

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Methodology and Subject Matter in Sociology of Founding Fathers of Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte: A Comparative Study

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## Abstract:

This study discusses the contributions and efforts made by Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte to develop sociology in terms of subject matter and methodology. Since they are the founding fathers of this science, this paper shows their interpretation of the social phenomena. The researcher also exposes the study to the reasons that led Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte to study sociology. The research peculiarity required using historical, comparative, and critical approaches.

The central problem of this study is how Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte deal with the development of sociology and its independence from other sciences. The study results showed the accordance of both Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte in terms of the methodology of sociology as being a positive approach comprising observation and induction. Ibn Khaldun's distinction, because of his five-century precedence, is vivid though.

The results of the study also showed that Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte differed in terms of the divisions of sociology (subject matter of sociology): where Ibn Khaldun divided the subject of sociology into multiple sections, each section includes a set of homogeneous social phenomena in peculiarity. Ibn Khaldun studied the phenomenon by mingling the static aspect and dynamic one together, analysing its parts, elements, and functions. Besides, he studied its development and the laws to which it is subject to development. However, Auguste Comte has divided the social phenomenon into two principal parts: Social dynamics and social statics.

Keywords: Auguste Comte the Founding Father of Sociology, Social Phenomenon, Sociology in Ibn Khaldun's Point of View.

## Introduction

Today, the human heritage is rich in an enormous volume of theoretical and practical studies and researches in human sciences in particular, in which sociology occupies a great place. However, the mechanism for the objective and systematic examination of scientific subjects requires addressing the most important scientific contributions and achievements made by scientists in this field. Contextually, the development of any science usually needs significant efforts to determine the subject matter that science specializes in particularly. Also, further efforts should be made to determine the approach to the study of the subject matter. Science is primarily built on the existence of these two pillars (subject matter and methodology). The more precisely and vividly the subject matter is determined, the more independent sociology will be from other sciences. (Khamash, 2004).

This also applies to the methodology, but with a less degree as a collection of sciences can use the same methodology. For example, the experimental methodology is used in natural sciences and can be also used, with some modifications, in several social and psychological sciences, especially psychology and education. And because Ibn Khaldun's and Auguste Comte's important analyses about sociology, the current study seeks to excavate the contributions of both scientists to the development of sociology.

## The study question

This study tackles the scientific contributions made by Ibn Khaldun, and Auguste Comte for developing sociology as being the founding fathers of this science. This paper discusses two crucial dimensions: The analytical dimension and the methodological dimension of sociology subject matter to distinguish this science from other sciences and to achieve its independence as a distinct science.

## Significance the study

The significance of the study stems from the subject of research, which is considered to be of great attendance in all sciences, especially in the social and human sciences. The study also discusses the presentation of the Arab Islamic thought in establishing and merging sociology and distinguishing it from other sciences. The subject has important educational, social and developmental dimensions because of teaching individuals the alphabets of social life.

## Objectives of the study

The study seeks to answer a major question: Did Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte provide an integrated analytical view of the methodology and the subject matter of sociology as they are founding fathers of this science? If they had a clear analytical vision, what were their components and logic in interpretation and analysis? Also, the study has important educational and social implications that will hopefully help progress the individual and community members.

## Ibn Khaldun: The human urbanism (Sociology) (1332-1406 A.D.)

Ibn Khaldun occupies a distinctive rank in the Arab Islamic heritage and the contemporary Western thought, and even the Renaissance thought. Sociologists regard him as having a special cultural vision, especially about the study of human history, the human community, and urban construction. They refer him to as a systematic intellectual scholar, thinker, researcher, and interpreter, who represented a remarkable breakthrough in his time. Describing some of his achievements, at least, was unprecedented due to the fact that he is the founding father, and thus they were not known before him, nor succeeded. This Arab thinker made important contributions in human thought. As a biographer and historian, he benefited from his age sciences and field observations gathered during his movements throughout the Islamic World. He got usefulness from his wide readings of the ancient world history.

## The reasons behind Ibn Khaldun's study of sociology:

1. Ibn Khaldun studied social phenomena because of the confusion he found in historians before him and thus ridding historical research of false news.
2. He was keen to create a tool through which scholars and writers in history can distinguish between what is honest and what not true of the urban news. Ibn Khaldun criticized the pure historical way of studying social phenomena and historians' limitation of describing the phenomenon without trying to extract anything from this description.
3. Ibn Khaldun desired to treat social phenomena anew and look at them through an intellectual perspective different from what was prevailing in his age.

## Ibn Khaldun's target of creating sociology:

There are direct and indirect objectives that led Ibn Khaldun to establish sociology that can be divided as follows:

1. The direct objectives are the theoretical objectives of Ibn Khaldun's attempt to reveal the peculiarity and functions of social phenomena and to identify the laws to which they undergo
2. The indirect aims are to benefit from the facts and laws of sociology in correcting the facts of history and changing its discourse. For example,

the gist of sociology is to edit the historical news (Samih Mustafa al-Khashab, 1985, pp. 124-125 and Ibn Faraj Allah, 2017, p. 12).

## The subject of sociology according to Ibn Khaldun

The subject of sociology in Ibn Khaldun's point of view is the study of human Urbanism that arises from the combination of individuals and their interaction with each other. It leads to the interaction of the social systems and phenomena. They result into the interaction of the Kings and the States with the wealth, pension, and knowledge of human beings that naturally occur in that Urbanism.

Ibn Khaldun's contributions to history, politics, and sociology have been clear, prompting some scholars to consider him the founding father of sociology (Lacoste, 1978, and Maha Al-Muqadem, 1988). In his famous book "The Introduction of Ibn Khaldun", Ibn Khaldun stated that any new science must have its specific subject. Besides, he defined the subject presented in the human Urbanism as it underwent changes, stating in The Introduction " As if this is an independent science itself, it has the subject of human Urbanism and meeting. It has issues which show the symptoms and conditions of itself one after another. And this is the characteristic of every rational or positive science. It is like a science that is derived from the creation, and I swear that I didn't hear about it from any creature. I don't know why: Is it because of their negligence? Not to suspect them, or that they may have adequately written about it and did not reach us. It may be the variety of sciences and wise men of the human species. It is only receiving what reached us from preceding sciences and nothing else." (Abed Al-Rahman Badawi, Bin Khaldoun, V1, ed1, pp. 265-6)

Although the term "urban," is important in Ibn Khaldun's project. Ibn Khaldun did not define this term in proportion to its central significance if he merely represented its form, Ibn Khaldun says in The Introduction: " I have known for the fact that history is news about the human assemblage that is the world of Urbanism. It is what is exposed to that civilization, such as savagery, homogeneity, fanaticism, and the prevalence of human beings on each other, producing kings, countries and their ranks. And the impersonation of human beings in their work and endeavours of getting pension, knowledge, crafts that naturally occur in that Urbanism." (Abed Al-Rrahman Badawi, Bin Khaldoun, Vol.1, ed1, p. 261)

He also says: "One of this Urbanism is Bedouin, who is in the suburbs, in the mountains, in the resorts existing in the desert and sand margins. Some of them are urban, and they are the ones who live in the countries, villages, towns, and towns to be protected and entrenched by their walls. In all these cases, he has matters in terms of sociology that offer subjective presentations." (Abed Al-Rahman Badawi, Bin Khaldoun, V1, ed1, p. 270-1)

These quotations explain, in Ibn Khaldun's point of view, that the term "Urbanism" is used to refer to a wide range of events of the human gathering. These events include Bedouin society, urban society, states, succession, king, pensions, gain, science, acquisition, and learning (Ali Oumlil, 1979, and Svetlana Batsiva, 1978).

These examples presented by Ibn Khaldoun illustrate his interest in analysing social phenomena. However, he did not know these phenomena or show their characteristics. Some scholars believe that Ibn Khaldun's understanding of the subject matter or the field of Urbanism is very close to the French philosopher

and sociologist Durkheim's. Durkheim emphasized that society, in Ibn Khaldun's view, is more than a group of people who make it up. The community includes social structures that take diverse forms such as institutions and professional groups, and customs and traditions" (Fuad Balli, 1986, p 37-39).

Ibn Khaldun looked at these structures, as similarly as to Auguste Comte's view of social phenomena, which are special facts. Although they are not material things, as being agreements or common meanings, they have the power of material objects to influence people's behaviour. Besides, Ibn Khaldun seems inclined to classify these phenomena into two main categories:

1. Phenomena relate to the pattern of society, such as the phenomena of the Bedouins and urban areas. The distribution of the population depends on the land and the impact of geographical factors depends on customs and traditions. Ibn Khaldun has shown in the "Introduction" the impact of the geographical environment on social phenomena.
2. Phenomena related to urban systems, which vary according to the different aspects of urban activity, including what is political, economic, religious and linguistic. Thus, he tackled analysis and study of each homogeneous group separately. The third chapter of his "Introduction" was defined as the study of political phenomena and chapter five to study economic phenomena. Also, he presented in this chapter many families, moral, religious and linguistic phenomena (Zidan Abed Al-Baki., 1972, p. 100-101 and Taher – Gherraz and Rabia – Chetioui, 2020 , p.7 ).

In his analyses, he was working to clarify the pattern and regularity of these phenomena, i.e. he was trying to explain how these phenomena are organized into rules and laws, as they do not result from coincidence. It is also not subject to the individual's whims, but it follows, in its origin and development, firm rules that the social researcher must disclose. And in this context, the researcher Mohammad Al-Talibe confirms that "Ibn Khaldun's thinking is always based on observation and experience. Also, he always rises by extrapolating to the level of revealing the general laws that govern the world (Muhammad Al-Talebi, 1979, p. 205-217).

The researcher Maha Al-Muqadem confirms that Ibn Khaldun, in his study of social phenomena, has ways that differ substantially from the ways of those researchers who came before him. He studied the phenomena because he described them or showed off what they should be. Like the ones who were doing before him, such as Farabi or Plato, he analysed and explored their nature, accessing them to the laws they are subject to after showing the factors that led to them (Zahid Al-Russan, 1990, pp. 100-105). Thus, Ibn Khaldun's contributions helped establish sociology independently from other sciences.

## Method of sociology of Ibn Khaldun:

In his research, Ibn Khaldun relied on the observations of the social phenomena of the people whom he was allowed to be in touch with and live among. He traced these phenomena in the history of these peoples in the pre-antiquity times. Besides, he tracked their likes and counterparts in the history of other peoples whom he did not have contact with or life among. He balanced these phenomena, reflecting them on their various affairs to determine their own natures, elements and the functions they play in the lives of individuals and groups. These relationships bound them to each other, or to others in cosmic

phenomena and their factors of development and differences in different nations and ages. They extracted the laws to which these phenomena are subjected (Samia Al-Khashab, 1985, p. 124-125).

Ibn Khaldun was aware of the methodological problems that prevent the development of science, especially history, from which he took a critical stance. When Ibn Khaldun analysed the conditions of this science in his time, he found that it is based on the methodology of reporting and predicting. This may sometimes lead to inaccuracies in the news's transmission or event. Ibn Khaldun explained it by saying: "The news is based on the mere transfer. The original traditions, rules of politics, the nature of Urbanization, and conditions are not applied in the human gathering. And if the present is not measured by the absence, perhaps we did not believe it because of the mixture between error and honesty. Historians, interpreters, and imams of the misrepresentation of stories and facts have often fallen for their reliance on the mere transfer, plain it was or momentum. They have not presented it to its origins, nor have they measured it with its likenesses, nor will they judge it by the standards of wisdom...". (Abedul Rahman Ibn Khaldun, Introduction, Vol.1, Ed.1, p. 219 and Ibn Khaldun, Abedul Rahman, 2009 , p.16 ).

Ibn Khaldun noted that this approach is appropriate to chronicle the Islamic news, which relied on a sacred text. He has used the transfer in conveying the Hadiths of the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) so that these Hadiths are preserved from being lost. As for the history of 'news about events', which tells about the realities of nature or history, Ibn Khaldun noticed that this approach is not suitable for this history. The method of transportation and attribution used in the history of "news about realities" is the one on which Ibn Khaldun focuses and stands critically. He suggested the use of the extrapolatory methodology that depends on direct observation. Ibn Khaldun asserts that: "If this is the law to distinguish the right from falsehood in the news, it is impossible to consider the human assemblage, which is Urbanism. And to distinguish the circumstances, it entails for itself and what is an unreliable symptom, and what cannot be offered to it. And by doing that, we have a law to distinguish the right from falsehood in the news, and honesty from lying in a demonstrative shape that has no doubt." (Abedurrahman Ibn Khaldun, Introduction of Ibn Khaldun, Vol. 1, Ed. 1, p. 418-462).

Ibn Khaldun used this approach of collecting a lot of scattered historical information about the conditions of the small Islamic states established in North Africa during the fourteenth century. For example, he gathered information about the State of the Monotheists and others to plan a general law about the state and its development (Abedurrahman Ibn Khaldun, Introduction, Vol. 1, Ed. 1, p. 265).

Thus, Ibn Khaldun could identify the field of Urbanism and its methodology which was not known - as he noted - before. However, there is some evidence to suggest that Ibn Khaldun considered his work as an initial step to reach an objective historical science. The development of Ibn Khaldun's human urban science was not intended for himself, but it was an initial stage to confirm the authenticity of the historical narrations. This intervened a lot of modification because of several factors mentioned by Ibn Khaldun such as prejudice of opinions and doctrines, amazement about purposes. The illusion of honesty, the people's cajolery to the Sultan's fellows, and ignorance of the natures and conditions of urbanization were other factors. The last factor is the most important factor that Ibn Khaldun is interested in as it is basically associated

with his great knowledge project. He believes that each incident, spontaneous or deliberate, must have a specific peculiarity (Hassan Shehata Sa'fan, 1965, p. 105).

## Auguste Comte: Missionary sociology (1798-1857)

Auguste Comte, like Ibn Khaldun, has been a major political figure, represented by the French Revolution and the counter-political movements. These movements have transformed the old social order in France in particular and in Europe. Comte has been influenced by these events, and this was clear in his rejection of political chaos and his focus on Order and stability. And these developments of the old social order were also associated with the teachings of the utilitarian school developed by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Their teachings viewed society individually and made individual values the core of social relations. However, this utilitarian trend was rejected by San Simon and his followers and among them, the most important sociologists Auguste Comte and the succeeding Durkheim (Gharib Sayed Ahmed, 2000, p. 233).

## The reasons Auguste Comte studied and preached sociology

Comte has focused on the values, customs, morals, and traditions that individuals share in formulating new teachings that call for balance and stability; and to renounce individualism and competitiveness. Comte went in this direction very sincerely, using methods that could be said to be 'missionary' to spread the positivist thinking embodied in sociology. It could play an important role in restoring cohesion to social construction. And he worked on the formulation of ideological slogans guided by the reforming society, including "love is our principle, the order is our basis, and progress is our aim." he stressed the need to rewrite these slogans into the science of humanity, for which he proposed a special design (Auguste Comte, 1975, p431-432).

One reason Comte studied social phenomena and the development of sociology was to reform society and rid it of chaotic factors that spread in his time. And in this context, Comte explained that the individuals were taking two contradictory approaches of understanding things. The first is the positivist approach that looked at the phenomenon, its direct cause, and the laws it is subject to. The second is the metaphysical or religious method to which the individuals resort when they study a social phenomenon to understand it properly and differently from the positivist one. Comte sees that the contradiction between these two methods and the individuals' different understanding of both approaches led to chaos and disorder reflected negatively on human thinking. Therefore, Comte emphasized the need to reform, human thought to reform society (Abed Al-Rahman Badawi, 1984, p. 313).

Comte has concluded that the positive methodology is the one that achieves harmony in thinking and makes it comply with the understanding of things in one way. Within this framework, Comte put two basic conditions to understand social phenomena:

1. Social phenomena should be studied according to laws and not by coincidence.

2. People should understand these laws so they can understand social phenomena as defined by these laws (Abbas Omar al-Hussein, 2001).

## Auguste Comte's aim behind creating sociology

Comte was keen to rid society of chaos and disorder that reflected negatively on human thinking. Hence Comte stressed the need to reform the thought, and yet Comte made some efforts to determine the field of social science and its approach. As soon as he detached from the influence of Qutelet, he could change the name of this science from "Physical Sociology" into "Sociology". It is derived from Latin syllable of "socio," meaning a person or nation, and a Greek one of "Logos" and means science or scientific study.

## The core of sociology in Auguste Comte's point of view

Auguste Comte believes that as long as there are celestial physics, geophysics and plant physics, we still need social physics to complete its format. Social physics means that science that takes social phenomena as the subject of its study. It points out that the abstract study of social phenomena is the main theme of the new science. He considers sociology a comprehensive science except for mathematical and natural sciences, so Auguste Comte was the first sociologist to coin the term "sociology."

Comte has explained that sociology takes society as its field. And society, as he emphasized in his important book, 'Studies in Positivism', has two aspects: stability and change, or more precisely, this field is divided into two basic aspects: the first aspect is the social static or social construction; the social dynamics of social change are the second aspect (Auguste Comte, 1955, p. 463).

Comte has provided analyses and contributions to these two aspects, which point to one integrated fact. He can see his analysis of the social units making up the social construction as an illustration of the static aspect. Also, it is a review of how to reorganize society through the use of scientific results of sociology.

Comte asserts

"And thus, the basis of social science is based on confirming the credibility of this theory of evolution. And we do so by combining dynamic law, which is one of the characteristics of theory, with the principle of stability, giving the theory more coherence. The theory is then supported by its application to real-life matters (Auguste Comte, 1955, p. 37).

Comte explained that establishing a society comprises three fundamental units: family, intermediate groups, and state. The supportive relations between these units give the building its cohesion, stability, and consistency. The intermediate groups play an important role in this cohesion, connecting families with the state and conveying the views of the state and its orientations to the families. The disintegration of society results from the weakness or disappearance of these intermediary groups because of the circumstances of the French Revolution. Comte, therefore, suggested that the reform of society would be done by restoring the lost role of these groups (Zidan Abed Al-Baki, 1972, p. 240).

The law of the three cases drafted by Comte can be seen as an illustration of the aspect of social dynamics and how this aspect is studied. This law reflects Comte's belief in the philosophy of human progress. Humanity in his view is



straightforwardly developing from a lower stage to a higher one. And with this ascent to the advanced stage, the ability of man to exploit his natural environment increases as well as his happiness on earth. These stages as defined by Comte are the metaphysical, positive, or scientific (Husseini Rashwan, 2001, p. 129).

Comte has applied this law to many issues as the evolution of sciences (Auguste Comte, 1955, p. 36) and social organization, applying it, in particular, to the progress of human thought. The human thought tries to reach to the cause behind the occurrence of the phenomenon. What was presented in the first stage are interpretations made due to the will of the gods. There were the cases with Arabs in the Pre-Islamic Era and in ancient Greece who made gods of war and another for rain. They explained the phenomenon of war by returning it to the gods of war. These simplified interpretations did not enable Man to reach to the true cause of the phenomenon. Hence, they did not enable them to have the ability to control the phenomenon (Nicolas Timasheff, 1983, p. 46-50).

The special nature of human thought at this stage has left its effects on society, especially its material aspects, as well as its effects on the social organization, which have been characterized by being a military-theological organization. The interpretation of the social phenomenon is superstitious (Ola Mustafa Anwar, 1988, p. 119).

The second phase, the metaphysical phase, is more advanced than the previous one. Human thought was characterized by the use of very general interpretations immersed in an abstraction such as the biological principle or the beloved, forces of good, or evil. Human thought at this stage assumed that the existence of phenomena can be caused by the forces of good or evil without determining the real processes initiating these phenomena. However, this stage of human evolution has not enabled Man to reach the true causal relationship between phenomena. Therefore, it did not enable them to reach the true knowledge to control the surrounding environment.

The third stage, the positivist or scientific phase, is represented in the contemporary industrial society. Human thought is characterized by its ability to use scientific approaches to reach real causal interpretations of the relationships between phenomena, whether natural or social, enabling human access. This also led to the increase of Man's ability to control these phenomena, and to control them for the benefit of his or her happiness (Khamash, 2004, p. 95).

This intellectual progress has implications for society, especially on its material aspects and on social organization. Comte points out that this stage is witnessing the supremacy of the category of scholars, businessmen and industrialists (Salah Mustafa Al-Fawal, 1974, p. 137-138).

Comte's analyses add some clarity to his understanding of sociology, which is part of his great positivist project. Positivist science takes natural and mathematical phenomena as a field of study, while social-positivist science takes from other phenomena as a subject of study. All beyond natural and mathematical phenomena of human matters is included in the subject of sociology. Comte has viewed sociology as the study of society and its human phenomena. However, he did not provide an accurate definition of these phenomena. In his writings, they seemed to refer to culture and its components of standards, traditions, and values. Also, they referred to social groups, especially families, working-classes, women, education, public opinion, and the mutual relationship between them (Khamash, 2004, p. 37).

## Auguste Comte's methodology in sociology

1. About the method, Comte, himself, has not been concerned for long, but his analysis shows his use of the descriptive historical approach. This approach was used to provide the data to strengthen his famous law: 'The Law of the Three Cases' on which historical data of past societies relied. These data described the historical stages that humanity has gone through in its evolution towards the positivist phase.
2. Auguste Comte can achieve the primacy of the positivist approach and its comprehensiveness, containing all aspects of society by following basic methodological procedures, the most prominent of which are: observation, experience, comparative, and historical approach.

Although Comte was utterly convinced of the validity of this Law of Human Progress, there have been several criticisms of it. Comte relied on historical and descriptive information that sometimes had no material basis for depicting the characteristics of these phases, particularly the first and second phases. The evidence shows that many societies do not follow such a hierarchy in their development. There may sometimes be a mixture of these stages, as there may be manifestations of theological and positivist thinking in a society.

## Conclusion

1. Previous analyses have shown the similarity between Ibn Khaldun and Comte. They were matched in social, political and intellectual circumstances experienced by them during their historical periods. These circumstances were the main motivation for the establishment of sociology.
2. There is a difference in the reasons Ibn Khaldun. Auguste Comte studied social phenomena and the development of sociology, while Ibn Khaldun determined the reasons for the confusion he found among historians before him, thus riding social and historical research of incorrect news besides his keenness to creating a tool through which researchers and authors of history science can distinguish between what is honesty and what is not true of the news related to the realities of urbanism as Ibn Khaldun called it. Also, Ibn Khaldun had the desire to newly address social phenomena and look at them through an intellectual contrary perspective to what prevailed in his time. As for the scientist Auguste Comte, the reasons for studying social phenomena and preaching sociology focused on reforming society and riding it of chaos and disorder. Bearing in mind that the reasons led Ibn Khaldun were real and correct reasons. The reasons given by Auguste Comte were imaginary derived from his understanding of the evolution of human thinking and not from positivist observation of the facts of things.
3. In terms of the methodology, Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte agreed with the study's methodology, which is a situational approach based on extrapolation and observation. The uniqueness of Ibn Khaldun remains as being a five-century forerunner.
4. In terms of the subject matter of sociology, Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte differed in terms of the divisions of study of sociology. Ibn Khaldun divided the subject of sociology into multiple sections. Each

comprised a set of social homogeneous phenomena in nature. Studying social phenomena, Ibn Khaldun aimed to detach from the framework of Islamic sciences. Ibn Khaldun was interested in studying each set of social phenomena by combining dynamic and static aspects. He studied the phenomenon by analysing its parts, elements, and functions and studying its development and the laws to which it is subject in Evolution. Unlikely, Auguste Comte has divided the social phenomenon into two principal parts, social dynamics, and social statics.

5. The contributions we reviewed about Ibn Khaldun's role in the founding of sociology, or human urban science, marked the beginning of a new science. This science added to the knowledge structure of the sciences of the Islamic society in the 14th century, on which the knowledge edifice with an Arab-Islamic identity is built.
6. Finally, This research provides a promising ground for those interested and researchers studying this science, as the research provides a comparison between one of the most important founding fathers of this science by reviewing the methodology followed by each of them on one side, and on the other hand, such research will provide an international sociology research library with vital topics In the field of sociology, the research also focuses on the contributions of the early founders of this science, in addition to that, this research will provide an additional opportunity for researchers and contemporary specialists, to contribute to enabling them to understand the historical roots of sociology and to employ this knowledge in accordance with the requirements of the current era.

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