle lasts three generations and took place over the five stages of:

- ✓ the overthrow of opposition (stage of success) ;
- ✓ the ruler's attainment of complete control over his people (full control) ;
- ✓ the stage of leisure and tranquility ;
- ✓ the stage of contentment and peacefulness ;
- ✓ the stage of waste, squandering, and disintegration.

II . August Comte (1798–1857)

August Comte sociology as a concept first appeared in an unpublished manuscript by a French essayist Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836). The term was later reinvented in 1838 by Auguste Comte. Comte's aim was to develop a new science which can describe, understand and explain the past developments of human society as well as predict its future, in a scientific manner as in natural sciences. His motive for this development was brought about essentially by the issue, and contradictions that surrounded the birth and life of Auguste Comte. Comte was born in 1798, in southern Montpellier, France. Comte initially studied engineer in school. However, because he rejected his parents' idea of being conservative and openly publicised himself as

a Republican and free spirit at age 13, and led a school riot, he was rusticated from school at 18. His rustication from school ended his chances of both getting formal education and becoming an engineer.

In 1817, Comte was introduced to Claude Henri de Rouvroy Comte de Saint-Simon (1760–1825). Saint Simon employed Comte as his secretary and was under his mentorship and apprenticeship until 1824 when they had a major controversy that led to their fallout. Regardless of the controversy that they shared, both men envisaged a science of society that can study the society using the precepts of natural science. Comte envisioned a science of society that differs exclusively from the tradition of authority and religion and relies primarily on reasoning and observation and the only true means through which knowledge can be acquired. Comte first called the new science “social physics”, however, after realising that the term “social physics” had already been used by Adolphe Quetelet, a Belgian social statistician, he coined the term sociology from the Latin word “Socious” and the Greek word “logos”. According to Comte, man must understand the laws that govern the natural world if they must take advantage of their environment. Comte contributed enormously to the growth and development of the discipline in the following ways.

Law of Three Stages or the Law of Human Progress: For Comte, the human mind, just like human societies develop over time through some stages from simple to complex. According to Comte, every human society, the human mind and all forms of human knowledge grow or develop through three different stages. These stages include; the theological or fictitious stage, the metaphysical or abstract stage, and the scientific or positivist stage. The primary underlying factor that defines the change from one stage of the human progress is essentially the way in which individuals understand the cause of things or events as well as their existence within the universe.

In the first stage, the theological stage, the Comte explains that the human mind provides explanations for events by attributing causation or the causes of things to the supernatural. People at this stage often attribute the events to a god or deity, saying for instance, that the death of a person or an earthquake is an act of god as a punishment for wrongdoing. In the metaphysical stage, humans provide explanations for events using their understanding of the workings of nature. In this regard, the human mind had developed from a supernatural interpretation of things to the use of abstract, contemplative ideas derived from an understanding of the way nature works and self-evident truth. Knowledge at this stage is gotten

from hunches, intuition and speculations. The final stage of the development of the human mind is what Comte referred to as the scientific stage. At this stage, humans provide explanations for events on the basis of a cause-effect relationship. Humans began to explain issues and events by relating effects or outcomes to their causes. The source of human knowledge at this stage was derived from scientific processes, precedents and laws on the basis of empirically tested facts.

It was Comte's belief that the scientific stage would be the final stage in the evolution and development of human mind because science would regulate the distinction that exists between political factions of order and progress by eradicating factors that necessitate moral and intellectual anarchy. When the positive philosophy is applied, Comte believes that would result in the unification of the society and of sciences.

Essentially Comte's whole idea of positivism was that all social phenomenon is subject to unchanging laws of nature. Its goal is to pursue an unbiased exploration of these laws, in order to reduce them to the smallest number possible. The major contributions of Comte to the growth and development of sociology are analysed below.

Hierarchy of Science: Comte's second major contribution to the development of sociology, the hierarchy of science is intimately connected to the law of three stages. According to Comte, the scientific knowledge develops in stages from the crudest to the most advanced in a hierarchical order, the simplest giving way to the more advanced in successive order. For Comte, any knowledge will only reach the positive or scientific stage when it passes the criteria of simplicity, generality and independence of other disciplines.

In Comte's hierarchy, astronomy was the crudest, simplest, most general and the first science to develop. The next science to develop in Comte's hierarchy was the physics, followed by chemistry, biology and then sociology. The emergence of each discipline depended on the development of its predecessors on the basis of the increasing complexity and decreasing generality. In this regard, sociology and the social sciences which are the most complex and the dependent on the other disciplines for its emergence are the highest in the hierarchy. According to Comte, the social sciences are the most complex of all the sciences they possess all the attributes of the preceding disciplines in

addition to the use of historical method of inquiry where an investigation is done not by comparison but by gradual filiation.

Comte further describes sociology as the queen of all sciences, being the highest in the hierarchy of science. However, he noted that even though sociology differs distinctively from its predecessors in the hierarchy by possessing special methodological attributes, it also depends on them. According to Comte, sociology depends mostly on biology. Being the closest it sociology on the hierarchy, biology differs from the other sciences in terms of its holistic properties. Unlike the other sciences such as physics and chemistry, biology focuses on the study of organic wholes. This emphasis on an organic or organismic whole that links biology with sociology. Some biological approaches used in sociology include the organismic analogy among others. For Comte, there cannot be a science of society in which the elements of the whole is studied in isolation from it. Accordingly, he meant that man as an element of the society cannot be studied in isolation from it. In order to derive a proper understanding of the workings of man or the society, an inquiry must be done from simple to complex. This is one feature that sets sociology apart from its predecessors. According to Comte, the proper approach to sociology is viewing each individual element in light of the entire system.

Social Statics and Social Dynamics: Another major contribution that Comte made to the growth and development of sociology is a theory of social statics and social dynamics. For Comte, the distinction between social statics and social dynamics in sociology is similar to the distinction between physiology and anatomy in biology. According to Comte, social statics and social dynamics are essentially about the conception of order and progress. Social statics is concerned with how order is maintained in society, the permanent harmony among the conditions of social existence. Social statics in Comte's view is concerned with how elements of the social system work together to ensure the stability, harmony and cohesion within society. Comte's position of social statics is similar to Durkheim's conception of functionalism. According to Comte, elements of the society that help to maintain social statics include; language, family, religion and division of labour. Social dynamics, on the other hand, is where Comte places a lot of emphases. According to him, social dynamics is concerned with social development or society or how society changes over time.

Comte's idea of social dynamics is founded on his Law of Human Progress/ Law of Three Stages of Human Mind. According to Comte, human society grows, develops or changes as the human mind develops from theological to metaphysical to positive stages. Social statics is therefore seen as the process of gradual evolution whereby people became increasingly intelligent, becoming less dependent on knowledge generated through dogma and focus on scientific knowledge. Social statics is, therefore, synonymous to order while social dynamics is synonymous to progress or social change. The process of social change or social dynamics can be modified, altered or accelerated by the actions of man but eventually, the development of society is predicted by the law of three stages of the human mind.