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FASHIONING A POST-COLONIAL SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION1*

by

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Introduction

This is a talk about tools. Not research methods, though those seemingly innocent

techniques are as steeped in politics as anything else, but intellectual tools: the

concepts and images with which contemporary sociology greets the world. We all know

that such concepts channel our thinking. Yet, we do not always appreciate how much

they limit it. For generations, we sociologists have presumed that our ideas are

universal. Just as 19th-century missionaries carried the Bible to benighted natives, we

haul our statistical charts, our interview techniques, and our sense of religious agency

around the globe, explaining as we go. "Here's some secularization," we exclaim.

"That's a typical charismatic movement." "Over there we have a religious bureaucracy

dealing with the dilemmas of institutionalization." Depending on our theoretical bent, we

posit universal rational choice, or patterns of religious evolution, or structural analyses

of ritual. Like the missionaries, we bring the Truth to light Other's lives.

I do not need to prove for this audience the affinity of 19th century missionaries

and colonialists. Like the missionaries, colonial administrators also took their Truth to

aid the natives: the rule of law, efficient and honest administration, along with the

scientific agriculture that was supposed to raise living standards under Euro-American

rule. Though the West arguably underdeveloped Africa, Asia, and the rest of its colonial

possessions (note that "underdeveloped" is here an active verb),1 colonial

administration was intended to produce better life through better government. Euro-American scientific knowledge put key tools in colonial hands.

Sociology, of course, was one of those tools – another point I need not demonstrate today. Both sociology and anthropology were, as Edward Said observed, among the schemes by which colonial administrators could "know [the Orientals] and what is good for them better than they [the Orientals] could possibly know for themselves".2 Said's critique of Orientalism batters sociology because, like that 19th century discipline, sociology provided colonial powers "with a vocabulary, imagery, rhetoric, and figures"3 that supported their domination. One need only recall W.W. Rostow's claim that "the stages of economic growth" require Westernizing elites to transform traditional economies,4 to see how Western social science aided Western hegemony.

Such academic colonialism is now out of favor, and for good reason. Not only does science presume an open society.5   More importantly, anti-colonial political movements have sensitized intellectuals to the uses to which their ideas are put. One does not have to be American to recoil from the attempted (mis)use of social science to control the Vietnamese.6 The Belgian political racialization of Rwanda was a necessary, though not a sufficient, condition for the recent genocide there.7 As much as we scholars like our innocence, our ideas have consequences, sometimes deadly ones – a fact that anti-colonialists have noted often.

My lecture is not an anti-colonialist enterprise, however, for I wish to do more than react to Western world domination.8 Instead, I seek a "post-colonial" sociology: a world sociology that joins the Western sociological tradition to other systems of thought,

in the hope of better empirical understanding. If colonization involves one society's

political domination of another – with its concordant domination of economic, literary,

cultural, and intellectual spheres – then "post-colonialism" is obviously something that

comes afterwards. The post-colonial imagination presumes colonialism's end, if not in

brute fact at least in spirit. That is, though we doubtless still live in a colonial world – or

at least a neo-colonial one – we can, at this historical juncture, begin to imagine its

passing. Post-colonial sociology opposes past, present, and future colonialisms but

refuses to limit itself to such opposition. It imagines a world free of colonial fetters,

though scarred by the marks that they have left. In this, it is a lot like coming to

adulthood: one's scars remind one of one's responsibilities.

How must we conceive social life, if we are to acknowledge the sins of the past,

including our lingering tendency to dominate others? What would a world society

without this domination look like? This is the task that a post-colonial sociology sets for

itself.

Though not as mired in politics as, for example, the sociology of development,

the sociology of religion has also embraced several limited and destructive concepts.

Max Weber's sociology of action, for example, misrepresents "traditional" action, which

prevents it from understanding much of the world's religious behavior. Rational choice

theories of religion similarly universalize an historically unique individualism, redefining

behavior to fit an extremely limited model of the person. I have elsewhere criticized

these theories at length,9 so I shall not do so again here.

Instead, I shall be more constructive. From the various alternative sociologies

with which I have been working – Confucian, Moslem, and Native American – I shall

extract two concepts to discuss today. These are the Confucian idea of the relational

self and Ibn Khaldûn's concept of Al 'Assabiyya. Each shows great promise for

reformulating the sociology of religion in a more inclusive mode. Along with other

concepts, these ideas may help us move beyond the intellectual colonialism in which

sociology in general – and the sociology of religion in particular – has been mired.

Before beginning, I must say a few words about the work of Bryan S. Turner.[10]

He, who has contributed so much to social theory, to the sociology of religion, and to the

understanding of Moslem societies, warns us against treating non-Western social

theories as somehow 'more authentic', just because they are not ours. As he points

out, for example, Ibn Khaldûn's work "does not offer a very useful analysis of late,

industrial urban civilizations,"[11] an interpretation with which I generally agree.

But I am trying something different. Though a theory may not analyze some

things well, it may very well help us comprehend others. We need not embrace all of a

thinker's ideas to explore some of them. Though Ibn Khaldûn does not help us

understand industrialism, he does help us understand social solidarity. If we

concentrate only on the first, we are surprised by instances of the second – as the

recent reemergence of European ethnic conflict proves. I am no anti-colonialist, arguing

for the greater integrity of non-Western viewpoints. I am a post-colonialist seeking to

combine 'the West' with 'the Rest', to make a more useful whole. I present the

Confucian relational self and Al 'Assabiyya to you because they force us to ask

questions about religion and social life that we did not ask before.

<u>Part I: The Confucian Relational Self</u>

Max Weber's sociology is built on a four-fold typology of action, of which only two are explored in his empirical work. Zweckrationalität and Wertrationalität, the equivalents of utilitarian and deontological ethics, are both conceived as individual orientations.12 That is, like their corresponding ethics, they guide persons, not groups. The same is true of traditional action, which subordinates individuals to the past, and affective action, which subordinates them to their desires. All four types of action treat individuals as the key unit of social analysis.13

Confucian social philosophy, on the other hand, begins not with the individual but with the group. It presents a much different notion of self than is found either in Weber or in most other Western social thought. It is captured in a masterful passage by Henry Rosemont, which I paraphrase as follows:14

> If I could ask the shade of Confucius "who am I?" his reply, I believe, would run roughly as follows: You are James Vernon Spickard, the son of Donald and Mary Alice Spickard, named in joint memory of their best friend (James) and of Donald's father (Vernon). You are thus first, foremost, and most basically a son; you stand in a relationship to your parents that began at birth, has had a profound effect on your own and their later lives as well, and it is a relationship that is diminished only in part at their death.

> Of course, now I am many other things besides a son. I am husband to my wife, father of my children, uncle to a rather large assortment of other children; I am a brother, my friend's friend, my neighbor's neighbor; I am a teacher of my students, student of my teachers, colleague of my colleagues.

> All of this is obvious, but note how different it is from focusing on me as a purely rational, autonomous individual. For the early Confucians there can be no Me in isolation, to be considered abstractly: instead, I am the totality of roles I live in relation to specific others. Moreover, these roles are interconnected in that the relations in which I stand to some people affect directly the relations in which I stand with others, to the extent that it would be misleading to say that I "play" or "perform" these roles; on the contrary, for Confucius I am my roles. Taken collectively, these roles weave, for each of us, a unique pattern of personal identity, such that if some of my roles change, others will of necessity change also, literally making me a different person. Marriage made me a different person, as did becoming a

father; the death of my first wife and my subsequent remarriage each
made me a different person also.

Rosemont (here modified) paints a particularly thorough picture of the relational self: the centerpiece of Confucian social thought. That thought does not begin with isolated individuals. Instead, it sees the individual as a node of intersecting relationships. While recognizing individual action, it focuses on relationships, not essences. This creates a distinctly unWestern social vision. What are the implications of this kind of self for the religious life? How does a connected rather than an isolated self change religion's social side?

(Like Rosemont, I build my picture from the Confucianism of the classic period. A more nuanced view would have to take into account each of several varieties of Confucianism – at the very least the classical Confucianism codified in the Han period, the neo-Confucianism of the 11th century C.E., and the neo-neo-Confucianism of the late 19th century.15)

Let us look for a moment at classic Confucianism's two most famous points of interaction between the divine and human worlds. Both "ancestor worship" and "the Mandate of Heaven" are fundamentally relational, and thus operate in a different mode than do Western forms of spirituality.16

"Ancestor worship" is, of course, a bit of a misnomer. Ancestors were not "gods" to the early Confucians, nor were they primarily of supernatural importance. They were not individualized beings set over against individual worshippers. Instead they were a collective: "the ancestors". They located the self in a family and lineage, anchored that self in the past and connected it to the future. "Worshipping" them meant to remember

who one was: son or daughter of X, grandson or granddaughter of Y, and so on. It was

to house one in a nexus of related kin.

Indeed, "ancestor worship" was the source of good character – an idea repellent

to the individualized West. C.K. Yang[17] tells the story of a Chinese college boy, who,

when accosted by a Baptist missionary and urged to repent of his sins, replied:

> I come of reputable ancestry, I have a good conscience, and I have
> always been strict about my moral responsibilities and conduct. How is it
> that I am full of sin?

Note that "reputable ancestry" came first. One's family determined who one was, for

good or for ill. Coming from a good family was equaled only by carrying well the family

honor. "Worshipping" one's ancestors means bringing to memory one's stream of

relationships, going backwards and forwards in time.

The Chinese notion of "the Mandate of Heaven" was similarly relational, but on a

political, not a familial, level. From the Shang period (1560?-1066? BCE), China was

ruled by kings whose authority depended on a traditional but evolving set of

relationships with the <u>min</u>: their laboring but non-slave subjects. The ruler was to care

for the <u>min</u>, at least in part because Heaven (<u>Ti</u>) holds them in special regard. When

the Chou dynasty (1066-771 BCE) replaced the Shang and instituted a more formal

feudal system, they developed the idea that the mandate of Heaven (<u>t'ien-ming</u>) could

pass from one ruler to another, depending on the ruler's virtue (<u>te</u>). "<u>Te</u> is not the will of

God but the ability to hold on to the rule by following the advice of one's ancestors."[18]

This involved treating the people well so that they would support the ruler. As one of

the ancient texts put it, "Heaven sees through the seeing of people, Heaven hears

through the hearing of people".[19]

Just as "ancestor worship" is not like Western worship, the belief in t'ien-ming is not like the Western notion of "following the will of God." The latter is active and, if the Hebrew Bible is taken literally, not always ethically oriented.20 Te is supremely ethical, and t'ien-ming even justifies rebellion in case the ruler forgets his obligations to care for the people. The Mandate of Heaven is thus not an individual matter; it enforces the proper care of the community and is meaningless outside of that communal context – including for the lives of individuals. Few Christians would say that God is meaningless outside of the community of believers, and those who do would be deemed heretics by their fellows. For Confucians, this anti-individualism is the normal state of affairs.

These are, of course, only a few elements of the Confucian world view, inadequately explored. Chinese philosophy is as subtle as the West's but built differently. Yet there is enough here to suggest how a Confucian sociology of religion would differ from the Western one to which we are accustomed.

First, it is clear that in Confucian eyes, religion is not church religion. While there are religious specialists, temples, public rituals and the like, most Chinese "religion" is fully integrated into daily life. Family-centered ritual is private, and the assorted healers, geomancers, and so on – all of whom incorporate religion into their work – are hired for private ends. Religion does not center itself on Sunday morning public worship, and much that resembles that worship is formally either Buddhist or Taoist (though both have operated under the Confucian umbrella for several centuries). In short, to study religion in China is to study popular religion – and not just during the recent Communist hegemony. "Ancestor worship", "superstition", semi-divine popular saints – these are

the dramatis personae of the Chinese religious universe. A Confucian sociology of religion would have to organize itself accordingly.

Second, the unit of religious analysis is not the individual: neither the individual's beliefs, nor the individual's actions, nor the individual's choices (rational or otherwise). A Confucian sociology of religion would begin from relationship, and ask how religion – popular and organizational, private and public – creates and sustains the relationships that constitute human social life. More exactly, it would look at the place of ritual and of various beings in the web of social life that reaches seamlessly from human to divine. How is each being in this web constituted, and what are the consequences of this mutual constitution for daily life? The exact questions are less important for our purposes than the Confucian presumption that individuals come second, not first.

Third, the Confucian approach undercuts the distinction between the "secular" and the "religious" spheres; it calls into question the supposed line between "the sacred" and "the profane". Scholars have long argued whether Confucianism is truly a religion, as it places persons, not gods at the center of its world.21 Pan Jianxiong notes that folk sayings like "the way of Heaven is far and the way of human beings is near," and "pay homage to the demons and gods but keep far away from them" are quite ancient and widespread.22 Many see Confucianism as an ethical, not a religious, philosophy.

Yet, this distinction is ethnocentric. Confucianism posits an integrated world of mutually-constituting relationships, each involving ritual propriety (li) and virtue (te) vis-a-vis the others; the sum total of these relationships constitutes each of its nodes, whether human or divine. As such, religiosity or secularization is not the issue. The Confucian universe is neither enchanted nor disenchanted, but oriented toward li and te,

under the aegis of t'ien-ming. As the recent Communist Chinese efforts to re-embrace

Confucianism show, not all that much has necessarily changed over the centuries.23

Chinese religion requires a different approach to "tradition" than is found in

Weberian sociology – or in other Western sociologies, for that matter. It was

"traditional" not because it hewed to established patterns but because it placed great

emphasis on nurturing the web of relationships that constitute both social life and

individuals. Weber, with his individualistic bias, did not see this, and so emphasized the

"Caesaropapism" of the Chinese regime.24 A Confucian sociology of religion begin its

analysis of religious life by tracing the ways in which relationships constitute the self

rather than merely complementing it. It would integrate ethics and sociology far more

thoroughly than we do. Such an approach would not just understand Chinese society

better; it would also have much to say to the West.

Part II: Al 'Assabiyya

Now let us move a third of the way around the world, to 14th century Tunis, the

birthplace of 'Abd-ar-Rahmân Abû Zaid Walî-ad-Dîn Ibn Khaldûn. The son and

grandson of minor court officials and scholars, he followed the family profession to

Morocco and Spain, where he played – and lost – many a political intrigue. After years

of struggle, he came to believe that wise rulership had little influence on human history,

and that states rise and fall from impersonal forces. His Kitâb al-'Ibar, or "World

History," traces these forces through several centuries of Moslem history.25

Ibn Khaldûn saw history as a cyclic struggle between barbarism and civilization –

"tribes" and "cities," to use a popular shorthand. "Badâwah" – "bedouinity" or "desert

attitude" – typifies nomads, who live a rude and savage life and are forced by their

harsh desert surroundings to endure with little and work hard for what they get. Individuals cannot survive here, and are thus of no consequence. The tribe works as a unit, especially in response to outside threats. Compelled to unity, courage, and fortitude, its members support each other against all comers.26

"Hatharah" – "sedentarisation" – on the other hand, typifies settled peoples, who are stable and rich. Agriculture, trading, and such livelihoods let them accumulate wealth. The resulting softer living leaves more room for individuality. People think more of themselves and less of their neighbors, turning to magistrates and rulers to defend them both against their fellow citizens and against hostile outsiders. They depend on laws, not persons. In short, their living makes them less unified, so that they need social organizations for support.27

Ibn Khaldûn argued that these two social types live in tension with each other. Harsh life makes tribes unified and fierce, which enables them to conquer their less unified neighbors. On doing so, they become rulers, who settle down and take on the civilized habits of their subjects. (Who, after all, would willingly stay in the desert?) After a few generations of sedentary life, they lose their unity, and so fall to the next wave of barbarians. Ibn Khaldûn saw the history of his native Maghreb, of Islam, and indeed of the Mediterranean world since Roman times as a cyclical history of conquest. Tribes overwhelmed cities, became civilized, and were overwhelmed by other tribes in their turn.

What distinguishes tribes from settled people is their differing Al 'Assabiyya.28 Usually translated as "group-feeling," "esprit de corps," or "spirit of kinship," Al

'Assabiyya denotes the emotion that leads group members to support one another.

Derived from the Arabic root 'assab, "to bind,"

> Ibn Khaldûn uses it to mean blood relationship in general, partisanship for the blood relatives, mutual partisanship and the vital force of a tribe or people which is expressed in common will.29

This group-feeling is, at first, external or defensive – the functional equivalent for nomads of the fortresses and armies of city folk. Lacking economic resources and even a secure livelihood, nomads must depend on their group or die. Yet, this way of phrasing it turns Ibn Khaldûn on his head, for it is the city dwellers' lack of Al 'Assabiyya that brings about their downfall. Not only do city folk lack the personal fortitude found among nomads, they also lack their strong group-feeling and common will. This makes it harder for them to respond to emergencies, which leads to their eventual defeat. Law and armies compensate somewhat for weak Al 'Assabiyya, but they cannot replace it. Nomads' superior group-feeling and lack of regard for outsiders allows them a single-minded brutality that ultimately prevails.

Though both theorized social solidarity, Ibn Khaldûn was no Durkheimian. He put forward a very different image of social solidarity than Durkheim proposed, especially in The Division of Labor.30   Both scholars posit two polar types of society based on people's means of livelihood, but Al 'Assabiyya is not mechanical solidarity – far from it. Where Durkheim saw simpler societies tied together by external laws and compulsion, Ibn Khaldûn saw tribes as knit from within. Where Durkheim saw complex societies as strengthened by their internal interdependence, Ibn Khaldûn saw them as weakened by their lack of common will. Most notably, where Durkheim found social solidarity problematic for simpler peoples, tracing what they have to common ideas, Ibn Khaldûn saw tribes as stable and tied together by feelings. Solidarity's emotional side

appears in Durkheim's later work, where it supports the sacred ideas that he says prop

up the social order.31 For Ibn Khaldûn, the emotional bond comes first; ideas may

support it, but also undercut it – and are secondary in any case.32

Nowhere is the contrast stronger than in the role each thinker saw for religion.

Durkheim thought that religion creates the social solidarity that is crucial for simpler

societies, which might otherwise fall apart. Ibn Khaldûn found tribal solidarity

unproblematic, but saw a role for religion in the transition to civilized life. Islam, he said,

could counteract a group's particularism, lending it the strength and unity that it needs to

triumph.33

This view is worth developing in some detail. Ibn Khaldûn called the early Arabs

the most barbarous of peoples, because their life as camel herders kept them in the

most nomadic condition. They thus had strong group-feeling, courage, and fortitude,

but were the most remote from civilization. Their group-feeling was limited to blood

relations, and their warfare produced pillage and ruin, not empire.34

Islam, with its emphasis on good conduct and discipline, helped overcome this

savagery. It expanded Arab group-feeling to encompass more than kin, allowing the

growth of royal authority (which Ibn Khaldûn saw as the natural result of group-feeling).

This would normally have lowered Arab Al 'Assabiyya, yet Islam kept it high. The

group-feelings of various tribes and clans did not vanish, but were submerged into a

wider unity that made the Arab Empire possible. Prophetic religion proved to be a good

proxy for kinship – and a stronger force than city-dwellers' armies and laws.35

Soon, though, the natural decline of group-feeling set in. Having conquered, the

Arabs took on civilized habits and lost their Al 'Assabiyya. City life lowered their

common will below the point that Islam made any difference. Their empire split into

kingdoms, whose dynasties rose and fell with the rise and fall of various tribal

solidarities. Seljuqs, Almoravids, Turks, Berbers, and others came to power and then

were absorbed or swept away in the pattern of invasion and conquest that Ibn Khaldûn

traced back 1000 years. Religious group-feeling came to be but one among scores of

group-feelings that typified the ethnically and territorially diverse Moslem world.

Regimes rose or fell, peoples triumphed or faded away in a complex dance of these

many 'Assabiyyat.36

Ibn Khaldûn's work is thus not just a history of nomadic conquest; it is the first

sociology of a multi-ethnic society, one in which religion played a key but varied role.

Ibn Khaldûn saw religion as a parallel means of solidarity, alongside kinship, ethnicity,

place, and so on. All were active in both tribes and cities, but in different strengths and

combinations. As we shall we below, treating such factors under the same rubric

encourages a nuanced analysis of their interrelationships.

What kind of sociology of religion can be erected on this base? I shall mention

two aspects here.

First, as in the Confucian approach outlined above, a Khaldûnian sociology of

religion is not grounded in individuals. Individuals do not appear in the Kitâb, except as

exemplars of social processes. They are mere counters in the social game, pawns in

the hands of larger forces. An individual's religiosity; her or his beliefs; her or his

personal choices: it is not through such things that religion influences events. Instead,

Ibn Khaldûn points to the role of group-feelings, which often submerge individuals in the

mass of their co-religionists.

As Islam was for the Arabs a unifying force, able to overcome (for a time) the natural decline in city-dwellers' group-feeling, so other religions have their own Assabiyyat. A Khaldûnian would find ways to gauge religious group-feelings as social phenomenon, would explore their waxes and wanes, and would study their interactions with their familial, ethnic, and regional counterparts. For example: is the decline in American mainline religion an outgrowth of their liberalism and their lost strictness as argued by Finke and Stark?37 Or is it a result of a soft city-dwelling life that reduces group-feeling in general, plus a religious predictability that does not reverse such natural trends? A Khaldûnian would explore the latter possibility, seeing such things as the American Methodists' loss of "market share" as less the result of individual and organizational choices than as the product of changing life patterns that lessen Assabiyyat in general.

(I note in passing that Stark and his colleagues have no direct measure of religious solidarity. Instead, they use church membership and participation, which may measure quite different things in different times and places.)

But there is more. Not only does Ibn Khaldûn not ground his sociology in individuals; he allows us to predict where individuals (as a social phenomenon) will occur. He argues that they will only appear where group-feeling is weak. In tribes, writes Mahmoud Dhaouadi,

> the individual can hardly acquire personal interests within the boundaries of Al 'Assabiyya. In tribal society a person can only assert his or her individuality through Al 'Assabiyya. In the words of Al-Jabri, the 'I' of Al 'Assabiyya is equal to the 'I' of each of its members.38

In cities, however, the situation is much different: there, lowered group-feeling allows individuality. People become distinct from one another, religiously as well as socially.

Their individual religious leanings, their diverse belief-systems, and their insistence on choosing their religious paths are a result, for Ibn Khaldûn, of a settled life that lessens group identity. A Khaldûnian sociology of religion would see the growth and decline of such individualism as the product of underlying social ties, whose strength or weakness is in turn the effect of specific ways of living.39 In short, religious individualism is a social product, to be explained rather than assumed.

Though this paints a very different picture of secularization than we are used to, I do not wish to propose yet another revision of that concept.40 Essentially a contemporary form of the Enlightenment belief that reason replaces religion, secularization as a concept separates religion from the rest of life and the sociology of religion from the rest of sociology. Focusing on it prevents us from seeing what unites religion with the rest of the social world.

Let us therefore take another tack, which leads us to the second aspect of a Khaldûnian approach. Though scholars study religion, and scholars study ethnicity,41 these are seldom the same scholars – and if they are, they seldom bring the same concepts to bear on both interests. True, scholars study ethnic churches and ethnics in churches, and scholars have long recognized the ethnic origins of some American denominations.42 But they do not conceive of both kinds of identity in the same way.

To be specific: religions are usually thought of in terms of beliefs and organizations – i.e., as ideas that people hold, or as organizations to which they belong, both of which are in a sense "voluntary." Despite some recent work on the social construction of ethnic identity,43 ethnicity is usually seen as an intrinsic property of the person – i.e., as something "involuntary." Thus, survey research often asks for one's

ethnicity and for one's current religion. It may conceivably ask for one's "religious

history" – i.e., a listing of the various religions to which one has at one or another time

belonged. A parallel question about one's "ethnic history," however, would most likely

elicit one's <u>ancestors'</u> ethnicities, not a record of the various ethnicities one has held

during one's own lifetime. Imagine someone answering: "I was raised White, then

spent ten years being Black before becoming Asian." Such an answer seems absurd,

though it may accurately depict someone of Pakistani extraction raised in the United

States (where Pakistanis are classed as "White"), who moves to Britain (where they are

considered "Black" but are struggling to be seen as "Asian").44 Our sense of absurdity

at this is a sign that we see ethnicity as an attribute, not a choice; despite the quasi-

permanence of religious identity for Jews and Catholics, we typically see religion the

other way around.

    This difference has been institutionalized in law. Ethnicity's "inevitability" has

won ethnic groups legal protection and – in some circumstances – communal

recognition. Britain, for example, protects ethnic groups against discrimination and in

some cases grants them communal representation on local councils. It does not do this

for religious groups, with the exception of Jews and Sikhs, who are protected because

of their putative ethnicity. It specifically does not protect British Muslims as Muslims,

despite the fact that they suffer discrimination for their religion as much as for their

origins.

    This has spawned a Muslim identity movement in Britain, which, notes Tariq

Modood, has "thrown British multiculturalism into theoretical and practical disarray." 45

The very proponents of ethnic-minority identity politics have opposed Muslims who seek

parity with other disadvantaged groups. Some opposition stems from the Rushdie

affair; some results from Islam's supposed anti-feminism. Those who once spoke for

the public relevance of gender and ethnic identities – by criticizing liberalism's relegation

of such identities to the private sphere – now deny the public relevance of religious

identity.46

This controversy would not occur were religion and ethnicity seen with

Khaldûnian eyes. Identities, to Ibn Khaldûn, are not an attribute of persons but of

groups. That is, they are a function of group <u>Al 'Assabiyya</u>, whose weakness or

strength is always an empirical matter. In some circumstances, people feel more

attachment to ethnic groups and so identify with their ethnicity; in other circumstances,

their religious adherence comes to the fore. Some identify themselves foremost as

women and men; others find such identities trivial. No such identity is essential, for

each depends on activated social support. Can one imagine a politicized women's

identity without a Women's Movement? Or a Latino identity without activists

emphasizing their Latino (as opposed to Chicano, Cubano, Dominicano, Puerto

Riqueño, Tejano, or simple American) heritage? The nature of such identities varies

across time and society. Their strength is a function of group activities, which also vary.

And they all – ethnic, gender, religious, etc. – are of a type: they rise or fall because of

group-feeling.47

Ibn Khaldûn saw no difference between ethnic and religious <u>Al 'Assabiyya</u> in his

native Maghreb; both kinds of group-feeling were present in various strengths at various

times and places. Furthermore, they were not mutually exclusive: such feelings cut

across one another as often as they coincided. Thus rulers had to deal with the

mobilization (or potential mobilization) of people based on ethnicity, kinship, religion,

locality, and a whole host of other factors, which often set people against those who had

previously been their allies. Arabs might face Berber rebellion, which they could

undercut either by dividing Berbers along kin lines or by emphasizing the Islam that all

held in common. Such strategies might or might not work, depending on the

'Assabiyyat involved. Ibn Khaldûn described these processes, but saw their outcome as

always an empirical matter. In his refusal to privilege any one Al 'Assabiyya, he was as

anti-essentialist as any post-modern thinker.

Such ideas shed light on recent Balkan conflicts, over whose causes scholars

have argued at length. While all agree that Balkan politicians have "played the

communal card", there is considerable controversy over whether the key distinctions are

"ethnic" or "religious".48 After all, the differences between Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian

"Muslims" amount to small bits of vocabulary and the religious services which each

does not attend. Are the recent Bosnian and Kosovar wars best understood as ethnic

(somehow "inevitable") or as religious ("voluntary") fighting?

Ibn Khaldûn would see this as a false dichotomy. What matters is not the source

of Al 'Assabiyya, but its strength and results. Clearly, "Croats," "Serbs," and "Muslims"

lived together in relative peace for hundreds of years; clearly they have not lived

peacefully for major parts of the last century. At least some of their recent discord

stems from an international political system that imagines national states as pure ethnic

communities.49 Ibn Khaldûn wrote in an age in which such purity was scarcely to be

conceived: a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society in which politics depended on variable

group-feeling. He encourages us to seek the source of religious and ethnic conflict alike in such group-feelings – and to recognize those feelings' social origins.50

Conclusion

What do such ideas do for the sociology of religion? The concepts of human relationalism and group-feeling are not beyond the Western ken, though they have not been central to Western sociologies. Like all ideas, they help us focus on certain aspects of social life while hiding others. A Confucian approach to religion, for example, grounds tradition in present relationships, not past memories; it emphasizes the social ties that constitute the self; and it subordinates that self to larger patterns of li and te ("ritual propriety" and "virtue"). A Khaldûnian sociology also sees wider patterns: the role of group-feeling in social life, its dependence on the concrete system of livelihood, its rise and inevitable dissipation, its potential multidimensionality.

Each view ignores certain important things. Neither has much to say about religious organizations, though neither is entirely silent on the subject. Each subordinates religious beliefs to other factors. Sociologists of religion should not give up these topics, for they have been fertile grounds for investigation.

Yet, each view asks new questions as well. From the Confucian side, we might ask: Why (and when) do people seek continuity as well as change in religion? What is the relationship between sociability and virtue? What is the relationship between formal and popular religion, and what are the social consequences of each? Such matters have received little attention in the West; indeed, the Western emphasis on organizations and individuals has all but made them seem unsociological.

On the other side, a Khaldûnian might ask: How is religious solidarity like and different from other forms of human solidarity? Under what social circumstances does religious individualism develop? Decline? How does religious solidarity interact with other solidarities: ethnic, national, familial? Are these even different? Or can they be seen through a common lens? Such questions draw the sociology of religion back to the centers of recent sociological concern.

But there is more, as the Khaldûnian connection between religion and ethnic nationalism makes clear. A recent article in the newsletter of the American Anthropological Association noted that academic anthropology's attempt to unite cultural anthropology, physical anthropology, linguistics and archaeology into one discipline began as part of a 19th century nationalist project, for which ethnic nation-states were each supposed to be distinguished by culture, race, language, and history.51 Benedict Anderson has shown how the printing press, the grammar book, the map and the museum – alongside anthropology – helped create the modern ethnic nation.52 Hannah Arendt showed us long ago how beliefs in ethnicity wedded to nationalism produced death and terror.53 These scholars remind us that ideas create social reality as well as describe it, though ideas' influence often travels unexpected paths.

The same is true of contemporary sociological ideas! Current sociology treats religions either as individual meaning systems or as organizations (churches, synagogues, mosques, and so on), both of which are increasingly conceived as part of private, not public, life. Is it any surprise that, to use Stephen Carter's phrase, public life in the modern West is a "culture of disbelief"?54 The issue of state-church vs folk-

church is alive in the Nordic countries; yet, as several papers at this conference have shown, citizens increasingly see religion as most relevant to private life, and most think of it in institutional and individual terms. Is it surprising that we are puzzled by societies in which religion manifests itself differently? Mainstream Western ideas have marginalized religion, and Western reality has followed suit. What would be the practical consequence for religion if we no longer thought of it just in individual, organizational, and private terms? Would social life be different if we saw religion as a core means of social solidarity, in the way that we now treat ethnicity? Would it be different if we saw religion as embedded in relationships – in the ritual proprieties that actualize human virtue?

I cannot, of course, answer these questions here. They must be asked, however, for ideas are not just the spectacles through which we see the world, though they are certainly that. They also help constitute that world. The promise of a post-colonial sociology is not just that we might now see with non-Western eyes; it is that we might overcome in practice the oppressive legacy of our past. Ideas matter. They are an important pole in the dialectic that constitutes social life. A post-colonial sociology must not shrink from its duty to think them through.

NOTES

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1 Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (Washington: Howard University Press, 1974);

Romesh Chundar Dutt, The Economic History of India Under Early British Rule (London: Routledge and

Kegan Paul, 1950 [1904]); Dutt, The Economic History of India in the Victorian Age (London: Routledge

and Kegan Paul, [1904]). Cf. Harriet Martineau, British Rule in India: A Historical Sketch (London: Smith,

Elder, 1857). Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,

1973). has an interesting discussion of the costs and benefits of colonialism in Africa to various social

sectors, including the colonial administration.

2 Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 35.

3 Ibid, 41.

4 W. W. Rostow, The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto, 1971 (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, [1960]).

5 Karl Raimund Popper, The Open Society and its Enemies, 4th revised edition. (London: Routledge &

Kegan Paul, 1962); James V. Spickard, "On the Epistemology of Post-Colonial Ethnography," in

Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion: Knowledge, Power, and the Interpreter's Position, ed. James V.

Spickard, J. Shawn Landres and Meredith B. McGuire (New York: New York University Press,

forthcoming).

6 Irving Louis Horowitz, ed, The Rise and Fall of Project Camelot, Studies in the Relationship Between

Social Science and Practical Politics, revised edition (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1974); Talal Asad, ed,

Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter (London: Ithaca Press, 1973).

7 Gerald Prunier, The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide (New York: Columbia University Press,

1995); Philip Gourevitch, We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families:

Stories from Rwanda (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1998).

8 Nor do I wish to limit myself to anti-anti-colonialism, which reacts to that reaction. Many so-called

"conservative" American academics are not really conservative, but are anti-anti-colonialists.

9 James V. Spickard, "Ethnocentrism, Social Theory and Non-Western Sociologies of Religion: Toward a

Confucian Alternative," International Sociology 13, no. 2 (1998b): 173-94; Spickard, "Rethinking Religious

Social Action: What is 'Rational' About Rational-Choice Theory?" <u>Sociology of Religion</u> 59, no. 2 (1998a): 99-115. Weber distorts "tradition" by treating it as the opposite of "rationality"; the latter defines the modern West, in his view. Rational-choice theory reduces all thinking to a utilitarian calculus that leaves out most Western views, as well as those of nearly everyone else. Neither is an empirically adequate description of human behavior.

10 See especially Bryan S. Turner, <u>Orientalism, Postmodernism, and Globalism</u> (New York: Routledge, 1994).

11 <u>Ibid</u>, 7.

12 See Spickard "Ethnocentrism, Social Theory and Non-Western Sociologies of Religion".

13 Max Weber, <u>Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology</u>, 1978, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1922]a), 21-26.

14 Henry Rosemont, Jr., <u>A Chinese Mirror: Moral Reflections on Political Economy and Society</u> (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1991a), 71-73. The sense and most of the words in this passage are Rosemont's; I have substituted my own family data to avoid confusing my audience.

15 For various approaches to Confucianism, see Roger T. Ames, "Confucius and the Ontology of Meaning," in <u>Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy</u>, ed. Gerald James Larson and Eliot Deutsch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 265-79; Ames, "Rites as Rights: The Confucian Alternative," in <u>Human Rights and the World's Religions</u>, ed. Leroy S. Rouner (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 199-216; Ames, "Reflections on the Confucian Self: A Response to Fingarette," in <u>Rules, Rituals, and Responsibility: Essays Dedicated to Herbert Fingarette</u>, ed. Mary I. Bockover (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1991), 103-14; Wing-tsit Chan, "Chinese Philosophy," in <u>The Encyclopedia of Philosophy</u>, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1967), II:87-96; Wm. Theodore de Bary, "Chinese Despotism and the Confucian Ideal: A Seventeenth-Century View," in <u>Chinese Thought and Institutions</u>, ed. John K. Fairbank (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 163-203; de Bary, <u>The Liberal Tradition in China</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); de Bary, "Neoconfucianism as Traditional and Modern," in Larsen and Deutsch, eds. <u>Interpreting Across Boundaries</u>, 294-310; John K. Fairbank, ed., <u>Chinese Thought and Institutions</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Herbert Fingarette, <u>Confucius: The Secular as Sacred</u> (New York: Harper & Row,

1972),; David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, <u>Thinking Through Confucius</u> (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987); Hall and Ames, <u>Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture</u> (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), Tu Wei-ming, <u>Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought</u> (Berkeley: Berkeley Asian Humanities Press, 1979); Tu, "Core Values in Confucian Thought," and "The Modern Significance of Confucian Ethics" in <u>Confucian Ethics Today: The Singapore Challenge</u>, ed. Tu Wei-ming (Singapore: Federal Publications, 1984), 2-15 & 100-29.

16 Though the classic texts discuss both "ancestor worship" and the "mandate of Heaven," neither is strictly speaking Confucian. Confucius regularized these and other traditional Chinese notions; later emendations absorbed Buddhist and Taoist elements, such that by the 13th century C.E. at the latest, one more accurately speaks of a "traditional Chinese" rather than a "Confucian" approach. The process is similar to the way in which Christian elements have become "Western." See Pan Jianxiong, "The Dual Structure of Chinese Culture and Its Influence on Modern Chinese Society," <u>International Sociology</u> 5, no. 1 (March 1990): 75-88.

17 C.K. Yang, "Introduction," in <u>The Religion of China; by Max Weber</u> (New York: Free Press, 1964), xxxix.

18 Chung-ying Cheng, "Human Rights in Chinese History and Chinese Philosophy," <u>Comparative Civilizations Review</u> 1 (1979): 4.

19 <u>Chou Shu, Tai-shih</u>, quoted by Cheng, "Human Rights in Chinese History and Chinese Philosophy," 4.

20 Think, for example, of the genocides in the <u>Book of Judges</u>.

21 See Peter F. Beyer, "The Chinese Have No Religion? On the Failure to Imagine a Chinese Religion," Association for the Sociology of Religion (New York City, August, 1996).

22 Pan, "The Dual Structure of Chinese Culture and Its Influence on Modern Chinese Society," 76.

23 See Wm. Theodore de Bary, "The New Confucianism in Beijing," <u>American Scholar</u> 64, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 175-89. It is as intellectually dangerous to posit a fundamental split between the Chinese past and present as it is to attempt to read current Chinese politics as merely the newest manifestation of the old dynastic system. One is reminded of Chou En-Lai's supposed comment on being asked what he thought

of the enduring effects of the French Revolution: "It has not been long enough yet to tell." But see Tu Wei-ming, "Destructive Will and Ideological Holocaust: Maoism as a Souce of Social Suffering in China," Daedalus 125, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 149-79.

24 Weber, of course, did not claim to be writing a full-fledged sociology of Chinese religion. He ignored non-individualistic elements of Chinese society precisely because he was looking for any religious ethics that paralleled Western individualism. The fact that he found nothing to match the Western Protestant ethic proved his point, but also proves ours.

25 Ibn Khaldûn, The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History (in 3 Volumes), trans. Franz Rosenthal, Bollingen Series XLIII, no. 2nd edition, 1967 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, [1377-99]). The Kitâb is better known by the title of its introduction: Muqadimmah. Unlike previous Arab histories, which were essentially chronicles, Khaldûn uses events to feed his social analysis, seeking the regularities that he believes underlie social life. He is thus much more of a sociologist than a traditional historian.

26 Ibid, I: 249-58.

27 Ibid, I: 249-50, 257-60.

28 I use Dhaouadi's transliteration rather than Rosenthal's, largely to avoid the latter's more complex diacritics. (Mahmoud Dhaouadi, "Ibn Khaldûn: The Founding Father of Eastern Sociology," International Sociology 5, no. 3 (1990): 319-35; Franz Rosenthal, "Translator's Introduction," in Ibn Khaldûn, The Muqaddimah, xxvii-cxv.).

29 Dhaouadi, "Ibn Khaldûn: The Founding Father of Eastern Sociology," 325.

30 Emile Durkheim, The Division of Labor in Society, trans. by George Simpson. New York: Free Press, 1964 [1893]; see Anthony Giddens, Emile Durkheim. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, Ltd, 1978.

31 Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, trans. by Joseph Ward Swain. New York: Free Press, 1965 [1915].

32 Ibn Khaldûn's approach also differs from Ferdinand Tönnies' (Community and Society [Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft], trans. Charles P. Loomis. New York: Harper & Row, 1965 [1912]). Tribes, like Gemeinshaften, are tied together by feelings, but for Ibn Khaldûn, these feelings arise from the rigors of a harsh life. The distinction between badâdawah and harharah is thus not typological – as is Tönnies' – but the result of practical living. He shares Marx's emphasis on the primary role of economics in society,

along with some technical economic concepts (see Abdol Soofi, "Economics of Ibn Khaldun Revisited," History of Political Economy 27, no. 2 (1995): 390ff.). For him, however, the mode and means of production work on a society's group-feeling, not just on its class structure. His overriding concern for the forms of social solidarity led him to ask Durkheimian rather than Marxist questions.

33   Ibn Khaldûn, The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History (in 3 Volumes), I: 305-6, 319-27.

34 Ibid, I: 251-2, 302ff.

35 Ibid, I: 284-5, 305-6, 313-27.

36 Ibid, I: 327-56, 372-85, II: 114-35.

37 Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

38 Dhaouadi, "Ibn Khaldûn: The Founding Father of Eastern Sociology," 326.

39 Mary Douglas and Steven Ney, Missing Persons: A Critique of the Social Sciences (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), make a similar argument, though they start from radically different theoretical assumptions.

40 For an intelligent recent modification of the secularization thesis, see Danièle Hervieu-Léger, "Secularization, Tradition and New Forms of Religiosity: Some Theoretical Proposals," in New Religions and New Religiosity, ed. Eileen Barker and Margit Warburg (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1998) 28-44).

41 In the following, I do not distinguish between 'ethnicity' and 'race'.

42 As an example of each: Hans A. Baer, The Black Spiritual Movement: A Religious Response to Racism (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984); Ana María Díaz-Stevens, Oxcart Catholicism on Fifth Avenue: The Impact of the Puerto Rican Migration Upon the Archdiocese of New York (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993); H. Richard Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism (New York: Meridian, 1929).

43 E.g.: Paul R. Spickard and W. Jeffrey Burroughs, eds, We Are a People: Narrative and Multiplicity in Constructing Ethnic Identity (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

44 Tariq Modood, "Political Blackness and British Asians," Sociology 28, no. 4 (1994): 859ff.

45 Tariq Modood, "The Place of Muslims in British Secular Multiculturalism," International Society for the Sociology of Religion (SISR) (Leuven, Belgium, July, 1999b).

46 Tariq Modood, "Anti-Essentialism, Multiculturalism and the 'Recognition' of Religious Groups," Journal of Political Philosophy 6, no. 4 (December 1998): 178-99.

47 This is not to say that group-feeling cannot be manipulated: it can. But Ibn Khaldûn finds that the requirements of practical life are more important to group-feeling than are politics. Instrumentalist interpreters of current ethnic crises may fault him here. See V.P. Gagnon, "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict," International Security 19, no. 3 (Winter 1994-5): 130-66.

48 See, inter alia, Laura Silber and Allan Little, The Death of Yugoslavia (London: Penguin Books, Ltd, 1994); Michael Ignatieff, Blood and Belonging: Journeys Into the New Nationalism (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1993); Cynthia Brown and Farhad Karim, eds., Playing the 'Communal Card': Communal Violence and Human Rights (Human Rights Watch, 1995).

49 See especially Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, revised and extended (London: Verso, 1991); and Josep R. Llobera, The God of Modernity: The Development of Nationalism in Western Europe (Oxford: Berg Publications, Ltd, 1994).

50 Tekle Woldemikael argues that war itself generates group solidarity, a fact that political opportunists have not missed ("Political Mobilization and Nationalist Movements: The Case of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front," Africa Today 38, no. 2 (1991): 31-42). Cf. Gagnon, "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict.".

51 Robert Borofsky, "To Laugh or to Cry?" Anthropology News 41, no. 2 (February 2000): 9-10.

52 Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.

53 Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism.

54 Stephen Carter, The Culture of Disbelief (New York: Basic Books, 1993).