Ibn Khaldun on discipline

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Abstract

Aim: This paper looks at Ibn Khaldun's main works to see what he says about discipline. It argues that it is the central idea behind his studies of cultural, economic, and social phenomena. This demonstrates, more narrowly, that discipline is major to his widely acclaimed analysis of asabiyyah.

Method: What follows is a survey of a selection of these studies, illustrating how they incorporate discipline into their analyses and interpretations of asabiyyah.

Findings: Subordination of self-interest to group interest, obedience to social orders, self-denial, and self-restraint are all themes that emerge from his substantive writings as central aspects of the discipline. The texts also demonstrate how unquestioned an assumption Ibn Khaldun makes about the incompatibility of discipline and luxury.

Implications/Novel Contribution: One of the most important areas of study to which Abdurrahman Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) devoted his time and energy was asabiyyah (social solidarity). This study expands our understanding of Ibn Khaldun's writings significantly.

Keywords: Ibn Khaldun, Discipline, Asabiyyah, Social solidarity, Luxury

INTRODUCTION

Ibn Khaldun [1], the most famous Arab social scientist in the Muslim world and the West is Ibn Khaldun, a scholar from North Africa who lived in the fourteenth century (S. F. Alatas, 2006a; Fromherz, 2011; Hasan, 2007). His wide-ranging curiosity has led him to study history, sociology, politics, religion, education, and economics. In his book Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History (Prolegomena), he delves into these topics to develop what he calls "a new extraordinary field of study," or "an independent science sui generis, whose subject matter is the human social organization" (Ibn Khaldun, 1989; Baali, 1988). This distinct area of research is known as historical sociology in today's jargon. In his analysis, he consistently "emphasized the importance of linking sociological thought and historical observation" (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018). His primary research interest is the rise and fall of political orders over time, and he does this by looking at their intertwined histories with cultural, religious, and economic developments.

Ibn Khaldun, in his prologue to history known as Mugaddimhah or (Prolegomena), stresses the importance of asabiyyah (group solidarity or social cohesion) in explaining the emergence and evolution of the state, which he defines as "an organization that mobilizes legitimate force within a definite territory" [2]. According to him, the state is not independent of social dynamics and group cohesion, as well as the shifting demographics of rural and urban areas. The idea of asabiyyah discussed further below has been identified as the central theme in Ibn Khaldun's works. Commentators who have discussed asabiyyah have ignored the crucial role of discipline in Ibn Khaldun's treatment of this form of group solidarity, despite its association in the secondary literature with various factors like religion, leadership, urban and rural ways of life, the natural environment, etc.

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[1] Abu Zaid Abdalrahman Muhammad Ibn Khaldun Waliad is his full name. He was born on the first of Ramadan in the year 732 AH (May 27, 1332 AD) in Tunisia to a family with a long history of involvement in scholarship and government. Before the fall of Seville in 1248, his family emigrated from Andalusia (Spain) to Morocco in the eighth century (Baali, 1988), Enan. On March 17, 1406, Ibn Khaldun passed away and was laid to rest in a Sufi cemetery in Cairo (Fromherz, 2011)

[2] For an extended discussion of the political and legal theories of the state, see (Coggins, 2014; Simmons, 2006; Stepan, 2008)

This article is divided into five sections that build upon one another. The first paragraph summarizes the paper's point, and the second discusses the relevant secondary sources. Part three of the article summarizes Ibn Khaldun's asabiyyah theory (group solidarity or social cohesion). The fourth section discusses the importance of disinclining in Ibn Khaldun's analysis. The article concludes with a brief summary of its key points in Section 5.

The Purpose of the Article

Many commentators on Mugaddimhah have overlooked the importance of discipline in Ibn Khaldun's work (Ahmad, 2004; Al-Mamni, 2010; Al-Katabi, 2011; Hakiki, 1983; Hassanzadeh, 2020; Ingole, 2015; Lacoste, 1984; Muftah, 2011; Rashwan, 2008). This paper aims to delve deeper into Ibn Khaldun's views on discipline by looking at how he links it to asabiyyah, or what is more commonly known in secondary literature as social solidarity based on shared group feelings. The author contends that discipline is the key concept in his socio historical analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ibn Khalduns analysis of asabiyyah has been extensively studied and interpreted by many scholars, who focus on different aspects of the subject. There are, for example, studies that examine it as an independent subject in itself and those that that investigate its relationship with various types of social, political, and economic issues. The following discussion surveys a number of these studies to show the extent to which they integrate discipline into the analyses and interpretations of asabiyyah.

Alatas is one of the major scholars who have devoted a great deal of their scholarly works to analyzing Ibn Khalduns social theories and his contribution to historical sociology (S. F. Alatas, 2006a, 2006b; S. Alatas, 2013; S. F. Alatas, 2014; S. F. Alatas & Sinha, 2017; S. F. Alatas, 2017). Like many other commentators see, for example (Çaksu, 2017; El-Kholei, 2019; Palop, Mucke, & Roberson, 2010; Ritzer, 2007), he recognizes asabiyyah as the central theme in Ibn Khalduns Muqaddimah (Prolegomenon). However, he, along with many analysts, reduces asabiyyah to emotional attachment among members of the social group. Alatas argues, for example, that Ibn Khaldun sees it as ...the feeling of unity among the members of a group that is acquired from the knowledge that they share a common descent (S. F. Alatas, 2017). In this context, the ability of the group to defend and protect their members depends very much on the degree to which they are a close group of common descent. This not only gives them greater courage, it causes them to be feared by their enemies since it is known that affection for the kin group is far more important than anything else (S. F. Alatas, 2014). He also points out that the military superiority of the Bedouin over sedentary people is a function of their stronger asabiyyah (S. F. Alatas, 2017).

In reality, Alatas analysis falls short from considering the role of discipline in Ibn Khalduns theory of asabiyyah. He inaccurately assumes that strong emotional attachment leads to an effective social solidarity in the sense that social groups with strong group feelings can dominate and assert their rule over groups with weaker emotional bonds of solidarity. Although strong emotional attachment is an important part of asabiyyah, group feeling/social cohesion is by no means sufficient to subjugate one group to the other and/or to form a new political order. As we will see later in this paper, Ibn Khalduns text reveals a much more complicated treatment of asabiyyah than a simple Durkheimian vision of social solidarity since discipline and political power are part of his theory.

Unlike Alatas, who views asabiyyah as a given social phenomenon, Malesevic investigates the origins of group solidarity in Ibn Khalduns historical sociology. He argues that Ibn Khaldun attributes social solidarity to the needs of human beings to the emotional fulfilment generated by asabiyyah, that is, the prolonged face-to-face inter-action forged in hostile conditions stimulates the feelings of moral obligation, mutual affection, unity and cognitive interdependence (Malešević, 2015). He also claims that Ibn Khaldun explains the development and disintegration of group solidarity among nomadic tribal warriors, but he did not explore how such strong solidary networks could also emerge elsewhere (Malešević, 2015). Although Malesevic assets that the inhabitants of modern social orders require ties of solidarity that are not profoundly different to those that bounded our predecessors (Malešević, 2015), he believes Ibn Khalduns theory does not explain the persistence and dominance of micro-group solidarities in the contemporary world (Malešević, 2015). His explanation of how group social solidarity is possible in modern society is related to what he calls organizational and ideological forces (Malešević, 2015). For him, the successes of modern organizations depend on their ability either to mimic the discourses of micro-groups or to penetrate the pouches of micro, face-to-face, solidarity and integrate them into broader, society- or organization-wide, ideological

narratives (Malešević, 2015).

Ibn Khalduns theory of asabiyyah neither depends of small group attachments nor relays solely on the emotional fulfilment generated by social solidarity. Since small group attachments and the emotions of members of the group are common throughout human history, they do not provide satisfactory explanations to the rise and fall of social and political organizations, especially the development of the state. As we will see in this paper, the Khaldunian text shows that he has a specific kind of social solidarity in mind, that is, asabiyyah that seeks political power (al-mulk). This type of social solidarity depends to a large degree on the driving force of discipline.

While various commentators pay lip service to the relationship between power and asabiyya/group feeling, others highlight the political aspect of this social phenomenon. Pocock, for example, asserts that group feeling entails a capacity for expansion, domination and conquest (Pocock, 2019) and Dhadance argues that Ibn Khaldun views asabiyyah as the cohesive force of the group to conquest power and to incarnate the state. Therefore, the rise and decline of states is associated with the evolution of asabiyyah. He suggests that Ibn Khaldun sees it as a neutral instrument of power, that is, a social force that is neither good nor bad in itself (Chabane, 2008).

In the same context, Katsiaficas reads Ibn Khaldun through lens of Durkheim since he views the formers analysis of asabiyyah as a social force that hold societies together (Katsiaficas, 1999). For him, Ibn Khalduns criticisms of the Arabs can partially be understood here as a critique of the failure of any group to maintain a sense of inner solidarity (Katsiaficas, 1999). In addition, Hopley discusses Ibn Khaldun vision of civilization arguing that he his theory posits that a given people are at their strongest when their feeling of asabiyya is at its height. This appears to happen when that group exists in some originary state in nature, far from urban life (Hopley, 2016; Wu, 2017). Similarly, Bent argues that Ibn Khaldun sees a direct link between the strength of asabiyyah and leadership and the expansion of the state. He states that in order to conquer other societies, a group needs a strong leader. In order to lead a group, a person must have a superior assabiyya to that of other individuals in the group. These individuals will then become aware of that superiority, and follow and obey this leader (Van, 2016).

Furthermore, there is a large body of literature that examines the relationships between asabiyyah and other issues. Orhan, for example, investigates asabiyya to shed light on its relationship with political violence and identity in the context of the Kurdish experience. He perceives the phenomenon of asabiyya as consisting of psychological, social, and cultural elements, the most important of which is the belief in the common ancestry (Orhan, 2018). At the same time, Hashemi presents a neo-Khaldunian theory to explain the dynamics of entrepreneurship of the Silicon Valley. He argues that Ibn Khalduns main theoretical contribution is in his distinction between the risk-takers and risk-avoiders rather than the city versus desert dichotomy. The deeper dichotomy, which remains relevant today, is between the risk-takers and risk-avoiders or between the trained and untrained. Arguably, these dichotomies provide a platform for a neo-Khaldunian sociology of technology (Hashemi, 2019). In fact, Ibn Khalduns real contribution lays not in what Hashemi calls the lack of respect for traditions, thriving on uncertainty and constant adaptation to the environment (Hashemi, 2019) but rather on his theory of asabiyyah at the center of which is discipline.

IBN KHALDUNS THEORY OF SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

Asabiyyah is the major social phenomenon that Ibn Khaldun examines in his historical sociology3. It is commonly referred to in the secondary literature as the feeling of social cohesion and solidarity among the members of a group and drives its power from their awareness that they share a common descent see, for example (Hashemi, 2019). Although emotions and the belief in sharing a common blood ties are integral aspects of asabiyyah, alliance and client relationships are parts of it as well. Ibn Khaldun sees the purpose of group feeling as the ability to defend oneself, to offer opposition, to protect oneself, and to press ones claims (Ibn Khaldun, 1989). He emphasizes that asabiyyah is a social force based on imagination rather than actual blood relationships, which means that lineage or pedigree is no more than a myth see (Ibn Khaldun, 1989, 2017). Notably, the emphasis on the use of myths by no means suggests that it has an insignificant influence on the actual behavior of members of the group. Instead, the strongest group in society employs myths, images and symbols and other cultural factors to consolidate its social and political domination and to spread shared cultural characteristics. As result, the group gains power over other groups and brings them under its authority, especially at the beginning of the establishment of the state (Ibn Khaldun, 1989, 2017).

DISCIPLINE

Ibn Khaldun never presents a coherent theory of discipline. However, a close reading of his substantive texts reveal that there are five interconnected characteristics of discipline. First, it encompasses the subordination of the individual interest to that of the group. Second, it involves patterns of behavior based on obedience to social orders. Third, it includes sacrifice and self-denial as its major components. Forth, it drives its power from individual self restraint. Fifth, it is incompatible with luxury.

The Subordination of the Person Interest to That of the Group

Ibn Khaldun suggests that the more intense the feeling of solidarity among members of the group the more they rise to defend it. For him, the subordination of the persons interest to that of the group prepones a large degree of emotional attachment to the group itself. Their defense and protection are successful only if they are a closely-knit group of common decent. This strengthens their stamina and makes them feared, since everybodys affection for his family and his group is more important (than anything else) (Ibn Khaldun, 1989). A close-knit group of people is the one in which everyone supports members of his group rather than focusing on his sheer egoistic interest. Such a group is characterized by social cohesion and cultural ties. Certainly, having a strong relationship among members of the group involves a substantial degree of altruistic behavior that enables each person to take interest in the challenges and activities of others.

Although the person common descent with the group increases his chances of altruistic behavior, it is by no means real but rather it is an imaginary belief (Ibn Khaldun, 2017). Ibn Khaldun observes also that other social relations have the same subjective effects on the persons emotional composition, which include friendly association, long familiarity and the relationship between master and flower. The consequences of common descent, though natural, still are something imaginary. The real thing to bring about feeling of close contact is social intercourse, friendly association, long familiarity, and the companionship that results from other circumstances of death and life (Ibn Khaldun, 1989).

Obedience to Social Orders

For Ibn Khaldun, social order refers to the relations of asabiyyah, which unify different groups under a strong political leadership rather than a set of diffused social norms or cultural values. In his theorizing, political authority is indispensable for the stability of the social order. Anarchy destroys mankind and ruins civilization, since the existence of royal authority is a natural quality of man. It alone guarantees their existence and social organization (Ibn Khaldun, 1989). In this sense, discipline involves pattern of behavior based on obedience to social orders, which gives asabiyyah its structure, habits and stability. In other words, political leadership plays an important role because it facilitates discipline in society, specifically at the beginning of the nation building. Ibn Khaldun suggests that in the beginning of the establishment of the state people find it difficult to follow social and political orders because they are not accustomed to rules and regulations (Ibn Khaldun, 2017). Therefore, strong political leadership is inevitable at this stage of social and cultural development.

Sacrifice and Self-Denial

Ibn Khaldun insists that humiliation and servitude have negative effects on the morals and solidarity of any group of people. The more members of the group experience humiliation and servitude the less they are able to exhibit orderly conduct. He illustrates his argument by referring to the Israelites refusal to conquer the Holy Land despite informing them by Moses that God granted them victory. Their conduct is to be explained by the fact that they were conscious of their own incapacity to resist or to attack owing to the long period of servitude to the Egyptians which they had to endure and which had broken their solidarity and given them a subject-mentality (Ibn Khaldun, 2008). He sees the wandering of ancient Israelites in the desert for forty years as a disciplinary measure to help them overcome the psychology of enslavement and disgrace. Their experience, which is an indication of loss of asabiyyah, transformed them into a new people with self-esteem, power and group solidarity, that is, a people with asabiyyah (Gürkan, 2017).

Self Restraint

Self-restraint is the ability of the person to control and resist various temptations and make rational goals and moral decisions. In Ibn Khalduns view, there are external and internal kids of restrain. The first one is imposed on the person from the authority and the second one is from within himself. He suggests that external control is needed to deal with lack of self-control. For him, human beings are capable of doing good and evil things because the nature of man consists of these two qualities. If there is no restrains on the person, he will undoubtedly fail to overcome his natural evil qualities, such as injustice and aggression. He who casts his eye upon the property of his brother will lay his hand upon it to take it, unless there is a restraining influence to hold him back (Ibn Khaldun, 1989).

Internal restrain is the ability of the person to control not only his natural evil qualities but also his pleasures and hedonic consumption. Ibn Khaldun associates between self restraint and the lifestyles of the inhabitants of the countryside and the desert4. Their self-control behaviors are characterized by restraint in regard to (a) the consumption of food and drink; (b) the use of the tongue and behavior towards others; (c) negative emotions such as anger, hatred, jealousy, etc.; (d) sexual behavior. With respect to the consumption of food and drink, for example, he notes that the person who suffers hunger or eats only little is physically better off if he stays hungry than if he easts too much. Hunger has a favorable influence on the health and well-being of body and intellect (Ibn Khaldun, 1989). Because of their high degree of self-restraint, people who have accustomed themselves to hunger and abstain from pleasures are more likely to survive widespread scarcity of food. In fact, very few of them, if any, die because of drought or famine compared to other people (Ibn Khaldun, 1989). He observes that the bodies of urban population are found to be more delicate than those of inhabitants of the desert who live a hard life (Ibn Khaldun, 1989).

Luxurious Ways of Life

In Ibn Khalduns view, luxury, laziness and ease have a strong negative influence on the character of the person, the survival of the group, the growth in the city and the advancement of civilization. Luxury also weakens political authority and religious beliefs.

The character of the person

Luxury is associated with lack of self-discipline because it involves consuming large non-essential pleasures, which, in his views, weaken the character of the person. It also has a very negative influence on the self since it endangers its chances of moral and ethical judgments. Luxury corrupts the character, through luxury the soul acquiring diverse kinds of evil and sophisticated customs (Ibn Khaldun, 1989). Ibn Khaldun assumes that the person is incapable of controlling himself in the face of an influx of abundance of material pleasures and great ease and comfort, that is, refinement ways of living rather than a necessity.

The demise of the group

Luxury is associated with lack of social discipline and the disappearance of feeling of solidarity and group cohesiveness among members of the group. Notably, social discipline diminishes greatly as members of the various groups embrace luxury. Ibn Khaldun, for example, argues that military discipline and bravery start to decrease as soon as the group settle in fertile lands and adopt lavish ways of life (Ibn Khaldun, 1989). For him, sedentary groups are doomed to disintegration because of their lifestyles.

Sedentary people are much concerned with all kinds of pleasures. They are accustomed to luxury and success in worldly occupations and to indulgence in worldly desires. Therefore, their souls are colored with all kinds of blameworthy and evil qualities. The more of them they possess, the more remote do the ways and means of goodness become to them. Eventually they lose all sense of restraint (Ibn Khaldun, 1989).

Ibn Khaldun sees a negative association between feeling of solidarity and group cohesiveness and embracing luxury in the city. The more a group of people embrace luxury the more the lose their moral and social discipline.

The decline of growth in the city

Ibn Khaldun asserts that luxurious ways of life contribute to the decline of growth in the city in the sense that

the abundance of foods weakens physical and spiritual life of its inhabitants. City inhabitants are less religious than inhabitants of the desert and those who have accustomed themselves to hunger and to abstinence from pleasures. For this reason, there are few religious people in towns and cities and the condition of the inhabitants within a single city can be observed to differ according to the different distribution of luxury and abundance (Ibn Khaldun, 1989).

The Disintegration of civilization

Ibn Khaldun argues that luxurious way of living is one of the major causes of the ruin of civilization. At the beginning of the formation of the state, there are few expenses and expenditures and that there is a large surplus because revenue from taxes pays for much more than the necessary expenditure (Ibn Khaldun, 1989). At this stage of development, people are generally pleased since the state imposes few taxes on them. However, when the state adopts more luxurious expenditures it has no choice but to impose more taxes on the citizens. The state keeps imposing more and more taxes until taxation becomes excessive. Hence, civilization is dissolved since economic activities decline because people have no hope of making profits that they can keep for themselves (Ibn Khaldun, 1989, 2017).

The weakening of political authority

Ibn Khaldun pays a great deal of attention to the role of authority in society. In fact, his ideas regarding the relationship between 'asabiyyah and royal authority remain insightful (Ayyash, 2017). His analysis of the weakening of political authority is more or less an analysis of the weakening of social discipline as a direct result of authoritarianism and extravagance of luxurious lifestyles of the rulers, that is, the leader and his new elite group that he trusts more than his original group. Ibn Khaldun points out that when a group of people seize power, the structure of political authority starts to change in the sense that sharing authority becomes limited to certain people of the ruling group but not to others. This is not only because there are very limited political positions for those who aspire to high government offices but also because jealously exists among members of the ruling group(Ibn Khaldun, 1989, 2017). At this stage of political development, group feeling in general and social discipline in particular start to detreat. The major reason for this is the rulers refusal to share authority with his own original ruling group that helped him reach this position of power and treats them severely and hold them in check. Further, he excludes them from possessing property and appropriates it for himself. People, thus, became too lazy to care for fame. They become dispirited and come to love humbleness and servitude (Ibn Khaldun, 1989).

Being lazy not only means the weakening of social discipline among members of the ruling group, but it also involves adopting negative world views and values. The ruling-group discipline is shaken by the fact that the leader no longer trusts his own group; rather he confers upon other members of a different group the most important administrative positions Therefore, the dynasty came to belong to people other than those who had established it (Ibn Khaldun, 1989). In this respect, social discipline starts to dissipate mainly because of the behavior of the leader toward members of his own group, who closely worked with him to establish the state. As a result of his mistrust of his original group The leader takes charge all by himself, as far as possible. Eventually, he leaves no part in his authority to anyone else (Ibn Khaldun, 1989).

In addition, he and his inner circle contribute significantly to the decline of group feeling and undermine their own authority by imposing excessive taxes on the people of the state to keep up with their continuous luxurious expenses (Ibn Khaldun, 1989). Therefore, the concentration of power in the hands of the leader and his new elite group and their engagement in luxurious lifestyles undermine their own political authority. The greater their luxury and easier the life they enjoy, the closer they are to extinction, not to mention (their lost change of securing) royal authority (Ibn Khaldun, 1989). Ibn Khaldun suggests that lack of political and fiscal disciplines precede social discipline as a result of the shift in the structure of power from the old ruling group that established the state to the new one that the leader formed. Generally, people in society, including political leaders, slowly lose more and more of the old virtues and forget the quality of bravery that was their protection and defence and depend on others for protection (Ibn Khaldun, 1989). This is by no means a sufficient reason to explain the process of the disintegration of political authority. Instead, the critical factor that contributes to lack of political discipline and downfall of authority is luxurious lifestyles. Luxury wears out royal authority and overthrows it (Ibn Khaldun, 1989).

The fading of religious beliefs

Ibn Khaldun highlights the vital role of religion in promoting social discipline, especially in the early stage of the development of the state. For example, he recognizes the disciplinary nature of early Islam in creating more obedient subjects for the purpose of spreading patterns of religious beliefs and behavior and advancing social order and stability and increasing the power of the political order (Ibn Khaldun, 2017). For him, religion increases social discipline since it significantly reduces jealously and hatred among members of the same group and direct them toward a common purpose. The secret of this is that when hearts succumb to false desires and are inclined toward the world, mutual jealousy and widespread differences arise. When they are turned toward the truth and reject the world and whatever is false, and advance toward God, they become one in their outlook. Jealousy disappears. Mutual co-operation and support flourish (Ibn Khaldun, 1989).

CONCLUSION

Discipline is central for the understanding of Ibn Khalduns argument in his masterpiece Mugaddimah (Introduction to History). It constitutes a central thread that pervades the entire volume and the analysis of BOTH the desert AND the urban people, a thread that has been heretofore neglected in the secondary commentary on Ibn Khalduns analyses of social, political and economic phenomena.

The concept of discipline is closely related to the concept of asabiyyah or group feeling in Ibn Khalduns historical sociology. In fact, it is the essence of asabiyyah since social cohesion without discipline is no more than a group feeling that lacks social power and a constant display of orderly conduct. In this sense, discipline is the fundamental component of asabiyyah because it gives it its stability and order, all of which are necessary for members of the group to succeed in their practical societal roles as well as in their ultimate missions in life. Discipline is the mechanism by which the ruling group mobilize its members and others under the umbrella of asabiyyah.

Ibn Khalduns analysis of asabiyyah shows that self-discipline is at the center of social and political activities. Self-discipline is the ability to control various wants that the person seeks out in this life. Ibn Khaldun assumes that it is the nature of human beings to seek various kinds of worldly pleasures once their basic needs are fulfilled. When this occurs, the person is no longer able to control himself and evil things start to follow. For him, the person resorts to self-control in order to survive harsh natural environment rather than an act of choice in hospitable situations. For this reason, the rural person, for example, has more self-discipline than the city person because the former has no choice but to exercise self-control in order to endure difficult experiences. In contrast, the city person lacks self-discipline because of the various temptations and pleasures that the city offers.

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