The Concept of Governance in the Writings of Ibn Khaldun, John Milton and Thomas Hobbes

Adnan Bouachour

Abstract

This paper seeks to pinpoint the notion of democracy and the democratic agent which were put forward by the 14th-century historiographer and historian Ibn Khaldun, the 17th century poet, John Milton and the philosopher Thomas Hobbes. In this regard, the paper proposes to bring to the fore different perceptions of the notion of democratic agent which were expounded by these thinkers.

1- Introduction

Ibn Khladun in his Muqqaddima is still regarded as the founder of modern sociology who is far ahead of his time. His theory of good governance based on his monumental work, al-Muqaddimah is still subject to diverse discussions and attention. He is reckoned as the founder of the science of human society as well as the forerunner of the original theories in social science, philosophy of history and economics [1]. He has been described as the first Muslim scholar to write about the science of umran (urbanism). In his book entitled al-Muqaddimah (an Introduction) Ibn Khaldun[2] exposed opinions about good governance which were fully detailed throughout several chapters of Al Muqaddimah.

[1] Bernard Lewis, "Ibn Khaldun in Turkey", in: Ibn Khaldun: *The Mediterranean in the 14th Century: Rise and Fall of Empires*, Foundation El Legado Andalusí, 2006.
2 Nasr Seyyed Hossein, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1987, 57.

1. 1 Ibn Khaldun

He had stated that himself [3] was thoroughly involved in politics and government for quite a significant period of time. Therefore he was able to write and carefully scrutinize the theory of good governance in depth in his writing. He asserted that human beings always needed one another to sustain life. They live in a community or society with mutual cooperation. Ibn Khaldun[4] observed that human cooperation and social organization are undoubtedly elements of any civilization to evolve. Therefore there is a need to appoint someone who has the authority and control and which becomes part of existence of any nation to have a ruler.

The appointment of a leader or ruler as well as his assistants projects the urgent presence of power to govern the nation. Governance is required so that the affairs of the country could be run. It is a pressing need pertaining to political authority, management of economics and social .The role of the government is to fulfill policies and perform their functions effectively, efficiently and equitably [5] (Blunt 1995).

3 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Trans. Franz Rosenthal, Bollingen Series XLIII.
Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press , 1967 , 56.
4 Muhammad Mahmoud Rabi, *The political Theory of Ibn Khaldun* (Brill, Leiden, Netherlands,1967), 141.

5 Blunt, P. (1995). *Cultural relativism, 'good' governance and sustainable human development*. Public *administration and development*. Vol. 15. Issue 1. https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.4230150102 (retrieve date: 19.8.2018)

1.2 Milton

Good governance usually epitomizes the ways in which power is exercised in the management of a country's society economically, politically and culturally. Apart from that, good governance also includes the legal system, health and education, as well as culture, of which had enumerated under religion, civilization, and state prosperity [6]. Ibn Khaldun ideas are based upon his personal experience, direct observations, and his genuine research related to the construction, consolidation and fall of a human civilization. His knowledge and expertise made him aware of the necessity to have good and fair ruler to maintain peace, justice and promote prosperity.

For Ibn Khaldun [7] the concept of good governance and great leaderships are closely intertwined. The ruler is accountable for advocating and observing that the Laws of Allah are fully respected. Ibn Khaldun [8] perceived that scholars and righteous advisors can guide the ruler to exercise his power in a fair and positive way to promote peace justice and prosperity. He notes that the decline and collapse of civilization is a result of injustice and oppression. There is an intrinsic link between good governance and good leaders who devote themselves to the interest of the people. While Ibn Khaldun put forward his ideals in the fourteenth century, Milton expounds them in a different way at a different time.

6 Wagener, H. (2004). Good governance, welfare, and transformation. The European journal of comparative economic. Vol. 1. N.1. 127-143. Retrieve from http://eaces.liuc.it
7 Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History. Trans. Franz Rosenthal, Bollingen Series XLIII.
Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press , 1967 , 56.
8 Ibid.

The English Revolution occurred as a conflict between Parliamentarians and Royalists from 1642 to 1651. During that period, John Milton published *Of Reformation Touching Church-Discipline in England*, in which he sided with the parliamentarians backing Cromwell and defending his cause.

The core of his political writings is embodied by his Puritan ideals to reform the church, and replace the monarchy with a free commonwealth. Thanks to his support to Cromwell, he was appointed in 1649 as Secretary for Foreign Languages. This position sealed his involvement in the English Revolution against Charles I and made him without a shadow of doubt a republican.

The writing of *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* [9] heralded his ideals of a republic corroborating the right to overthrow a tyrannical king. He defended the separation of church and state in order to protect Christian liberty, i.e., the freedom of each Christian to follow individually his or her faith with no constraints. He viewed that the fusion[11] of church and state effectively stifled religious freedom

[9] John Milton, *Of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes* (1659), cited by A.S.P. Woodhouse, ed. Puritanism and Liberty (London: J.M. Dent and Sons), 1938.
[10] Ibid.
[11]John Milton, The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth (1660), in Areopagitica and Other Political Writings of John Milton (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund), 1999.

From 1642 to 1651, John Milton published *Of Reformation Touching Church-Discipline in England*, marking his perception of the role and essence of the church to enlighten the people with their faith. Milton seemed to incarnate the seeker of religious truth. In the introductory epistle, he explained how he had sought answers to religious questions by relying on his own examination of God's word. According to him, political liberty would only be attained in a republican regime guided by an aristocratic body.

Indeed, Christ recommended this free commonwealth as best for humanity until the second coming. Despite the divine sanction for the free commonwealth[12], however, Milton insisted that the civil and ecclesiastical powers should be distinguished. Although Milton was concerned to curb excessive constraints on outward political liberty, he pinpointed that just civil laws should be obeyed. In religion, however, the true Christian should be free from external law; and so the scope of ecclesiastical authority is severely limited because the subject matter of religion is individual faith and conscience, not law. As far as the seventeen century philosopher Thomas Hobbes is concerned, he has his own vision of politics and of sovereignty.

According to him, the state of nature (natural life time before the emergence of the state) is not peaceful but instead it is very wild full of violence. Thomas Hobbes believes that the state of nature is nothing but a "state of warre" [13] during which all individuals struggled against all other individuals

[12] Ibid.

[13] Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil, Edited by J. C. A. Gaskin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

1.3 Hobbes

In his *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes buttressed his political philosophy of "social contract theory". He put forward the principles whereby power could be exercised in order to maintain peace and freedom in the land. He advocated the absolute authority of the ruler and invited the people to abide by his laws and orders to live in peace, and harmony. His defense of an absolute-undivided and unlimited-sovereign power brought about many criticism.

Hobbes perceived the evil of men were in a state of nature where they struggle to dominate and conquer. To avoid chaos and oppression men should find a way to establish order and peace. It could be only attained through the elaboration of a social contract agreed upon by the people. Hobbes adheres the concept of social contract even represented by an authoritarian and tyrannical leader.

Hobbes' theory revolves around the premise that human nature and especially human selfishness and greed are always rampant. He even claims "It is a voluntary act: and of the voluntary acts of every man, the object is some good to himself"[14].This fear and lack of trust in human beings could engender a regime of absolute monarchy with strict, severe rules and little space for freedoms[14]. So, the absence of state urges individuals to compete with others in a very hostile sense; a fear of each other and lack of trust become dominant. Hobbes calls this fear "diffidence"[15] and explains it as the lack of confidence people have in the state of war due to their inevitably unsafe lives

[14] Ibid

[15] Skinner, Q., 1996, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 36.

According to Hobbes the realization of an organized state by an authoritarian ruler saves and protects human beings. The people give their power to a sole person who would be like a mortal God called "Leviathan. In Hobbes' view, Leviathan should be the sole authority and should punish in a severe way in order to prevent chaos from the people destroying peaceful life.

According to Hobbes, the sovereign power cannot be forfeited"[16] and the sovereign's actions cannot be justly accused by the subject"[17]. These ideas assert that Hobbes wants an absolute monarchic regime where there would be no personal freedoms. Hobbes leaves in the dust the notion of trust of humans. They are selfish by nature and seek power and domination. He contended that hereditary and absolute monarchy is not an evil since it defends the very notion of government far from chaos and struggle. Hobbes defended the idea that the sovereignty of a monarch existing from centuries could not be a legitimate ruler.

[16] Abizadeh, A., 2011, "Hobbes on the Causes of War: A Disagreement Theory", *American Political Science Review*, 105 (2): 298–3
17 Ibid.

In this respect, Edward Andrew[18] depicts Hobbes as a defender of skeptical toleration as opposed to the rights of anarchic conscience championed by Protestant revolutionaries like Milton.

For Hobbes, the state is the product of a contract between multitudes to submit to a ruler defending peace and organizing social order. Hobbes' major preoccupation was a powerful state that would thwart the threat of chaos and civil war. In this respect, the people and the church have to submit to the power of the sovereign. Hobbes advocated the strict subordination of church to state or to the Erastian supremacy.

This prescription would seem to exclude the sort of religious liberty championed by Milton. Indeed, Aubrey's[17] remark suggests that the opposition between the two thinkers is effectively summarized in Hobbes's dismissal in Behemoth of Milton as an ill reasoning Independent. Hobbes and Milton were profoundly original thinkers whose conceptions of religion and the state represent two alternatives for modem political life. Milton was opposed to Stuart absolutism and the power of organized church in England and abroad.

[18] Edward Andrew, In *Conscience and its Critics: Protestant Conscience, Enlightenment Reason, and Modern Subjectivity*. University of Toronto Press. pp. 63-78 (2001).

[19] Erastianism, doctrine that the state is superior to the church in ecclesiastical matters. It is named after the 16th-century Swiss physician and Zwinglian theologian Thomas Erastus, who never held such a doctrine. He opposed excommunication as unscriptural, advocating in its stead punishment by civil authorities. The state, he held, had both the right and the duty to punish all offenses,
from Britannica   https://www.britannica.com/topic/Erastianism

Hobbes developed a philosophical account of complexity and subtlety towards ensuring the conditions for peaceful commodious living. While Hobbes in his Leviathan, makes a set of basic assumptions concerning   human nature and deem the necessity of having a sovereign to prevent society from chaos and universal war of everyone against everyone, Ibn Khaldun's historical argumentation contrasts clearly when compared to Hobbes' deductive reasoning.

Ibn Khaldun explains the reasons behind the rise and fall of dynasties in the Arabian world, he lays his analysis on the sociological role which determines the decay and fall of societies. In Hobbes' understanding, the principle of the sovereign is valid in every case, and each political system has to conform to these principles if it wants to prevent a fallback into chaos. Ibn Khaldun suggests a different, relativistic interpretation; each specific culture and each specific phase of the rise and fall of the Caliphate shows a corresponding social structure; thus it is characterized by a particular type of leadership.

Ibn Khaldun seems to follow genuinely sociological and historical procedure whereas Milton provides solid philosophical and religious justifications for political resistance. Conversely, Hobbes sought to favor a state dominant of all powers in order to attain order and avoid chaos. Ibn Khaldun begins his discussion of political sovereignty with a simple premise: "Not everyone is master of his own affairs…As a rule, man must by necessity be dominated by someone else."[20]

[20] Ahmed, Akbar S. "Ibn Khaldun and Anthropology: The Failure of Methodology in the Post 9/11 World." Contemporary Sociology, 34 (2005): 591-596.

2.Conclusion

Much like Ibn Khaldun, Hobbes' ideas are deeply rooted in and influenced by his time, place, sociopolitical and intellectual contexts. Writing in the wake of the Civil War, Hobbes bore witness to anarchy of the social fabric of the European state. The lessons Hobbes drew from the ancient historian on democracy, war, diplomacy, and human nature echoed deeply when he sought to make sense of the chaos engulfing England.

Despite the difficulties imposed by the historical-contextual limits of time and place, Ibn Khaldun's work remains faithful to individual intellectual genius, and talent; his ideas inspire new questions and bring new meaning to the study of political theory, long dominated by Western thought. Each thinker buttressed his ideas which were intrinsically framed by his political environment, his religion and his perceptions of the problems encompassing the period they lived in.

There is no unique democratic agent heralding one truth, there were different elaborations and understanding of the relation between the government and the governed. Ibn Khaldun is driven by his sociological thrust and practical depiction even he was to some extent an actor, whereas Milton and Hobbes were more inclined to voice their ideas within their involvement in the hectic days of the civil wars.

Reference

Ibn Khaldun

Baali, F. (1988). *Society, state and urbanism: Ibn Khaldun's sociological thought*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Campo, J. E. (2009). *Ibn Khaldun, Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad*. In Campo, Juan E. (ed.). Encyclopedia of Islam. New York: Facts of File. 334–335.

Enan, M. A. (1979). *Ibn Khaldun: His life and works*. New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan.

Gierer, A. (2001). *Ibn Khaldun on solidarity ("asabiyyah") – modern science on cooperativeness and empathy: A comparison. In Philosophia naturalis*. Germany: Vittorio Klostermann. 38 (1), 91-104

Ibn Khaldun, A. (2000). *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.

Mohammad, M. T. S. (2010). *Principles of sustainable development in Ibn Khaldun's economic thought*. Malaysian journal of real estate. Vol. 5. No. 1. 1-18.

Mujahidin, M. (2018). *The concept of economic thought Ibn Khaldun*. Munich Personal RePec Archive (MPRA) Retrieve https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/87143/1/MPRA_paper_87143.pd

Soofi, A. S. (1995). *Economics of Ibn Khaldun revisited. In History of political economy*. Duke University Press. 27 (2) 387-404.

Books about Milton

Hill Chirstopher, *God's Englishman* (1972 edition), p. 200.

Hughes Ann, 'Milton, Areopagitica, and the Parliamentary Cause', *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, ed. Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith, Oxford University Press, 2009

Hoxby Blair, 'Areopagitica and Liberty', *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, ed. Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith, Oxford University Press, 2009

Lim Walter , *John Milton, Radical Politics, and Biblical Republicanism* (2006), p. 141.

Rogers John , *The Matter of Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. xi.

Smith Nigel, *Popular Republicanism in the 1650s: John Streater's 'heroick mechanics'*, p. 154, in David Armitage, Armand Himy, Quentin Skinner (editors), *Milton and Republicanism* (1998).

Sullivan C, 'Milton and the Beginning of Civil Service', in *Literature in the Public Service* (2013), Ch. 2.

Woolrych Austin, *Commonwealth to Protectorate* (1982), p. 34.

Worden Blair, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England: John Milton, Andrew Marvell and Marchamont Nedham* (2007), Ch. 14, *Milton and the Good Old Cause*.

Books about Hobbes

Abizadeh, A., 2011, "Hobbes on the Causes of War: A Disagreement Theory", *American Political Science Review*, 105 (2): 298–315.

–––, 2018, *Hobbes and the Two Faces of Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Armitage, D., 2007, "Hobbes and the foundations of modern international thought", in *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Baumgold, D., 1988, *Hobbes's Political Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bejan, T.M., 2010, "Teaching the Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Education", *Oxford Review of Education*, 36(5): 607–626.

Ewin, R.E., 1991, *Virtues and Rights: The Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes*, Boulder: Westview Press.

Finn, S., 2006, *Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Natural Philosophy*, London: Continuum Press.

Goldsmith, M. M., 1966, *Hobbes's Science of Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Malcolm, N., 2002, *Aspects of Hobbes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Skinner, Q., 1996, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

–––, 2002, *Visions of Politics Volume 3: Hobbes and Civil Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

–––, 2005, "Hobbes on Representation", *European Journal of Philosophy*, 13 (2): 155–184.

Sommerville, J., 1992, *Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Historical Context*, London: Macmillan.

Zagorin, P., 2009, *Hobbes and the Law of Nature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.