

The Concept of Change in the Thought of Ibn Khaldun and Western Classical Sociologists*

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This paper makes a comparative analysis and discussion of the notion of social change in Ibn Khaldun's 'umran science, on the one hand, and that of his counterparts among the Founding Fathers of Western sociology, on the other. In this regard, many similarities and differences are found between the author of the *al-Muqaddimah* and Comte, Marx, Durkheim and Weber. As to the evolution of human societies, they did not, however, see eye to eye. While the European sociologists saw human societies evolution in a linear pattern, Ibn Khaldun found the evolution of Arab Muslim societies cyclic in nature. Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun had found a strong link between the wide spread of extreme materialism/luxury in Arab Muslim societies and their weakness and inevitable collapse. This link is hardly found in the works of the Founding Fathers of Western sociology. On the convergence side, both Ibn Khaldun and those Western sociologists agree that social change is a necessary feature of human societies which very often lead societies from simple states to more complex ones: bedouin to sedentary, traditional to modern, Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft, etc.

Key words: Ibn Khaldun, 'Umran, Social Change, Western Sociology.

The Nature of the Study and its Objectives

March 16, 2006 marked the sixth centenary of Ibn Khaldun's death in 1406. On this occasion we thought it relevant to make an attempt to explore Ibn Khaldun's sociological thought regarding the concept of change as expressed in such modern terms as progress, social change, evolution, development and the typology of human societies. The latter is seen here as a ma-

* This essay is an extended and a modified version of the author's article "Ba'du Awjuh al-Tashabbuh wa al-Ikhtilaf Bayna al-Tafkir al-Arabi al-Khalduni wa al-Tafkir al-Gharbi", *Shu'un al-Arabiyya*, 26 (1983), p. 98-109.

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nifestation of the different nature of change as it occurs within and between societies.

In order to put Ibn Khaldun's sociological thought in focus, we will attempt to compare it, for the most part, with the sociological thought of contemporary Western classical sociologists.¹ To be more precise, our ultimate aim in this study is fourfold:

a) to outline the main features of Ibn Khaldun's sociology of change, which is yet to be explored. Therefore, greater emphasis will be given, throughout this essay, to Ibn Khaldun's thought on the phenomenon of change in societies.

b) to assess the relevance of his sociological thought on change as compared to that of Comte, Spencer, Durkheim and Weber.

c) to underline the determinants of sociological thought on this matter, both of the author of the *Muqaddimah* and that of his Western counterparts.

d) to see how their theory-building stands up to the modern criticism of the Grand Theories of social change.

Societies, Change and Sociologists

Despite numerous factors, such as time, space and culture, which have made the orientation, as well as the interest, of these two types of sociologists quite different² from each other, they have nevertheless been found, as will be shown, to share a common preoccupation with the study of change.

¹ In Western sociological references, distinction is made by some authors (A. Etzioni and E. Etzioni (eds.), *Social Change*, New York: Basic Books, 1964) between classical and modern sociologists. The former refers to Western sociologists of the 19th century, while the latter (modern) refers to those of the 20th century. Here we stretch the term classical to encapsulate some eminent Western sociologists whose lives overlapped a short period of this century. Emile Durkheim (1917) and Max Weber (1920) are case in point. Furthermore, our focus on this category of sociologists is justified by the fact that their sociology has shaped, to a great extent, the orientation of contemporary Western sociology (R. Appelbaum, *Theories of Social Change*, Chicago: Markham Publishing Co., 1970, 128). Thus, the understanding of the sociological outlook on evolution, social change, development, etc. of the earlier founders of the Western sociology becomes basic for any meaningful assessment of this field of knowledge.

² Modern Western sociological thought has been largely preoccupied with the problems of industrial society, while Ibn Khaldun dealt significantly with the Bedouin/sedentary dualism which characterized the Arab society of his own time.

The concern of sociologists with the phenomenon of change in societies is more than legitimate. It is evident that no human society can be totally immune from change. Change is the life and death force throughout human history, in all societies and civilizations. The process of change has proved capable, at times, of transforming societies either into superior or decaying human collectives and gatherings. Since society is the focus of the attention of all sociologists, their study of the phenomenon of change becomes, therefore, central and irresistible.

Studying and theorizing on evolution, social change and the development of human societies constitute, thus, a continuity of interest of a cross-cultural nature in the sociological tradition. As will be seen, Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* makes, on the one hand, frequent references to these aspects of societies and civilizations. On the other hand, the issues of evolution, progress, social change etc. have also been a major preoccupation for contemporary sociologists since the time of Comte.

The Issue of Change in Khaldunian and Western Sociological Thought

On the one hand, Western sociology has paid great attention to social change, development, modernization and the evolution of societies since its birth in France in the 18th century. Comte's³ Law of the Three States is an example of how human societies could evolve. Spencer's notion of Linear Evolution⁴ is another example illustrating the great interest among the founders of Western sociology in the phenomenon of change.⁵ This interest has intensified, especially since the Second World War. The West, in particular,

³ Comte, as the founder of Western sociology, was heavily evolutionist in his outlook on change and development in civilizations. Appelbaum writes "If Comte saw the development of civilization as evolutionary in the sense of uniform progress toward human perfection, he also saw it as evolutionary in the sense of smooth, continuous change; the laws of social change were seen as merely a form of Positive Sociology - Order and Progress - making the second the result and consequence of the first, according to the maxim: Progress is the development of Order" (Appelbaum, *Theories of Social Change*, 20). One must add here that Comte's evolutionist view was shared by earlier Western social thinkers like Henry Sumner Maine, Lewis Henry Morgan, Tonnies and Spencer. See also R. Aron, *Les Étapes de la pensée sociologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 79-140.

⁴ J. H. Abraham, *Origins and Growth of Sociology* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 194-7.

⁵ Of the 20th century American sociologists who have been interested in the study of change in contemporary societies one can mention a few striking figures: Parsons, More, Levy, Etzioni and Lerner.

has accumulated an impressive quantity of sociological literature on social change, development/underdevelopment, modernization etc.; the number of books, journals, reports surveys and monographs dealing with these aspects of change is considerable.⁶

On the other hand, Ibn Khaldun appears to have been captivated by the rapid phenomena of change which took place in the fourteenth century in the Maghreb of the Arab world. He writes;

The situation in the Maghreb, as we can observe, has taken a turn and changed entirely. The Berbers, the original population of the Maghreb have been replaced by an influx of Arabs that began in the eleventh century. The Arabs outnumbered and overpowered the Berbers, stripped them of most of their lands, and also obtained a share of those that remained in their possession. This was the situation until the middle of the fourteenth century; civilization both in the East and the West was visited by a destructive plague which devastated nations and caused the population to vanish. It swallowed up many good things of civilization and wiped them out... when there is a general change of conditions, it is as if the entire creation has been changed and the whole world has been altered, it is as if it were a new and repeated creation, a world brought into existence anew. Therefore, there is a need at this time that someone should systematically set down the situation of the world among all the regions and races, as well as the customs of sectarian beliefs that have changed for their adherents. In this book of mine, I shall discuss as much as is possible here in the Maghreb.⁷

As such, change and its related phenomena can be considered as a major continuing concern for sociologists, regardless of time, space or culture. This implies that a society, any society, must be sociologically conceived as an on-going process-system⁸ and not a given (stagnant) system. Change is, therefore, in the very nature of human societies. We shall see in this essay that Ibn Khaldun's *Ilm al-Umran al-Bashari* (Science of Human Civilization) and Western classical sociology have dealt with and studied the dimensions of change.

⁶ The following document is just one example of known publications about development, social change, modernization etc.: P. Jacquemot et al., *Economie et sociologie du Tiers-Monde: un guide bibliographique et documentaire* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1981).

⁷ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, translation F. Rosenthal, ed. N.J. Dawood (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 29-30.

⁸ W. Buckley, *Sociology and Modern Systems Theory* (Eaglewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 73.

Is There a Khaldunian Sociology?

Comte, Spencer, Durkheim and Weber are known as the founders of contemporary Western sociology. The question ought to be raised here as to the nature of Ibn Khaldun's social thought. In other words, does the social knowledge found in the *Muqaddima* qualify as "sociological" in the modern sense of the term?

The answer must be sought in such modern works as dictionaries, encyclopedias and textbooks of sociology. These sociological references define the discipline of sociology as the systematic study of human society.⁹ Methodologically speaking, sociology is also referred to as empirically and theoretically based knowledge.

The application of these common definitions of the discipline of sociology to the *Muqaddima* would mean that Ibn Khaldun was, among other things, a sociologist. The *Muqaddima* is a systematic analysis of Arab society before and during the time of Ibn Khaldun.

First, it is a boldly perceptive work on the dynamics of Arab society at large. The *Muqaddima* is seen, in fact, by some as the only global scientific sociological study¹⁰ carried out to date by an Arab scholar.

Second, the sociological knowledge in the *Muqaddima* has been inspired directly by the author's own observations as well as by his experiences¹¹ in life in the Arab Muslim civilization of his time.

Third, the *Muqaddima* is rich in sociological grand theories on Arab society in particular: How did it rise and fall? What were the roles of *al-asabiyya* and religion in its making and its disintegration? Why do the vanquished always tend to imitate their conquerors? How did the Arab State systematically follow the short-lived cycle patterns of growth and development? As

⁹ "Sociology: a social science concerned with the systematic study of human society", *Encyclopedia of Sociology* (Guilford CN: Duskhin Publishing Group, 1974), p. 278.

¹⁰ A. Shrait, *al-Fikr al-Akhlaqi inda Ibn Khaldun* (Algiers: SNED, 1975).

¹¹ Ibn Khaldun appears to have used documental statistics in checking the validity of his conclusions on a category of people who as a rule do not become wealthy. He writes "I discussed this with an excellent man. He disagreed with me about it. But some salaries from the account books of the government offices in the palace of al-Ma'mûn came into my hand. They gave a good deal of information about income and expenditure at that time. Among the things I noticed, were the salaries of the judges, prayer leaders and muadhhdhins. I called the attention of the person mentioned to it, and he realized that what I had said was correct". Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 309.

such, Ibn Khaldun's sociology ought to be regarded as a school of sociological thought in its own right among modern sociological schools. Because of its specific Arab nature, it may still offer a better understanding of many issues found in today's Arab societies than any foreign sociological school of thought.¹²

Finally, Ibn Khaldun himself describes his sociological work in this way:

In this work, I have commented on civilizations, on urbanization and on the essential characteristics of human social organization in a way that explains to the reader how and why things are as they are... As a result, this book (the *Muqaddima*) is unique, as it contains unusual knowledge and familiar hidden wisdom...¹³

The author of the *Muqaddima* was quite aware that he had made a breakthrough by setting a firm basis for the New Science ("sociology"). He writes:

We, on the one hand, have been inspired by God. He has led us to a science whose truth we have ruthlessly set forth. If I have succeeded in completely presenting the problems of this science and in showing how it differs in its various aspects and characteristics from all other crafts, this is due to Divine guidance. If on the other hand, I have omitted some points, or if the problems have become confused with something else, the task of correcting the rest is for the discerning critic; but the merit is mine; I have cleared and marked the way.¹⁴

Ibn Khaldun's New Paradigm

Furthermore, it can be legitimately stated that Ibn Khaldun's New Science constituted a new paradigm for the study of socio-historical phenomena. In the introduction to his *Muqaddima*, he showed the errors made by Muslim historians in their explanations of historical events. He made it clear that none of the known historical perspectives could adequately account for the historical events in question. In Kuhn's terms, there was then a real paradigm-crisis¹⁵ in the Arab Muslim historiography. The birth of *Ilm al-Umran al-Bashari*, as articulated in the *Muqaddima*, was the alternative paradigm which provided a better comprehension, especially of the history of Arab so-

¹² Shrait, *al-Fikr al-Akhlaqi inda Ibn Khaldun*, p. 208.

¹³ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 8-9.

¹⁴ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 42.

¹⁵ T. Kuhn, *The Structures of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

cities and civilizations. One can understand in this sense why the *Muqaddima* (the "Introduction") is classified by its author as Book I of the three books¹⁶ which make up his entire work. The remaining two books¹⁷ are basically about the history of the Arabs, the Berbers, and the Non-Arabs. In calling the *Muqaddima* Book I, Ibn Khaldun made his point explicit regarding its extreme importance as an essentially new framework; a new paradigm for any real grasping of the dynamics of the history both of Arab and non-Arab societies and civilizations.

The Backgrounds of Khaldunian and Western Sociologies

The two sociologies in question here are, therefore, separated by time, space and culture, as mentioned earlier. On the one hand, Western sociology as a modern discipline was born in the late 18th century in Europe, principally through Auguste Comte's writings. Therefore, he is considered by Western sociological circles as the founder of modern sociology.¹⁸ On the other hand, Khaldunian sociology saw the light basically in the fourteenth century in the Maghreb (North Africa) first, and then in the Mashreq (the Middle East). But in both cases, the development of these two sociologies was, to a certain degree, a response to the conditions which the Arab and the European societies were facing. Western European and then American sociologies have been greatly shaped by and preoccupied with the forces of the new industrial and urbanized societies of Western civilization, while Ibn Khaldun's sociology echoes deeply the moving forces at work in his time in the Arab world, both in its Western and Eastern parts: *al-asabiyya*, "Bedouinity", political instability, affluence (*al-taraf*), urbanization etc.

The continuing decline of Arab-Muslim civilization after Ibn Khaldun's death resulted in, among other things, the stagnation and poverty of religious philosophical and social thought. The closing of the gate of *Ijtihad* just a few

¹⁶ This was the way Ibn Khaldun himself divided his work. See Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 8-9.

¹⁷ As a historian Ibn Khaldun does not appear to have done any better than other Muslim historians like al-Tabari. See M. Talbi, "Manhajiyatu Ibn Khaldun al-Tarikhiyya wa Atharuha fi Diwan al-Ibar", *al-Hayat al-Thakafia*, 5/9 (1980), p. 6-26.

¹⁸ In our view, the birth of sociology as a systematic discipline that studies human societies saw the light when Ibn Khaldun completed the finishing touches to his *Muqaddima*. As such, he is the uncontested pioneer in this field. Consequently, Auguste Comte should be more accurately considered the founder of modern Western sociology and not of Sociology as such.

decades after Ibn Khaldun's death, was to be seen a symptomatic manifestation of this civilization's continuing weakness and disintegration. Consequently, Ibn Khaldun stands out as a unique phenomenon in the field of social thought in Arab culture and in other civilizations that predated him. The perceptive depth of his sociological analysis of Arab society is still unparalleled by any scholar or thinker known to us in the entire history of the Arab-Muslim world. The famous British historian, Arnold Toynbee, saw Ibn Khaldun's unique thought as being matched by no one, not only in the Arab-Muslim civilization, but in the entire history of the social thought of humankind. He wrote:

In his chosen field of intellectual activity he appears to have been inspired by no predecessors and to have found no kindred souls among his contemporaries and to have kindled no answering spark of inspiration in any successors, and yet in his Prolegomena (the Muqaddima) to his Universal History he has conceived and formulated a philosophy of history which is undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever yet been created by any mind in any time and any place.¹⁹

With Western industrial civilization expanding its occupation to many parts of the world, there came a Western cultural domination of the Arab World, not least in the discipline of sociology. French, British and American sociological theories, notions, concepts and methodologies dominate the vision of 20th century Arab sociology. The latter can at present hardly claim that it has its own identity, as had the Khaldunian sociology. The actual influence of Ibn Khaldun on contemporary Arab sociologists is still negligible. The absence of a distinct Arab sociology today is only one aspect of what we call "Cultural Underdevelopment"²⁰ in the Arab world. Furthermore, dependency on Western sociology is hardly a more reliable alternative for understanding the dynamics of Arab society. More and more frequently researchers²¹ admit that the explanations of social sciences are culturally and situationally (according to specific circumstances, conditions etc) determined. So the literary or semi-literary application of Western-made social science theories on Arab societies has no strong scientific legitimacy. Unlike the natural

¹⁹ A. Toynbee, *The Study of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), III, 322.

²⁰ See this author's articles: "al-Takhalluf al-Akhar fi al-Maghrib al-Arabi", *al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi*, 47 (1983), p. 20-41; and "al-Takhalluf al-Thaqafiyy al-Nafsi ka-Mafhum Bahth fi al-Alam al-Arabi wa al-Alam al-Thalith", *al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi*, 83 (1986), p. 25-42.

²¹ See R. Boudon, *La Place du désordre: Critique des théories du changement social* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984).

sciences, social sciences theories and paradigms are greatly conditioned by socio-culturo-historical forces, as well as by the world view²² prevailing in the milieu where they are born. In other words, they have an in-built bias. As such, the generalization of their application in different socio-cultural historical contexts often makes their validity questionable. As an illustration of this outlook, we examine now how the Khaldunian and Western sociologies have approached the issue of the typology of the societies they have studied.

The Dualist Sociological Typology and the Study of Change

Certainly, Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima* offers plenty of references, as well as an analysis of the dynamics of change and evolution in Arab societies and civilization at large, although the Maghrebian societies were the main field of his studies,²³ his observations and his sociological theory-building. Furthermore, in his attempt to lay down the general laws governing the transformations of human societies, Ibn Khaldun relied basically on the Arab society as a whole in the Maghreb as well as that in the Mashreq. His sociological typology or classification appears, therefore, to echo the type of change the Arab society had undergone up until that time. From his study of the latter, before and mainly during the fourteenth century, this great Arab historian and sociologist came up with a sociological classifying model of Arab societies which closely resembles the models used by contemporary Western sociologists. In their studies of change in societies, both Ibn Khaldun and Western sociologists have resorted to a pattern of sociological typology which can best be described as dualist in nature.

While the author of the *Muqaddima* used, on the one hand, the Bedouin/sedentary model in typologizing the entity of Arab society, contemporary Western sociologists have, on the other hand, made use of a number of terms that are very similar to Ibn Khaldun's, such as traditional/modern, rural/urban, pre-industrial/industrial, *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* and so on, as shown in Table I.

²² See Z. Sardar, "Islamisation of Knowledge or the Westernization of Islam", *Afkar Inquiry*, 1/7 (1984), p. 17.

²³ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 30.

Table I: The Use of Dualist Typology in Khaldunian and Western Sociologies

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Ibn Khaldun | Bedouin/Sedentary society |
| Tonnies | Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft society |
| Durkheim | Mechanic/Organic solidarity society |
| Cooley | Primary/Secondary group society |
| Redfield | Folk/Urban society |
| Howard Becker | Sacred/Secular society |
| D. Lerner | Traditional/Modern society |
| Parsons | Pattern variables (Particularism/Universalism oriented society) |

The classification of societies into two sub-categories, as shown above, in sociological thought both from the East and West (in spite of the fact that there are several centuries separating them) can be viewed as a sign of scientific sociological maturity.²⁴ While Ibn Khaldun's "New Science" was established on a set of new principles, ideas, visions and methodology of history and society, which has given the spirit of his *Muqaddima* a quite modern outlook, Western contemporary sociologists have, for their part, theorized and used different research methods under the influence of Positivist science. Some argue,²⁵ however, that continuity in the usage of the dualist-sociological typology²⁶ model of human societies has not been solely a result of sociological sophistication.

The Nature of Social Phenomena and Sociological Typology

One can legitimately ask what led Ibn Khaldun, as well as contemporary Western sociologists, to seek this dualist typology of societies. There are three questions that arise from such an approach: 1) Were the social realities of the societies they studied actually dualist in nature (Bedouin/sedentary, rural/urban etc.)? 2) Is this dualist typology determined by the nature of the methodology

²⁴ The spirit of Positivist modern science considers the classification (typology) of a large phenomenon (like society) into subphenomena (Bedouin/sedentary, traditional/modern, etc.) as an essential scientific methodology which improves our understanding of society (as a complex phenomenon) by analyzing and reducing its entity into its fundamental components and parts. See also Y. Lacoste, *Ibn Khaldun* (Paris: Maspero, 1965) where he argues that mature socio-historical Positivist thought and analysis began with the *Muqaddima*.

²⁵ J. McKinney, *Constructive Typology and Social Theory* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966), p. 101.

²⁶ McKinney makes no mention of Ibn Khaldun's pioneering dualist typology of the Arab society's entity as an important contribution to the study of social phenomena as well as to theory building. McKinney, *Constructive Typology*, p. 105-15.

of *Ilm al-Umran al-Bashari* and Western sociology? 3) Can this dualist classification be related to such factors as the philosophical civilizational/cultural worldview of both types of sociologists discussed here?

Certain modern sociologists who have raised the issue of the use of the sociological dualist typology in studying human societies tend to attribute it, in part, to the very nature of social phenomena. McKinney, for instance, links it to the following:

1. To distinguish fundamentally different types of social organizations in order to establish a range with which transitional or intermediate forms can be comprehended.
2. The polar extremes of the dualist typology are ideal types of analysis.
3. The continuum is seen as a vital notion in the comparative analysis of social phenomena. The types establish the outer limits, or standards, by means of which the processes of change or intermediate structural form can be comprehended from the perspective of the continuum.²⁷

Dualist topologies, like Ibn Khaldun's Bedouin/sedentary, Durkheim's mechanic/organic solidarity, Tonnies' *Gemeinschaft* /*Gesellschaft* etc., are considered by McKinney as important scientific²⁸ methodological tools which can greatly help in the understanding of the complex phenomenon of society. In this sense, the use of topologies in social sciences should be seen, on the one hand, as a sign of their growing maturity and, on the other hand, as an essential sociological tool for social theory-building.²⁹

Dualist Sociological Typology as a Reflection of the Social Milieu

One can assume at the outset that the use of a dualist sociological classification of societies, both by Ibn Khaldun and his counterparts in the Western world, is a direct result of the existing social realities of the societies they have studied. Was not the Bedouin/sedentary typology a realistic sociological description of the two sub-entities of the Arab society of Ibn Khaldun's time? Do not the topological terms of contemporary Western sociologists, referred to above, reflect the contemporary sociological realities of these societies?

²⁷ McKinney, *Constructive Typology*, p. 105-15.

²⁸ See footnote no. 25.

²⁹ McKinney, *Constructive Typology*, p. 105-15.

It is in this respect that the phenomenon of “sociological terminology” ought to be sought in the archaeology³⁰ of social reality. The more closely the new man-made sociological terms describe the true nature of the social facts in question, the more their credibility and validity, in theoretical as well as in empirical terms, will be. Contemporary Western sociologists and Ibn Khaldun’s dualist sociological classifying systems of the social reality of societies do not appear, however, to be only the outcome of their own observations of the reality of the societies they have dealt with. They seem, rather, to be influenced as well by the subjective dimension of the sociologist as a human social observer and as a social theorist. This shows, once again, that scientific neutral objectivity in the social sciences is a difficult task.³¹ Even some of the best sociologists, like Ibn Khaldun, Durkheim, Weber,³² Spencer and others could not avoid becoming entangled by the nature of the obstacles facing the student of social phenomena.

The Subjective Side of Ibn Khaldun’s Typology

The source of the *Muqaddima*’s dualist sociological typology can be related also to personal and emotional factors. Ibn Khaldun lived between the 14th and 15th centuries; a period in which he witnessed the weakening of Arab Muslim civilization. He saw various symptoms and signs of its crumbling and decline. This was particularly true for him on the Maghrebian scene, where he spent most of his active life and produced his best ideas, especially in the field of the social sciences.³³

As an Arab-Muslim scholar, committed to Islamic values and philosophy, Ibn Khaldun could not help but be strongly and deeply saddened by the decay of that civilization, which had a special place in his own heart. In order

³⁰ M. Foucault, *L’archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

³¹ See Boudon, *La Place du désordre*. The book is a well-articulated criticism of the scientific foundations of the Western sociology’s theories of social change. None of the theories discussed in the book can be described without reservations as scientific. The main reason given throughout this rigorous critique is the complex nature of the social phenomena, on the one hand, and the imposed socio-cultural psychological prejudices which make scientific objectivity and neutrality in studying social phenomena a difficult task, if not impossible, for the sociologist.

³² Boudon, *La Place du désordre*, p. 158-61.

³³ As is known, Ibn Khaldun’s fame is attributed basically to his *Muqaddima* and not to his historical writings in *Kitab al-Ibar*.

to understand the forces leading to its disintegration at the sedentary stage of its evolution he had to come to grips also with the forces involved in its initial Bedouin “take-off” phase. As such, the Bedouin sedentary extremities of society’s life-span became the focus of his study of Arab society as a whole. It is there, so to speak, that the decisive action which shaped the fate of Arab civilization is to be found. On the one hand, our great Arab sociologist made it clear that the rise of the Arab-Muslim civilization was the result of a combination of true Bedouin forces (*al-asabiyya*, bravery etc.) and of the new forces (Muslim brotherhood, etc.) which Islam had brought with it to the New Society. On the other hand, Ibn Khaldun identified a number of objective and subjective causes which tended to lead to the weakening and ultimate collapse of Arab Civilization. Looking at these two polar stages (Bedouin/sedentary), so important in the making as well as in the disintegration of Arab societies, made the adoption of a dualist sociological typology by Ibn Khaldun suitable for his study of the dynamics of Arab society.

Furthermore, the phases of *al-badawah* (“Bedouinity”) and *al-hadarah* (“sedentarization”) appeared to have also captured Ibn Khaldun’s attention and thought, both psychologically and socially. On the emotional level, the author of *al-Ibar*³⁴ had more sympathy with the Bedouin life-style pattern. He saw the Bedouin as essentially good by nature, as well as moderate in their materialistic orientation. These Bedouin traits are similar to those of the Islamic religion. Islam is described in the Qur’an as the religion of *al-fitrah* (innate human goodness) and also of moderation.

On the social side, both the Bedouin society and the new Muslim society had a strong sense of solidarity. *al-asabiyya* was the social bond for the former, while the concept of “Muslim brotherhood” had become the bidding factor of the new multi-ethnic society. Based on this, one may be in a position to suggest that Ibn Khaldun’s pro-Bedouin attitude cannot be divorced from an Islamic influence³⁵ on his thinking. The Bedouins are viewed by him as

³⁴ This refers to the whole work of Ibn Khaldun including the *Muqaddima*. Its long title is as follows: The Book of Lesson (Ibar) and Achievements of Early and Subsequent History, Dealing with the Political Events Concerning the Arabs, Non-Arabs, and the Supreme Rulers who were Contemporary with Them. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 91-122.

³⁵ Ibn Khaldun’s remarkable positivism and rationalism throughout his *Muqaddima* did not lead him to put aside the influence of what Z. Sardar (*The Future of Muslim Civilization*, London: Croom Hel, 1979, p. 23) has called the Absolute Frame of Reference: Knowledge originating in the Qur’an as well as in the Sunnah. This implies that human knowledge, from an Islamic

simple people by nature, ready to adhere to new religious beliefs. This is because of their uncorrupted and innately-good human nature (*al-fitrah*), which the Qur'an constantly praised.

With this background in mind, one can also explain Ibn Khaldun's well known negative attitude toward the sedentaries. The latter are perceived as rich people fond of luxury. He found that a sedentary, over-materialistic environment corrupts human nature and, consequently, undermines the basis of Islamic values. For Ibn Khaldun, however, the hardening of materialistic life in the "sedentarization" phase of human civilization was not only the predestined end of civilization as an objective phenomenon; it was, above all, a painful blow to the Arab-Islamic civilization which he held so dear.

The Roots of the Dualist Sociological Typology of Western Sociologists

Like Ibn Khaldun, classical Western social theorists and sociologists, such as Comte, Spencer, Durkheim and Weber also appear to have been influenced by socio-historical and subjective factors in their adoption of a dualist sociological typology as they theorized on the nature of societies and the way in which they are changed and transformed. Among the socio-historical factors which are assumed to have played a significant role in the shaping of dualist sociological typology are the following:

1. The study of non-Western societies, particularly by evolutionist³⁶ Western anthropologists, led to the discovery of other social patterns which were often described as "primitive", "underdeveloped", "strange" and at best "exotic".
2. The dualist typology of human societies by Western social scientists as traditional/modern, developed/underdeveloped, pre-industrial/industrial and

view, can never be an absolute knowledge. It is rather relative in nature. Ibn Khaldun has repeatedly manifested this attitude toward the relativity of human knowledge; he often uses the expression "Allah knows better" throughout the six sections of his *Muqaddima*.

³⁶ The following describes well the nature of evolutionary framework and its research interest: "With the dramatic emergence of Charles Darwin's fully developed theory of biological evolution on the European intellectual scene in 1859, interest in the 'primitive' peoples of the world increased as the possibility of applying evolutionary concepts to the realm of cultural and social materials was eagerly explored". D. Hunter and Ph. Whitten (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Sociology* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1976), p. 13.

so on seems to have been profoundly influenced by the Darwinist philosophy of the evolution³⁷ of human societies. According to this view, the growth pattern of human societies resembles that of organic living beings. Human beings, the Darwinist argument affirms, have evolved through the ages from a simple primitive state to their actual more complex one. So, evolution, whether of humans or of society, is conceived as having two extremes: primitive/advanced. Based on this evolutionary outlook of development, the adoption of a dualist sociological typology as a framework of Western classical sociological analysis of societies is an expected outcome. Western sociologists and anthropologists alike have been influenced not only by the Darwinist perspective³⁸ in their use of this typology, but also by their belief in the notion of the Linear Evolution of human societies.

3. The global transformation which Western societies began to witness in the field of science and industrialization, particularly during the 19th and early 20th century, has had its impact on the very conceptualization with which these social scientists have approached the study of the patterns of growth and development of human societies. The new dynamics of Western civilization, with its new vigour and imposing accomplishments, must have induced some unrestrained psychological biased attitudes in Western sociological and anthropological studies of human societies and civilizations. Spencer, for one, is a case in point. His somewhat categorical assertion that the evolutionary process of societies is inevitable and non-interruptible cannot be easily supported by the historical record. The same goes for his concept of Linear Evolution. The broad intellectual orientation of what is called today in the West the "Sociology of Development" has been strongly affected by these unfounded premises.

Some assumptions, like the "evolution of societies" as a basic intrinsic natural process of continuous advancement, which is seen to be only a matter of time,³⁹ have not stood the test of research over a long period of time in social sciences. By the early 1970's evolutionary-oriented theories of develop-

³⁷ This is particularly true of Spencer and Comte.

³⁸ Applebaum, *Theories of Social Change*, p. 16-30.

³⁹ This is shown clearly in Comte's position on development and progress: "Taking the human race as a whole, and not any one people, it appears that human development brings after it, in two ways, an ever-growing amelioration, first, in the radical condition of Man, which no one disputes; and next in his corresponding faculties..." quoted in Appelbaum, *Theories of Social Change*, p. 19-20.

ment were being questioned and their trial⁴⁰ continues unabated in intellectual circles. The critics point out that the process of development and change must be viewed as contingent both on multiple internal and external factors of the society in question. It is clear, then, that the subjective side has played its part in the analysis by Western anthropologists and sociologists of the dynamics of Western and non-Western societies.

Ibn Khaldun's Sociological Concept of Change

The concept of change appears to mean, both for Ibn Khaldun and for evolutionist Western sociologists, the transformation of society from a simple state to a more complex one. For the author of the *Muqaddima*, the simplicity of the Bedouin society can be traced to the material scarcity⁴¹ which characterizes it. The Bedouin does not usually possess more than the necessary material possessions which fulfill his daily needs and guarantee his own survival. Furthermore, the presence of strong *al-asabiyya* and courage, the readiness to adopt religious beliefs, and the capacity to preserve the innate goodness of human nature⁴² are seen, on the one hand, as features of this simple type of human society. On the other hand, the complexity of the sedentary society is fundamentally induced by the society's materialistic affluence (*al-taraf*). Bedouin-blood based *al-asabiyya* appears in the affluent society to take other forms, such as common interest. Ibn Khaldun affirms that both religiosity and bravery are greatly undermined by sedentary environmental conditions. As such, economic factors play a crucial role in shaping society's character and life-style.

According to our great Arab sociologist, the sedentary phase of Arab society's evolution is associated with the ultimate decline of civilization. Affluence and luxury (*al-taraf*) create many social and non-social ills. Among them is what is called by modern sociologists the "socio-cultural breakdown" of societies. Ibn Khaldun was far ahead, in this sense, of Durkheim in poin-

⁴⁰ A. Abu Zaid, "al-Darwiniyya fi al-Mizan", *Alam al-Fikr*, 2/4 (1980), p. 70-83.

⁴¹ This is in line with Ibn Khaldun's famous principle of economic determinism to society's dynamics and lifestyle: "It should be known that differences of condition of many people are the result of the different ways in which they make their living." Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 91.

⁴² Mahmoud Dhaouadi, "Mafhumu al-Tabi'ah al-Bashariyyah fi al-Fikr al-Khalduni", *al-Mus-taqbal al-Arabi*, 277 (2002), p. 70-78.

ting to the relation between the increasing rate of deviant/criminal behaviour and Arab society's weakening socio-cultural bond due to excessive sedentary culture and luxury. Ibn Khaldun writes:

Corruption of the individual inhabitants is the result of painful and trying efforts to satisfy their needs caused by their luxurious customs; the result of the negative qualities they have acquired in the process of satisfying (those needs), and the damage the soul suffers after it has obtained them. Immorality, wrong-doing, insincerity and deceit for the purpose of making a living in a proper or improper⁴³ manner has increased among them. The soul comes to think about (making a living), to study it, and use all possible deceit for that purpose. People are now devoted to lying, gambling, cheating, fraud, theft, perjury, usury... Thus, the affairs of people are disordered, and the affairs of the individual deteriorate one by one, the city becomes disorganized and falls into ruin.⁴⁴

This perceptive observation is a fundamental Khaldunian contribution to the study of crime, a domain which is yet to be explored.⁴⁵ It remains to be emphasized once again, in concluding this section, that Ibn Khaldun's general perspective of change, as well as the causes of deviance, are to a great extent materialistically and culturally determined. As an example, the transformation of Arab society from a Bedouin (simple) to sedentary (complex) state was achieved to a large degree through the working of religio-cultural materialistic forces.⁴⁶

Ibn Khaldun and Marx

With this key statement that the economic forces have a decisive role in shaping the very nature of human societies, Ibn Khaldun can rightly be considered as a forerunner of Marxist thought. The substance of the above observation is hardly any different from that of Marx: "The method of production in the material matters of life determines in general the social, political and intellectual processes of life."

It must not be concluded, however, that the author of *Das Kapital* and that of the *Muqaddimah* see eye-to-eye on all levels. Trying to entirely "mar-

⁴³ These terms should remind us of the modern terms "legitimate and illegitimate means" of contemporary sociology of crime and deviance.

⁴⁴ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 286.

⁴⁵ There is no known study in the domain of crime/deviance in the sociology of Ibn Khaldun.

⁴⁶ See footnote no. 42.

xise” Ibn Khaldun’s thought is a plain distortion of his multi-factored⁴⁷ explanatory vision of social phenomena. In other words, it is an attempt to de-Islamize and westernize his original thinking.

An illustration of the difference between these two great thinkers is the following: while Marx saw materialistic forces as the only real mover and mobilizer of human societies, Ibn Khaldun also gave a crucial role to the importance of non-materialistic factors in the making as well as in the disintegration of societies and civilizations. His well-known assertion that the Arabs would not have been able to build an empire without some form of religion is a case in point. “Bedouins can acquire royal authority only by making use of some religious colouring, such as prophethood, or sainthood or some great religious event in general.”⁴⁸

The Islamic Nature of Ibn Khaldun’s Thinking

On the one hand, there have been attempts on the part of contemporary Western scholarship to de-Islamize (or westernize) Ibn Khaldun’s model of thinking. The fascination of Western thinkers with his intellectual vision has been essentially the result of the Positivist, empiricist and rationalist bent of this great Arab sociologist’s mind. Western admiration of these traits is well established. It goes with the logic, as well as with the perceptions, of the modern Western outlook.

On the other hand, Western scholars interested in Ibn Khaldun’s work are nonetheless puzzled by certain aspects of the author of the *Muqaddima*. Yves Lacoste,⁴⁹ for instance, has great respect for the originality of Khaldunian thought. But he fails to reconcile Ibn Khaldun’s manifest orthodox Islamic personality with his imposing Positivist intellectual work. In other words, Lacoste perceives a sort of dualism of “split vision” in Ibn Khaldun as a solitary giant intellectual of the Middle Ages. The presence of both sound Positivism and strong religious faith in the personality of the scientist is not well received by the modern Western scientific outlook. Lacoste was certainly forcing a Western point of view on Ibn Khaldun as a Muslim social scientist and,

⁴⁷ Fahmi Jad’ân, *Usus al-Taqaddum inda Mufakkir al-Islam fi al-Alam al-Arabi* (Beirut: Arab Foundation for Studies and Publishing, 1979), p. 87.

⁴⁸ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 120.

⁴⁹ Lacoste, *Ibn Khaldun*.

consequently, on his Islamic epistemology, which had guided the framework of his well-articulated work. As such, Lacoste's work, despite its rigour and its debt to Ibn Khaldun's thought, is a non-objective effort on his part to westernize the Maghribian sociologist's ideas. From an Islamic perspective, Ibn Khaldun's work falls into the main stream in terms of how Muslim scientists and scholars should behave in their attempts to understand the phenomena of the universe. Like classical Muslim scientists and scholars, Ibn Khaldun used the *aql-naql* mind in writing his *Muqaddima*. It is a mind which combines the Revealed knowledge with human reasoned knowledge.

The Positivist approach to the study of phenomena is a cornerstone in Islam. It is not, therefore, restricted only to the modern outlook of Western civilization. The Qur'an, being the first reference of Muslim civilization, has:

1. adopted a positivist, rationalist, observationalist and "down-to-earth" approach in explaining phenomena, as well as in advancing its arguments to humankind.
2. devoted about one-sixth of its verses to emphasise directly or indirectly the key importance of science to human beings.
3. rarely resorted to philosophical arguments or explanations in trying to convince the non-believers of the existence of the unique God.

The *Muqaddima* speaks loudly of the influence of the Muslim holy book on Ibn Khaldun as a Positivist social scientist and as a believer in the invisible and in the mystical.

Shrait has argued that Ibn Khaldun's eminence in medieval civilization has to be linked to his adherence to the pure Islamic intellectual tradition to which he was exposed in the Muslim Maghreb. The Muslim Mashreq, Shrait points out, was less immune from the widespread distorting influences from mythical, magical and metaphysical Greek, Israelite, Persian or Christian doctrines and beliefs. The purer Islamic cultural context in the Maghreb must have played a significant role, according to Shrait, in producing the clarity, the Positivism and the originality of Ibn Khaldun's sociological thought.

Classical Western Sociologists and the Concept of Change

The actual conceptualization of the phenomenon of change by Western classical sociologists such as Comte, Spencer, Tonnies, Durkheim and others basically is similar to that of Ibn Khaldun. The typical pattern of the evoluti-

on (the nature of the process of change) of human societies is reduced to their transformation from a simpler to a more complex state, although several different⁵⁰ sociological terms are used by these sociologists to express society's simplicity or complexity. For the simplicity of societies, the concepts used tend to convey approximately the same thing as Ibn Khaldun's term (Bedouin); the simple life-style of primitive societies. Mechanic, traditional, rural, folk and Gemeinschaft societies are essentially societies characterized by simplicity in terms of population density, available material resources, means of social and cultural control and so on. As a result, the sense of social solidarity within such human social gatherings closely resembles the one prevailing among the Arab Bedouin communities in terms of the strong *al-asa-biyya* as described by the author of the *Muqaddima*.

The process of social solidarity in these types of societies does not usually need formal organizational efforts to maintain their social solidarity, stability and their social order. The normative order⁵¹ is the preserver of integration in such communities. Along the same lines, Tonnies' concept of Gemeinschaft is a typical illustration of the classical Western sociologists' sympathy with the spirit of simpler communities. Here, close human and informal relations, reciprocal cooperation and so on are expected to prevail among its individuals and groups. Tonnies subjective bias in favour of the Gemeinschaft⁵² community type closely resembles that of Ibn Khaldun toward the Bedouin society.

With regard to complex societies, classical Western sociologists have used, as seen earlier, such terms as "modern", "industrial", "urban" etc. to describe them. The notion of the complexity of this type of society has been commonly measured by population density, diversity of cultural values ("multiculturalism"), affluence, economic growth, industrialization and communication development.

Furthermore, these sociologists have resorted to such concepts as the differentiation⁵³ of structures and the means of social control of a society as a

⁵⁰ See Applebaum, *Theories of Social Change*, p. 128.

⁵¹ See Aron, *Les Étapes de la pensée sociologique*, p. 319.

⁵² See Abraham, *Origins and Growth of Sociology*, p. 248-55.

⁵³ Durkheim in particular used the term "differentiation" in his book: *De la Division du Travail Social*. See Aron, *Les Étapes de la pensée sociologique*, p. 328-29. See also the following works: F. R. Allen, *Socio-Cultural Dynamics* (New York: MacMillan Col, 1971), p. 139-59; N. Smelser, *Essays in Sociological Explanations* (Eaglewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1968).

yardstick of the society's complexity. The more differentiated the general structure of a society is, the more complex it becomes, and vice versa.

Durkheim's concept of "Organic Solidarity" was seen as a better mechanism as compared with "Mechanic Solidarity".⁵⁴ The former permits the new modern industrial social order to function, progress and maintain its equilibrium.

Table II: The Concept of Change in Ibn Khaldun and Classical Western Sociologists

| The Sociologist | His attitude toward Simple Society | His attitude toward Complex Society |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Ibn Khaldun | Great sympathy with Bedouin society. | Resentful of sedentary materialistic-oriented (Ettaref) society. |
| Durkheim | Mechanic Solidarity: Society is normatively controlled well but he is not very enthusiastic about it for the well being of society. | Organic Solidarity society is favoured as an evolutionary entity of society, but his fear and anxiety about the spread of Anomie are more than obvious. |
| Weber | Traditional simple society is appreciated because of the spread of informal relations. | Society of Rationalization, Bureaucracy, Materialism and Formal relations are the cause of many of his manifest worries regarding the future of this type of society. |
| Tonnies | Gemeinschaftliche society is seen with great sympathy because of the spread of simplicity and informal human relations. | Gesellschaftliche society is resented because of the spread of formal relations and increasing alienation among its members. |

In spite of the importance of this Durkheimian notion and its continuing use by modern sociologists, Durkheim himself did not appear to be entirely at ease with its capacity to maintain modern social order, particularly where complexity and differentiation processes are intense and speedy. His famous concept of Anomie expresses, in a sociological manner, his own fear and anxiety concerning the menace that threatens the nature of modern industrial,

⁵⁴ E. Gellner, *Muslim Society* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 686-90.

differentiated and materialistic society. As a result, the Anomie⁵⁵ has been widely used in modern times, not only by sociologists, in the analysis of weak social integration, social problems and other crises from which modern complex societies have been suffering. Nonetheless, the French sociologist was not, despite being an evolutionist, the only pessimistic Western sociologist vis-à-vis the dangerous potential inherent in the future of modern Western societies.

The German sociologist, Max Weber, was no less concerned or troubled by the implications of the continuous spread of Positivist science, rationalization and bureaucracy on the human and sacred dimensions⁵⁶ of these modern societies.

Weber's mixed feelings about modern Western societies since his own time greatly resemble those of Ibn Khaldun toward sedentary society or civilization. Table II depicts some of the similarities and the differences (in terms of simple or complex societies) between these Western sociologists and Ibn Khaldun.

The Three Revolutions and the Process of Development

Both the Industrial and the Scientific Revolution, which were witnessed first by Europe, later spreading to other parts of the world, have been crucial forces that have transformed contemporary societies and equipped them, particularly in the West, with modern structures. A direct result of these two revolutions in the West has been the crystallization of a third type, which we may call the "Materialistic Revolution".⁵⁷

Historically, the Western Industrial Revolution had to some degree certain links with Western colonial expansionism around the world. On the one hand, this was in response to the pressing need for the raw material required by industrialization. On the other hand, Western expansionism has to be seen also as a behavior that aims at securing strategic politico-military gains on the world scene.

⁵⁵ See Aron, *Les Étapes de la pensée sociologique*, p. 374.

⁵⁶ Aron, *Les Étapes de la pensée sociologique*, p. 522-29; Abraham, *Origins and Growth of Sociology*, p. 271-88.

⁵⁷ Z. Sardar argues that Rationality (as a dominant pattern of thought in society) is often correlated with materialism as a social prevailing feature. The materialism of modern Western societies has been the outgrowth not only of the rational-scientific thinking but also that of the Industrial (materialistic in Nature) Revolution. Sardar, *The Future of Muslim Civilization*, p. 27-29.

With these crucial historical events, a decisive shift in the balance of power took place between the new powerful Western societies and those societies which had fallen victim, directly or indirectly, to their subsequent domination.⁵⁸

Consequently, the colonial status of these countries has been maintained as they remain on the periphery of the process of participation in science, industrialization and development (economic or other). The emergence of the Third World phenomenon was to a large extent the outcome of these circumstances. The impact of these three revolutions has been, in general, of a materialistic nature. That is to say, the grip of materialism has affected more and more contemporary human societies. The Western Scientific Revolution has changed the values of modern man as well as his perception of the world and of himself (so it could be seen as a “cultural revolution”). Nonetheless, its wide orientation has been based essentially on a materialistic philosophy and its applications.

Furthermore, the processes both of economic growth and industrialization have radically hardened the materialistic existence of modern man. The spread of these three materialistic revolutions throughout Western societies has had side effects on nearly every aspect and condition of contemporary societies, not only in the West, but all over the world. Again, Ibn Khaldun’s theory of change in societies (from a Bedouin to a sedentary state) closely resembles that of Western sociologists on two levels: (1) they both, as stated before, view society’s transformation pattern as evolving from a simple to a more complex modern/industrial form; (2) they both appear to virtually agree on the links between materialism and the evolution of societies. In other words, societal change (society’s transformation from the simple to the complex) could not take place without the presence of at least a minimum of materialistic forces.

Ibn Khaldun’s View of Civilization’s Dialectics

The Islamic cultural revolution, which transformed the simple Bedouin Arab society into an Islamic society, more complex and greater in size, could not have accomplished those impressive civilizational milestones without the presence of basic materialistic acquisitions. But regardless of the nature of the principal forces involved in the transformation of human societies from simple

⁵⁸ P. Bairoch, *Le Tiers-Monde dans l'Impasse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

structures to more complex ones, sociologists have not been able (as seen earlier) to ignore society's processes of sedentarization, urbanization, industrialization, etc.

Ibn Khaldun, for one, was a bitter critic of the sedentary phase of civilization, though he was born and socialized in urban milieus. Furthermore, he spent most of his active life in urban settings.

In sedentarized people he saw the dialectical process of materialism come to the fore. On the one hand, civilizational dimensions, in a sociological sense, cannot grow or continue to flourish without some materialistic foundations. On the other hand, civilization will weaken and disintegrate because of excessive materialistic domination (*al-taraf*) in human civilizations. In this way, Ibn Khaldun was strongly convinced that sedentary civilizations will ultimately wither. Thus, the materialistic forces (in their *al-taraf* form) are basically the determinant factors that undermine the basic foundations of a civilization. This is a good explanation as to why Ibn Khaldun looked pessimistically on the destiny awaiting the sedentary process of human societies and civilizations.

A New Society is Problematic

As shown earlier, most of the Western sociologists discussed here were not as sure as Ibn Khaldun of the inevitable predestined end which awaits civilizational growth, its organization and its social structures, once the phenomena of the Division of labour, rationalization and materialism become common features of human civilization. Durkehim's position on this issue, as we have already seen, had many worries and anxieties with regard to the future of the New Industrial Society, whose social order is regulated by the Organic Solidarity mechanism.⁵⁹

Max Weber seems to have had a gloomier outlook of the destiny of the new Bureaucratic/Rationalized society. He was clearly troubled by such a society, in which bureaucracy and rationalization affect practically all public and personal relations, not only in the West, but in all modern and modernizing societies of the contemporary world. The German sociologist appears to have been haunted by the resulting loss of human spiritualism and tender-

⁵⁹ Aron, *Les Étapes de la pensée sociologique*, p. 374.

ness when the rational/bureaucratic/scientific/materialistic trend⁶⁰ continues to dominate all features of society; he had witnessed the beginning of this, particularly in the German society of his own time.

All three sociologists, Ibn Khaldun, Durkheim and Weber, expressed anxiety, fear and pessimism towards the advanced phase (sedentary, industrial, bureaucratic) of their own societies, but for slightly different reasons. Thus, societal complex evolution was problematic for all of them.

The Notions of Political Society and Social Darwinism and the Limited or the Linear Evolution of Society

It should be clear by now that Ibn Khaldun's comparative socio-historical approach to the study of Arab society and civilization led him, as stressed earlier, to recognize the phenomena of social change, growth and evolution of human societies as a fact.⁶¹ The author of the *Muqaddima* does not hesitate to affirm that the transformation of society from the Bedouin stage to the sedentary phase is indeed an example of evolution in the life of societies. Sedentarization, he observed, was often the goal of the Bedouins⁶², and not vice versa.

On the issue of evolution, Ibn Khaldun does not see eye-to-eye with these other sociologists. Contrary to Spencer, our Arab sociologist believed in the notion of limited growth and the evolution of Arab societies.

The difference between the Khaldunian and the Western sociological schools regarding whether the evolution of societies is limited or linear can be traced to the different realities of Arab and Western societies at the time. The theories of Ibn Khaldun and Western sociologists about societies echo profoundly those social realities. The concept of limited evolution can, to a large degree, find its explanation in Ibn Khaldun's view of Arab society as a political society. That is, its present and future are deeply shaped by its unstable political forces.

⁶⁰ Aron, *Les Étapes de la pensée sociologique*, 568; where Weber shows that the spread of bureaucracy, rationalization and science will have more dangerous effects on the human dimensions of Man in Socialist countries than in Capitalist ones.

⁶¹ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 30, 94, 95, 285-89.

⁶² Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 93.

Accordingly, Arab states and governments were found to be very precarious and fragile. Change in this type of society takes place vertically rather than horizontally.⁶³ Change is rotated from one head of a tribe to another. Thus, the phenomenon of change does not have a chance to widen its impact and affect the grass roots of the population. In other words, there are only a few individuals whose political regimes perish with their own disappearance in this Khaldunian society.

Seen this way, the growth and evolution of Arab societies depended very much on political variables. Consequently, such societies were conceived of only as limited and cyclical in nature.

Social Darwinism,⁶⁴ as has been pointed out, was the new ideology that has shaped the Linear Evolutionary vision of society's progress and advancement among Western evolutionist sociologists, since the time of Comte and Spencer. Western civilization's broad progress and expansion inside and outside its frontiers have only reinforced the idea of Linear Evolution among Western social thinkers and sociologists.

Furthermore, one can also relate the logic of Ibn Khaldun's sociological thought on Arab society's limited growth and evolution to his own dialectical approach in his socio-historical analysis of social phenomena. For him, dialectics is the clear future of the nature of human societies' dynamics. On the one hand, the starting point in the movement of societies and civilizations toward growth and evolution is bedounity (primitiveness). On the other hand, the end result to this movement is the sedentary phase (*al-hadara*) where materialistic affluence (*al-taraf*) prevails. But the latter is far from being a permanent stable phase of Arab societies and civilization.

Ibn Khaldun was strongly convinced that *al-hadara's* own dynamics lead, sooner or later, to its disintegration and breakdown.⁶⁵ Based on this, the

⁶³ See Jad'an , *Usus al-Taqaddum*, p. 87.

⁶⁴ Among the classical sociologists, this exemplified in particular Comte and Spencer's vision of the evolution of societies.

⁶⁵ Ibn Khaldun based his argument on two reasons: a. the metaphysical reason is summarized in the Qur'an "Everything on it (earth) perishes" - this includes civilizations. So, there are periods of decline and collapse in the life-span of human civilizations. Thus, the growth and evolution of societies and civilizations are not evolving processes, but rather they are interruptible processes. b. The author of the *Muqaddima* was convinced by the historico-empirical reason from the historical record , as well as from his own observations of the Arab scene, that human civilizations would not be able to go forward all the time.

nature of the dynamics of human societies and civilizations is, therefore, a dialectical one. And as such, it cannot be linear. Thus, the evolution and growth of Arab societies are cyclical and limited in nature.

The Place of History in Both Sociologies

In any comparative attempt to understand both sociologies concerning social change, development and evolution one should not neglect to identify the internal as well as the external factors which may have determined and influenced the nature of the sociologists' visions and sociological theories about society. Sociological knowledge, is in our view, essentially psycho-socio-culturally determined.

On the one hand, it is an established fact that Ibn Khaldun's attempt to understand Arab society and its civilization initially used a historical perspective.⁶⁶

His New Science (*Ilm al-Umran al-Bashari*: "Sociology") was, to a large degree, accidental. And there is nothing surprising about this when one examines the entire history of the development of human science.⁶⁷

As such, the author of the *Muqaddima* can be rightly described as a historian and a sociologist at one and the same time. On the other hand, the Western classical sociologists do not appear to have given significant attention to the past historical record of human collectivities in their understanding and analysis of human societies and civilizations. This was particularly true of their vision of Western societies. They⁶⁸ perceived them as better suited to the ongoing evolutionary processes than other societies.

These sociologists were rather preoccupied with the present and the future of Western societies than with their past. The Linear Evolutionary concept can be seen as a result of this analytical framework.

⁶⁶ As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Ibn Khaldun initially set out to reform or correct the historical methodology of his predecessors among Arab-Muslim historians.

⁶⁷ Many scientific inventions and discoveries occur by chance that is without any conscious planning on the part of the researchers or the scientist.

⁶⁸ This is more applicable to Comte and Spencer's positions on the evolutionary process in Western societies.

The Notion of Development and Its Ethics in Western Social Scientists

Modern Western theories of growth, development, underdevelopment, modernization etc., can be described as materialistic in nature. For instance, the GNP has become a common yardstick for sociologists, political scientists and, of course, for economists, in comparing societies on the developmental scale.

For instance, any normal development take-off in Third World societies has been reduced to economic matters. It is argued that without the economic basis there can be no realistic hope for the improvement of the conditions of underdeveloped countries. They cannot build schools, hospitals, roads, factories, etc. The rapid pace of development in the Arabian Gulf region is a vivid illustration of what the economic power of the petro-dollar has been able to do in the development of these societies.

But the impact of materialistic development on human societies has not always been rosy. Rather it has proved in modern times that it can be ugly as well. A great many of the individual and collective ills of modern societies have been attributed by many modern Western social scientists to the hardening materialistic syndrome in their own societies. The weakening of social solidarity, the increasing rate of divorce, the high rate of crime, the high rate of suicide in the younger generations, the non-empathetic attitude toward the elderly, the hippies' movement etc., are all common phenomena which are partly explained by the over-dominance of the ethics of individualist materialism in those societies.

In spite of this, there are hardly any significant modern works in social scientific⁶⁹ circles that have seriously raised the question of the ethics of the predominantly materialistic model of development which continues to spread around the globe. On this issue (materialistic or balanced development) Ibn Khaldun's ethics are explicitly opposed to those of most modern Western social scientists. In any case, there is an urgent need today for developmental

⁶⁹ Among the classical Western sociologists discussed here, one does not find apparent worries or anxieties related to the spread of materialism in modern Western societies. Weber's concern, for instance, can be clearly traced to the effects of science, rationalization and bureaucracy on human dimensions in the New Societies. Likewise, Durkheim's worries about the spread of the phenomenon of Anomie cannot be easily linked to his hostility toward materialism as such in new industrial societies.

social scientists to take a closer look⁷⁰ at the forces that can help improve the qualitative side of the materialistic orientation of the social development of modern societies.

Qualitative and Quantitative Development

As has been emphasized many times in this essay, Ibn Khaldun's sedentary phase (*al-hadara*) is seen as the ultimate end of the evolution of Arab and human societies and civilizations.

Humanity's long historical record does not seem to contradict Ibn Khaldun's observations. Furthermore, Islam's manifestly hostile position with regard to excessive materialism (*al-taraf*) strengthened Ibn Khaldun's belief in the validity of his cyclic theory of civilizations. The Islamic faith has stood against all materialistic domination, be they exercised by individuals, groups or societies. In fact, Ibn Khaldun does compare and consolidate his own theory of human civilization's downfall with the Qur'anic statement, spelled out in the *Muqqaddimah*: "When we decide to destroy a population, we first send a definite order to those among them who are given the good things of this life and yet transgress; so that the word is proved true against them: then We destroy them utterly."⁷¹

Regardless of whether the primary factors which have led to the rise of human civilization be of a spiritual and cultural nature (as in the case of the Arab-Muslim civilization) or of a socio-scientific-materialistic character (as in the case of modern Western civilization), it remains reasonable to state that nearly all civilizations throughout history have had the tendency to become more and more materialistically dominated as they grow and evolve.

The growth pattern of modern Western civilization is a case in point. Contemporary materialistically oriented Western science, industrialization and technology have scored a remarkable and sweeping victory over the authority of the Church. The impact of materialism has taken precedence over spiritual symbols in new Western societies. So is born the phenomenon of what

⁷⁰ Two books are worth mentioning here. Their ideas are signs of hopes as far as "Development" with a Human Face is concerned: Henry Birou, *Pour un autre développement* (Paris: PUF, OCDE, 1982); F. Perroux, *Pour une philosophie du nouveau développement* (Paris: L'UNESCO, 1981).

⁷¹ al-Isra 17/16.

we may call “the quantitative logic of things” in these Western industrially and scientifically expanding societies. None of the sciences, including the social sciences, would be credible if they did not follow the imperatives of this quantitative logic. The analysis of modern sociologists of the evolution and progress of societies is measured more and more in terms of quantitative indicators. The traditional qualitative dimensions of human societies, such as spiritual symbols, morality, the extended family etc., have frequently come to be perceived as indicators of backwardness.

Thus, Ibn Khaldun’s outlook on the advancement and progress of society is largely opposed to that of his Western counterparts. While he did not see the possibility of a lasting development of society without religious ethics, modern Western sociologists have not, on the whole, viewed that relation as a necessary one. As underlined throughout this essay, Ibn Khaldun remains strongly against excessive quantitative materialistic development, but not against development as such. The kind of development which he seems to favour may be referred to as qualitative development. Among its important features are: the preservation of the primitive (innate) goodness of human nature, strong social solidarity and religious ethics.

The author of the *Muqaddima* appears to believe that primitive human nature is basically good. Consequently, the human personality will have a greater chance of being decent as long as it remains closer to the good nature of primitivity. These assumptions explain again Ibn Khaldun’s sympathy both with the Bedouins and with Islam as a religio-social system. While the Bedouins are seen as good by their very simple nature, Islam is referred to as the religion of *al-fitra* (innate primitive goodness) itself. Furthermore, the Bedouin society and the Muslim Umma (community) share a similar stand on materialism.

The Bedouin individual does not have any more materialism than what is necessary for basic survival. The ethics of the Muslim Umma consistently disapproves of any excessive involvement in materialism. Finally, both types of societies enjoyed a strong sense of solidarity. On the one hand, *al-asabiyya* was the basis of solidarity of the Bedouin society. On the other hand, the bond of Islamic Brotherhood was the new foundation of solidarity for Muslim society at large.

Given the Bedouin/Islamic systems with the similarities just outlined, Ibn Khaldun saw a safer alternative for society’s evolution and development in Islam. Compared with Bedouinity, Islam as a system has more to offer for the

qualitative development of society. On the materialistic side, the Islamic faith asks for the practice of moderation, not the severe restrictions by which the Bedouins were obliged to live. While the Bedouin community is a somewhat inwardly closed system, Islam, as a religio-social system, is outwardly open to all humans, regardless of their language, colour, creed etc. This is surely a qualitative dimension of society's development. Furthermore, Islam has clear principles in favour of the actualization of human development in its broad sense. Science⁷² is a key pillar of the Islamic faith. It is through science that Muslims can uncover a great many riddles of this universe and use them for their well being. The Bedouin system has hardly anything to offer on the usefulness of science for the development of humans and their society.

But, as we may interpret Ibn Khaldun's view, the development process of human societies cannot survive if it is not monitored and controlled by religious ethics; these can help to maintain the social order of a civilization, keeping it in balance. This is exactly the nature of Islamic Ethics - to strike the middle range of things and never be dominated by extremes: "Those who when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those extremes."⁷³

Viewed in this way, Islam as a system can be appropriate for a qualitative (balanced) evolution and for the development of societies and civilizations.⁷⁴ The quantity/quality dimensions of development in modern societies have been a much-debated issue. Critics of modern socio-psychological dilemmas tend to attribute these to a lack of balance in the quantity/quality processes, something which modern societies have been experiencing since the Industrial/Scientific Revolutions.

Schumachers's notion of "Small is Beautiful"⁷⁵ is probably the clearest vision in modern times favoring a qualitative human development. For the author of "Small is Beautiful", the materialistic dimensions of development and growth must remain small or at least moderate, so humanism and spiritualism will not be overrun by savage materialism. Balancing out the equilibrium

⁷² It is estimated that 750 (one-eighth) of the Qur'an's verses speak highly of science and knowledge.

⁷³ al-Furqan 25/67.

⁷⁴ The importance of Muslim civilization for the future of human civilization lies in its balanced position between matter and spirit. See Sardar, *The Future of Muslim Civilization*, p. 27-29.

⁷⁵ E. E. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful* (New York: Harperturech/Harper & Row, 1976).

between the quantity/quality sizes of the social order of human communities leads, according to Schumacher, to more meaningful human societies and consequently to happier individuals.

Development and Materialism in Both Sociologies

As pointed out in this essay, Ibn Khaldun's thesis on affluence (*al-taraf*) is explicitly categorical: excessive materialism has negative effects not only on human civilizations and societies, but on the personality⁷⁶ of the individual as well. In such civilizations and societies, the individual tends to become more egoistic.⁷⁷ His own materialistic interests take priority. Ibn Khaldun sees the *al-taraf*-caused tendency as the primary reason for the increased rate of deviance and crime⁷⁸ in materialistic societies.

Under the pressure of satisfying his materialistically oriented needs, Ibn Khaldun's sedentary individual often appears to be ready to do away with his society's means of social control. Thus, the breakdown (Anomie) of the socio-cultural rules in sedentary societies is strongly linked in the Arab society of Ibn Khaldun's time to the materialistic over domination⁷⁹ of the individual and not to the multicultural value systems as argued by any contemporary Western sociologists. As such, the author of the *Muqaddima*'s view of the cause of crime and deviance may be applicable, to a large degree, to modern materialistic/individualistic Western societies. Merton's theory of deviance makes reference to the spread of materialistic cultural values in American society as a predominant cause for an innovative type of deviance, particularly among Afro-Americans. Yet, among most modern sociologists one rarely encounters a clear ethical position on materialism and society's well-being like the one expressed in the *Muqaddima*.

The attitude of Ibn Khaldun and that of Western sociologists toward materialism may be explained as a reflection of the general cultural values system that prevails in each of the two civilizations. As mentioned, the spirit of Islam is, on the one side, categorically against excessive materialism. Furthermore, the spread of luxury in Ibn Khaldun's time systematically led to the

⁷⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 289.

⁷⁷ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 286.

⁷⁸ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 286-88.

⁷⁹ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 286.

collapse of the Arab states, as well as to the weakening of their civilization. On the other hand, in modern times the impact of Christianity has declined in the West, while Western societies have appeared to be doing well or better under the umbrella of materialism.

These two different social contexts, have, consequently, led to two distinct sociological views concerning materialism. Ibn Khaldun's condemnation of excessive materialism and the generally favorable (or indifferent) attitude of Western classical sociologists toward excessive materialism must be, therefore, understood accordingly. However, Ibn Khaldun's condemnation of luxurious lifestyles cannot be solely restricted to his own empirical observations of the history of Arab societies, which speak of their weakness and disintegration once they are overrun by wild materialism.

Ibn Khaldun's view on the negative side effect of *al-taraf* on human civilization was inspired by his religious outlook. Thus, backed by two data sources (the empirico-historical and the metaphysical influences) which support each other in the *aql - naql* mind, the author of the *Muqaddima* can find no grounds to be optimistic about the destiny awaiting materialistically oriented societies. As such, his denunciation of luxury civilization is no longer a matter based only on his own subjective judgement; it is, rather, a social fact of his milieu in his own time.

The rather enthusiastic vision of Western sociologists of their materialistic civilization appears to be rooted in factors that are in conflict with those of Ibn Khaldun. Increasing materialism in the West has led, since the Industrial Revolution, to the continuous growth and dominant power of Western civilization. Furthermore, the decline of Christianity and the rise of the scientific ideology have left practically no room for the bulk of contemporary Western sociologists to seriously question the basic materialistic foundations of their own civilization.

The Nature of the Relative Knowledge of Social Sciences

This discrepancy between the two sociologies vis-à-vis materialism, is just one socio-cultural value among many, and its impact on the dynamics of societies and civilizations should solicit some fundamental remarks on the nature of the social sciences⁸⁰ themselves:

⁸⁰ "Social Sciences" is used here to include psychology as well.

1. Social science concepts, theories, methodologies etc., are greatly affected and determined by the influential multiple forces of the social milieu where the social scientist happens to be doing his work and his theory building.

2. The scientific explanation of the social sciences is, thus, bound to be relative in nature. Its credibility and validity are essentially local and partial. In other words, social science observations, laws and theories that are worked out in one community, in one society or in one civilization, ought not to be blindly generalized elsewhere, as social entities appear to always preserve certain features of their particularism and localism.

3. Recent critics have made it clear that classical as well as modern Grand Theories of social change have the tendency to stretch their explanatory power too far beyond the specific milieu they have studied. This trend has been seen as a major cause of the failures of numerous attempts to promote meaningful social change in the Third World by applying Western oriented modern theories.

It is against this background that we now take a look at the new scientifically inspired assessment of the foundations of both modern and classical theories of social change. In so doing, we intend not only to underline the flaws pointed out by the critics of these theories, but also to identify some principal causes that have led to the crisis of modern social sciences and how that crisis can be diffused.

A Typology of the Theories of Social Change

As an area of social theorization and empirical investigation, the study of the processes of social change has come a long way. With its more sophisticated methodology and techniques in studying these phenomena, modern sociology, for one, has contributed to the evolution of sociological knowledge in this field. New theories have emerged and some old ones have been refined.⁸¹ Generally speaking, we can identify today two types of sociological models which are used by modern sociologists in order to understand and explain social change. Some of these are what are often referred to as the Grand Theories. On the other hand, there are the smaller type theories, or

⁸¹ See what Trevor Roper has modified in Weber's theory of The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism in Boudon, *La Place du Desordre*, 156-61.

what Merton has called Middle Range Theories. Ibn Khaldun, Comte, Spencer, Durkheim and Weber's theories of social change obviously belong to the first category. These sociological theories have dealt essentially with the broader grand causes which can transform an entire society or a whole civilization. For the author of the *Muqaddima*, Islam was the crucial determinant impetus that set in motion the global change which Middle Eastern, North African and Asian societies underwent during Islam's earlier expansion. Likewise, it was through his thesis of the Protestant Ethic that Weber explained the transformation of Western societies into a Capitalistic system. As far as Durkheim is concerned, the transformation of contemporary Western societies took place due to a set of processes. The process of industrialization required a process of specialization. The latter has led, in turn, to the social phenomenon of the Division of Labour. All these processes have enabled the new industrial societies to function via a new type of social solidarity: Organic Solidarity. Furthermore, such modern theoretical models as Structuralism, Marxism, Functionalism and Culturalism are considered as Grand Paradigms⁸² suitable to study the macro-phenomena of social change.

Boudon and Popper's Criticisms of Grand Theories of Social Change

The French sociologist Raymond Boudon has published⁸³ a rigorous and systematic critical evaluation of contemporary theories of social change, not only of the discipline of sociology, but also in the fields of economics, political sciences, demography and psychology. In examining modern Grand Theories of social change one by one, he concluded that these theories lack scientific foundations.⁸⁴ To use Karl Popper's terminology, they are not falsifiable.⁸⁵ Boudon points out that these modern theories have the tendency to be nonlinear and too general in their explanation of social change in contemporary societies. Weber, McClelland and Hagen have emphasized the values-ideas factor as the deterministic force of social change. Likewise, Marxists, Structuralists, Functionalists, Culturalists and Developmentists have argued that the phenomena of social change can be explained according to their own

⁸² Appelbaum, *Theories of Social Change*.

⁸³ Boudon, *La Place du Desordre*, p. 156-61.

⁸⁴ Boudon, *La Place du Desordre*, p. 10-11.

⁸⁵ B. Magree, *Popper* (Glasgow: Fontana Paperbacks, 1982). See in particular ch. 3: "The criterion of demarcation between what is and what is not science".

grand perspectives. The unscientific spirit, according to Popper, lies in the pretension of each of these perspectives to be able to account for all features of social change.

Boudon, for his part, imposes certain restrictions on the explanatory capacity of scientific theories of social change: “il n'existe de theories scientifique du changement social que partielles et locales.”⁸⁶ In other words, the “scientificity” of these theories is only partial and valid for the local phenomenon in question. This vision of the “scientificity” of the theories of social change is greatly influenced by Karl Popper’s perspective of the nature of science itself. Popper contends that a scientific theory can never be accorded more than provisional acceptance. He argues that even this cannot properly depend upon verification of the kind made in terms of the “orthodoxy” of Bacon and Mill and their followers. For Popper, induction as a methodological tool of research can never lead to universal laws that can establish that all “A’s” are “B”. Such universal statements, though unprovable, remain in principle disprovable. According to this principle of falsifiability, a theory holds until it is disproved. Based on this, falsification and not verification is the appropriate criterion of the observational as well as the experimental procedures for science.

As such, Popper affirms that social theories founded on mistaken notions of certainty, such as “scientific” Marxism, breed distorted blueprints for total global change. These theoretical models are holistic in nature. The individual has no role to play in these holistic frameworks and he simply agrees to cater to the needs of the whole.

As an alternative to the outlook of Grand Theories, Popper and Boudon have used the concept of Methodological Individualism, which “seeks to understand all collective phenomena as due to the actions, interactions, aims, hopes and thoughts of individual men and as due to traditions created and preserved by individual men.”⁸⁷

Having ignored the limitation of the explanatory power of scientific theories, the Grand Theories of social change find themselves, according to Boudon, in a City of the Dead. “Les grandes theories du changement social qui

⁸⁶ Boudon, *La Place du Desordre*, p. 184.

⁸⁷ A. Bullock and O. Stallybrass, *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (London: Fontana Books, 1983), p. 486.

ont inspire le positivisme et le marxisme, le culturalisme et le structuralisme, le fonctionnalisme ou le developmentalisme peuplent une sorte de cimetière des morts.”⁸⁸

Furthermore, contemporary Grand Theories of social change remain silent with regard to both the role of chance and subjectivity in the phenomenon of social change. Boudon emphasizes that chance⁸⁹ does exist, and there is no use denying it under the pretext that chance is not a scientific concept - or that it is not significant.

The important role of the individual's subjectivity in the explanation of social movements is in line with the Weberian vision of the forces involved in social change. Thus, attempts by modern social scientists and thinkers to explain the history of mankind through the notions of class struggle, structural contradictions, power conflicts etc., have led, according to Boudon, to these theorists either inventing concepts that are entirely devoid of any meaning or being proven wrong by the facts themselves.

The Middle Range Theories of Social Change

Middle Range theories mean here those theories that have mainly resulted in recent decades from social science research which has been carried out on particular cases and forms of social change of specific communities or societies. As such, their scope for explaining social phenomena is bound to be largely confined to the studied milieu in question. Nevertheless, sociological studies of social change of a small-scaled nature have proven that accurate prediction of the trend of microscopic social change remains a difficult task for the social scientist.⁹⁰ Such a state of affairs ought to raise the following questions: (1) Is the nature of social phenomena too complicated, so that it is almost impossible to be mapped out and understood (even when they are small in scope) in its entirety by social scientists? or (2) Are modern techniques and methods of social sciences still premature? (3) Should the notion of determinism in its rigid nature, as in the case of the exact sciences, be considered inappropriate for application to the explanation of human and social phenomena?

⁸⁸ Boudon, *La Place du Désordre*, p. 185.

⁸⁹ Boudon, *La Place du Désordre*, ch. 7.

⁹⁰ Boudon, *La Place du Désordre*, p. 34-35, where Caplow and his research team are quoted as saying the following about the findings of their recent study (1972) of social change in Middletown: “The only coherent trend of these findings is the incoherence of partial trends.”

The Reassessment of Orthodox Science and Rigid Determinism

Popper and Boudon are firmly opposed to rigid determinism when it comes to the laws governing man's behaviour and social phenomena. Popper himself has gone one step further and argued for the principle of indeterminism in all sciences.⁹¹

Another philosopher, Schrag, has come out against rigid reductionism. The latter, he stresses, has led to confusing human knowledge in the fields of the human and social sciences. The numerous modern visions of human beings as homo-politicus (Lasswell); homo-sociologus (Dahrendorf); homo-significant (Barthes)⁹² are clear signs of this disarray which still afflicts these sciences.

With this in mind, Popper, Boudon and Schrag appear to agree that any potential reform in human sciences and society would require (a) a self-criticism of those concerned regarding their epistemology, their assumptions, their concepts, their methods and the theories which they have used and constructed while studying humans and human society. Such a self-assessment would help identify at least some of the causes which have led them astray in their pursuit of understanding the complex phenomena with which they deal; (b) The vision of modern science has to be rehabilitated. Science must no longer restrict the criterion of human knowledge validity only to quantifiable data. Among other things, science must accept the subjective components of human beings as real forces which must be taken into account in the explanation of both human and social phenomena. In other words, science must abandon the principle of rigid materialistic determinism and replace it with a multi-dimensional one, yet one that is more flexible, which is more suitable to the understanding of the complex phenomena in question.

Ibn Khaldun and the Stand of Western Classical Sociologists on Determinism and Science

Both Classical Western sociologists and Ibn Khaldun had scientific ambitions in their sociological theory building. Durkheim was probably the most deterministic sociologist of his kind among the founders of Western soci-

⁹¹ Karl Popper, "Indeterminism in Quantum Physics and in Classical Physics", *British Journal of the Philosophy of Science*, 1/2 (1966), p. 117-33, 1/3(1966), p. 173-95.

⁹² O. Schrag, *Radical Reflections on the Original of Human Sciences* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1980), p. 1-2.

ology. He believed strictly in the “social facts” (*les faits sociaux*) as the only force which can explain scientifically the social phenomena in society.

Comte’s enthusiasm for *la Physique Sociale* and social determinism were similar to those held by the author of *Le Suicide*. Comte went as far as considering sociology as humanity’s “new religion”. Spencer, for his part, could not hide the strong faith in the discipline of sociology and evolutionary determinism which had led him to believe uncritically in the concept of the “Linear Evolution” of human societies.

Ibn Khaldun, as mentioned earlier, was quite aware that he was making a scientific breakthrough in a new field (*Ilm al-Umran al-Bashari* = Sociology) while writing his *Muqaddima*.

As such, his sociological thought claimed to have scientific spirit in its analysis and comprehension of Arab society and civilization. His systematic treatment in the *Muqaddima* clearly has a deterministic sociological outlook. Like Comte, Spencer and Durkheim, Ibn Khaldun believed that society has its own social laws which alone regulate and determine the nature of social phenomena. The role of the individual’s psyche in the dynamics of society appears to be insignificant for all four sociologists. Thus, they are essentially social determinists. Yet, like other Muslim scholars and scientists, Ibn Khaldun did appear to believe in the limitations of human science versus the superior unlimited Divine Knowledge. The nature of the latter is absolute on all levels, while the scope of human knowledge is always short-sighted and relative. The repeated expression *Allahu a’lam*: “Allah knows best” and other similar statements are present throughout the *Muqaddima*. Such a phenomenon is unlikely to be found in the sociological writings of Comte, Spencer or Durkheim.

On the one hand, modern Western sciences, including the social sciences, have emerged and asserted themselves as a revolt against the authority of the Church and all other spiritual and metaphysical forces. Consequently, modern Western scientists have become strongly committed to the logic and truth of the quantitative rational sciences.

On the other hand, Ibn Khaldun did not seem to have any conflict with his Islamic faith while he was laying down the foundations of his New Science. On the contrary, he referred to Qur’anic verses, as seen before, to support his sociological observations. Ibn Khaldun’s implicit “relativisation” of the credibility of human knowledge and science makes his position closer to

that of Boudon and Popper. Yet, his reason for adopting this stand is different from theirs. While his view of the limitations of human science and knowledge is of an Islamic nature,⁹³ theirs can be said to be the outcome of their own systematic and scientific analysis and research in their fields.

Some of the Roots of the Crisis of Modern Theories of Social Change

The general failure, particularly that of the Grand Theories of social change as described here, may be traced to three main sources:

1. The flaws of these theories are part of today's general malaise that afflicts modern social and human sciences. In other words, the crisis of the theories of social change is not a phenomenon isolated from the broader crisis of the science of Man and his society. Schrag depicts the state of human and social sciences this way:

There is today a widespread awareness that a crisis in the human sciences has taken place. Philosophers and social scientists alike have expressed increasing concern about this apparent lapse of the sciences of Man into a situation of crisis. Regrettably, however, no clear and consistent account of the nature of this crisis and the factors that have occasioned it has been forthcoming. Indeed, the varied and conflicting accounts of the nature and source of the encroaching crisis have become infected with a conceptual crisis of their own.⁹⁴

2. These theories are predominantly the work of Western social scientists. In spite of the claims of objectivity and neutrality, Western ethnocentrism and ideology are bound to surface and interfere⁹⁵ in their making. In other words, they cannot be value-free. In their attempt both to account for the state of underdevelopment in the Third World and in their proposed strategies on how these countries can overcome the challenge of development, the theories, particularly those of liberal Western social scientists, remain on the whole si-

⁹³ al-Isra 17/85: "They ask Thee Concerning the Spirit of (the soul)". Say: "The Spirit (Cemeth) by command of my Lord: of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you (o men!)"

⁹⁴ O. Schrag, *Radical Reflections*, p. 2.

⁹⁵ In our view, this can be related to two factors: (1) objectivity and neutrality are a nearly impossible task to be realized by social scientists, as Weber and others have pointed out. (2) Given the dominant position enjoyed by Western civilization since the 17th century, it is expected that (because of their superiority complex) Western social scientists will be more inclined to show bias and ethnocentrism in theorizing about development/underdevelopment in non-Western societies.

lent as to the “underdeveloping” role⁹⁶ which was played and is being played by Western impact on those societies during and after the period of traditional colonization. Studying and theorizing about the developing nations without any worthwhile mention of the nature (dominant/dominated) of the contact between the West and these societies can lead only to distorted knowledge. Social scientists ought to be, by training and profession, the first to address themselves to the study of this unbalanced (superior/inferior) interaction and its subsequent long-term effects on the processes of development/underdevelopment of the two parties in question.

3. Weber’s position on the nature of the difficulties involved in research and theorizing in human and social sciences is well known. For this German sociologist it is almost impossible for social scientists not to suffer from short-sightedness, prejudice and bias in studying social phenomena. Thus, objectivity and neutrality in the field of the human and social sciences remain always an Ideal Type project. Many Western theorists of social change do not appear to have taken Weber’s observations seriously. They went about producing completely or partially inspired Western-oriented theoretical models of development⁹⁷ as if they were scientific and suitable for application in all societies regardless of their different historico-culturo-social backgrounds and characteristics. This tendency has proved to be ill-founded, not only by Boudon’s thesis articulated in his book *La Place du Desordre*, but also by the widening consensus among the specialists of social sciences, which stress more and more the specific nature of social change in contemporary societies.⁹⁸

The Concept of Methodological Individualism and the Explanation of Social Phenomena

In order to improve the credibility of theories concerned with the explanation of social phenomena, Popper and Boudon have used the notion of Met-

⁹⁶ This is in contrast to the Western Marxist social scientists, who have usually made colonialism, in its traditional or new form, a central theme of both development and underdevelopment. Gunder Frank’s writings are good illustration.

⁹⁷ Daniel Lerner, in his book *The Passing of Traditional Society* (New York: Free Press, 1964) is convinced that the Western model of development is the only model for the modernization of Middle Eastern societies.

⁹⁸ Birou, *Pour un autre développement* and Peroux, *Pour une philosophie du nouveau développement*.

hodological Individualism. The latter states that collective phenomena should be explained as the outcome of the actions, interactions, hopes, aims and thoughts of individual men and not only, as claimed by some Grand Theories, by the means of production, the pattern structures, the values, etc. of human societies. The implications of the use of this notion can be put as follows.

When social phenomena are seen as the result of both social and individualistic determinants, the way is then set for the recuperation of the fundamental concept of dialectics in social science theories. The abolition or the under-use of such a concept can only impoverish the credibility and validity of social knowledge. It may be argued here that the trend of the rapidly increasing specialization⁹⁹ in modern social sciences, as in the exact sciences, has led to the phenomenon of one-dimensional explanatory paradigms and theories that offer narrow and rigid explanations for Man's behaviour as well as for collective phenomena.

As already mentioned, Ibn Khaldun, Comte, Spencer and Durkheim are not exempt from neglecting the individual's role in the dynamics of social phenomena. Being social determinists, they were unable to see adequately that social phenomena are the result not only of social forces but of individualized input as well. Weber's position on this is clearly different. His concept of *Verstehen* is very close to Popper and Boudon's notion of Methodological Individualism. Both notions consider that social action cannot be accounted for without taking into account the individual's impact on it.

The implications of Weber and Popper Boudon's vision of the foundations of social action are twofold:

1. On the one hand, the social sciences have to reassess their general negative position towards such concepts as free will, Man's dualism (e.g. mind and matter according to Descartes) which have become, in modern times, more or less confined to philosophical studies. What is required of the sciences of Man, society and culture is a New Positivism that should commit itself to the principle of studying quantifiable and non-quantifiable factors and forces that may affect Man's behaviour as well as collective social action.

⁹⁹ There is no doubt that specialization is a pragmatic tool for the advancement of the enterprise of science. However, the fragmentation of scientific knowledge may not be of any help for the understanding of or policy making about such multi-dimensional phenomena. Such a specialized one-dimensional outlook of things may in fact cause more harm than good. As such, modern narrowly specialized knowledge can be risky both in theory and practice.

2. On the other hand, to improve their coherence and trustworthiness, the social sciences must adopt a multidisciplinary analytical approach to the phenomena they study. This would enhance the social scientists' comprehension as well as their sound prediction of social events. This does not mean, however, that the adoption of multidisciplinary will magically lead to a complete and perfect understanding of social realities. That goal, it should be emphasized, appears to remain beyond human reach, not only in the social sciences, but in the fields of the natural sciences as well. In other words, the enterprise of science is an ongoing process. Its discoveries are never ultimate truths. The experience of science has proved in modern times that scientific findings, theories etc., are always vulnerable to modifications, reformulations and even radical transformations.

Thus, in evaluating the credibility of classical as well as modern social theories of social change we should keep in mind that credibility does not guarantee absolute and final truths about the phenomena of social change. Our realistic criterion should simply be this: the closer these theories can get to the Idea Type¹⁰⁰ (in the Western sense) comprehension of nature and the scope of the social change in question, the more credibility they ought to have.

Final Remarks on Social Science Theory Building

In addition to what has just been outlined on the nature of the social sciences and the various obstacles facing the growth of sound theory building, we would like to end this chapter by proposing certain principles which should, in our opinion, enhance the state of social science theory construction:

1. The social scientist must have first-hand interaction with the broader social realities as well as with the special characteristics that may distinguish the society he studies from other societies. Without the social scientist's commitment to this, any theorizing or knowledge on social phenomena will be of little, if any, value. On the one hand, Ibn Khaldun's widely recognized contribution to the sociological understanding of the dynamics of Arab society is

¹⁰⁰ The Ideal Type notion in social sciences implies that either (a) social laws are flexible due to the impact of various other factors (the individualistic ones, etc) involved or (b) human and social determinants can never be completely mapped out by social scientists. This is in line with Montesquieu's view: there are certainly social laws, but they are by their nature unlike the rigid laws that govern natural phenomena.

often attributed to his firm commitment¹⁰¹ to this principle. On the other hand, the neglect, by a number of modern social scientists and researchers, of the role of particular cultural, social historical and economic factors in the understanding of the processes of social change in societies led Boudon to conclude that modern Western theories of social change are void of scientific foundations.

2. It must be stressed here that the social scientist cannot have a scientifically meaningful interaction with the society he investigates unless the general conditions of the society encourage freedom of thought and promote scientific social science research. The social sciences, in particular, cannot grow or flourish in societies where rigid customs, rigid social structures, oppression, dictatorship and authoritarianism prevail. The social sciences can prosper and mature only in open societies. Today's poor state of these sciences in the Third World must be related in part to those constraints.

3. We think that the credibility of sociological theory building depends, to a large extent, on two essential pre-requisites:

a. The explanation per se of the social phenomena under investigation must become a scientific challenge to the social scientist. In other words, the phenomenon in question must continuously preoccupy and stimulate his scientific thought.

b. In order for a social phenomenon to be carefully and seriously handled by the social scientist, we believe it is important that it becomes their personal or semi-personal problem, and not just an objective phenomenon simply to be studied. There is a difference, in our view, between a sociologist who examines the social phenomenon as a spectator and the sociologist who studies it both as an insider (being personally involved in it) and as a challenge to their scientific thinking. On the one hand, research and findings made by sociologists of the first category are often superficial, and thus, unable to contribute and enrich sociological theorizing with credible scientific scope and imagination. On the other hand, the type of relation the second category of sociologists have with the social phenomenon triggers in them greater motivation and determined commitment so that they are in a better position to set

¹⁰¹ *The Muqaddima's* sociological concepts, observations, theories, etc., are derived from the broader as well as the more specific social realities of both the Magribian and the Mashriqian societies.

the grounds for the establishment of more original and credible theory building regarding the social phenomena being studied.

The solid foundations of Ibn Khaldun's theories on Arab society have to be linked to the presence of the two conditions (a) and (b). On the one hand, Ibn Khaldun was not satisfied with the explanations of historical events given by earlier Muslim historians about various human societies and civilizations. Thus, he had to come up with better explanations. That was indeed a challenging scientific task for the author of the *Muqaddima*. On the other hand, the deteriorating state of the Arab Muslim civilization manifestly caused him personal anxieties, worry and sadness. In our opinion, these two dimensions have to be taken into consideration in any serious attempt to account for Ibn Khaldun's breakthrough in the social sciences and his perceptive social theory building on the dynamics of Arab society.