Two development theories: 
Ibn-i-Khaldoun and Wallerstein

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Abstract

Purpose – Each day, many different people in different societies are striving within their daily work to advance society. Every society needs to create ideas for further development and in order to become recognised as developed. The purpose of this paper is to show how different cultures at different times created similar ideas and theories to develop their society.

Design/methodology/approach – A comparison between the development theories of Ibn-i-Khaldun and Wallerstein's famous “world system theory” is undertaken to show that similar ideas of development were in existence even centuries before. Technically, seminar papers were posted and reviewed on an e-learning platform in order to reach such peer-reviewed assessment in a “Global Studies” curriculum.

Findings – The paper shows that the similarity between all developed countries is a strong state and extensive economic activity in different areas among cooperative people. All of these three characteristics are measurable and visible in today’s western societies, and also centuries before in other countries (the Golden Age of the Muslim World).

Research limitations/implications – Limits to comparing the two development theories of Ibn-i-Khaldun with Wallerstein's world system theory arise because of the large gap in time and the big cultural differences between the authors of the two theories. There is, on one side, Ibn-i-Khaldun in the thirteenth century whose religion (Islam) played an important role in his development theory and on the other side there is a western author, Immanuel Wallerstein in the twentieth century. In Wallerstein's development theory, religion has almost no role. Another point is that Wallerstein's theory provides a guideline to almost all countries for reaching development but Ibn-i-Khaldun's target countries are the Muslim countries which were experiencing decline at his time.

Originality/value – Unlike traditional approaches, the present analysis includes early scientific theories from non-European authors. Thus, one of the main objectives of “Global Studies” is fulfilled; namely a trans-disciplinary, globalised perspective.

Keywords Development theories, European-Muslim countries, Ibn-i-Khaldoun, Muqaddimah, Wallerstein, World system theory

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to compare two development theories from two different places in different times and cultures. The aim is to conclude that any country in any kind of circumstance needs to follow certain procedures and paths in order to be considered developed.

Development theories are seeking to explain how society progresses, which variables affect the development process and how societies react upon it (Corporation Conjecture, 2013).

Development and modernisation theories originated in Europe during the seventeenth century (Corporation Conjecture, 2013). If we consider Islamic economic and social studies, we find development theories which were existing in Eastern

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countries even centuries earlier (Chapra 2008, p. 3). One example of this can be the multi-disciplinary development theory of Ibn-i-Khaldun.

E-learning facilitates comparison of development theories

The purpose of comparing the manifold and intercultural (Hobson, 2004) approaches to development theories during a lecture on “Global Studies” (GS) at Graz University, based on international project experience (Ahamer et al., 2010b, 2011; Ahamer and Strobl, 2010a), was enhanced by regular student-student exchange on a learning platform among the two hundred students annually originating from diverse cultures (Figure 1). Typically, students pass some 20 hours on this platform to read and review colleagues’ views on development theories (Ahamer, 2005, 2008, 2012a,b) including negotiation games (Ahamer, 2006, 2013).

Development theory of Ibn-i-Khaldun

Because of the time gap between Ibn-i-Khaldun’s and Wallerstein’s development theories, some background information will be provided.

Ibn-i-Khaldun was born in 1332 AD in Tunis, where he received an education from reputed scholars. Political responsibilities made him to move from place to place until 1382, when he finally settled down in Egypt after not being able to join the Hajj caravan in Alexandria (Bliss, 2000; Hozien, 2001), see Figure 2).

He was using his theory to explain the causes of Muslim decline. Historical events weakened most of the central Muslim lands during his time. Under these circumstances, he was searching for an effective strategy to bring about change (Elbahnasawy, 2010). There is little agreement on the precise causes of the Muslim decline, but in addition to the invasion by the Mongols and crusaders, including the destruction of libraries and madrasahs, it has also been suggested that political mismanagement and the stifling of Ijtihad (Abbas, 2011; Haddad Macron, 1979) was one of the reasons. Ijtihad means to derive and deduce religious opinion about some matter that is not mentioned in the sources of Islam by independent reasoning. The twelveth century had favoured institutionalised taqlid thinking (i.e. blindly following a scholar), which also played part in this process (Sonn, 2010). From another perspective, Ahmad Y. Hassan analyses the decline in terms of economic and political factors which had been underway during Ibn-i-Khaldun’s lifetime (Beg, 2006; al-Hassan et al., 2001).

Ibn-i-Khaldun’s development theory argues that the improvement or decline of a society does not depend on one single factor, but rather on the interaction of moral, socio-economic, political and historical factors over a long period of time (Sonn, 2010).

Ibn-i-Khaldun tried to address the mentioned reasons in the “Instruction” (Muqaddimah) of his book of lessons, a record of beginnings and events in the history of the Arabs and Berbers and their powerful contemporaries (al-Kitābu l-‘ibar).

The main ideas of his development theory are:

1. the strength of the sovereign (al Mulk) does not materialise except through the implementation of Sharia[1], i.e. Islamic law on the acts of worship and on people (Standke, 2008; Johnson and Vriens, 2013; BBC, 2009);
2. Sharia cannot be implemented except by the sovereign (al Mulk);
3. the sovereign cannot gain strength except through the people (al Rijal);
4. the people cannot be sustained except by wealth (al Mal);
Partial screenshots of the discussion forum that allows the exchange of detailed descriptions of theories on global development in the basic lecture "Global Studies" (GS) at Graz University during winter semester 2010/11 (at left), winter semester 2011/12 (centre) and postings on the critical comparison of developmental curricula that resulted in a cooperative article by GS students.

**Source:** Bader et al. (2013a, b)
wealth cannot be acquired except through development (Al Imarah);
(6) development cannot be attained except through justice (al Adl);
(7) justice is a criterion (al Mizan) by which God will evaluate mankind; and
(8) the sovereign is charged with the responsibility of actualising justice
(Chapra, 2008, p. 4).

Ibn-i-Khaldun's analysis links important socio-economic and political variables such as political authority, beliefs, rules of Sharia, individuals (who have certain obligations to God as a part of society), wealth, development and justice together. The interaction of these factors over the time leads to the development and decline (Chapra, 2008, p. 5).
Development theory of Wallerstein

After the explanation of Ibn-i-Khaldun’s development theory from the fourteenth century AD, Immanuel Wallerstein (*September 1938-today) and his theory “The Modern World System” will be explained. With his theory, Wallerstein (1976) wanted to develop the theoretical framework to understand the historical changes involved in the rise of the modern western world.

Wallerstein’s theory makes it possible to understand the external and internal manifestations of the modernisation and developing processes.

From the ninth until the seventeenth century AD, feudalism dominated western European society. Between 1150 and 1300 AD, both population as well as commerce expanded within the limitations of the feudal system. From 1300-1450 this expansion ceased, creating a severe economic crisis.

According to Wallerstein, the feudal crisis was probably precipitated by the interaction of the following factors (Wallerstein, 1976):

1. agricultural production fell or remained stagnant (growing population);
2. the economic cycle of the feudal economy had reached its optimum level; and
3. a shift of climatological conditions decreased agricultural productivity.

Wallerstein argues that Europe moved towards the establishment of a capitalist world economy in order to ensure continuous economic growth.

In the new capitalist world, the system was based on an international division of labour that determined relationships between different regions as well as the types of labour conditions within each region.

In this model, the type of political system was also directly related to each region within the world economy.

As a basis of comparison, Wallerstein proposes four different categories of regions (Wallerstein, 1976), compare Figure 3.

1. The core: benefits the most from the capitalist world economy. It developed strong central governments, extensive bureaucracies and large mercenary armies.

![Figure 3. The four different categories of regions according to Wallerstein](source: Chase-Dunn et al. (2000))
The semi-periphery: between the core and peripheries. They represent either core regions in decline or peripheries attempting to improve their relative position in the world economy. These regions exhibit tensions between the central government and local landed class. These regions retain limited but declining access to international banking and the production of the high cost and high-quality manufactured goods. They fail to predominate in international trade.

The periphery: these areas lack strong central governments or are controlled by other states. They export raw materials to the core region and rely on coercive labour practices.

The external: these areas maintain their own economic systems and, for the most part, manage to remain outside the modern world economy.

The development of the modern world economy encompassed centuries. During this time different regions changed their relative position within this dynamic system (Wallerstein, 1976).

Wallerstein divides the history of the capitalist world system into four stages, which can be also divided into two basic phases (Wallerstein, 1976):

1. Stages one and two:
   - bureaucratisation;
   - homogenisation;
   - expansion of militia to support the centralised monarchy;
   - absolutism; and
   - diversification of economic activities.

2. Stages three and four:
   - European states participated in active exploration for the exploitation of new markets;
   - expanding the European world system;
   - combination of agricultural and industrial interests changed to purely industrial concerns; and
   - core areas encouraged the rise of industries in semi-peripheral and peripheral regions.

Comparison and discussion

After a brief explanation of Wallerstein’s development theory, similarities and differences between the development theories of Ibn-i-Khaldun and Wallerstein will be discussed.

Differences between Wallerstein’s and Ibn-i-Khaldun’s theories

As a first difference, the basis of Ibn-i-Khaldun’s development theory is the Sharia. It is the body of the Islamic law and deals with all aspects of life, including crime, politics and economics, as well as personal matters such as hygiene, diet and fasting. It is evident that Islam plays an important role in Ibn-i-Khaldun’s theory of development. He believes
religion (Islam) to be the basis of real development because it is the basis of state-building and empire, as it unites groups and makes them invincible. It brings forth and guarantees collective morality, virtue, and civic obedience while doing away with savagery, individual ambition, and civic strife. Without religion, a group is merely endowed with natural cohesiveness through group feeling which causes the individual members to act together to achieve superiority (Stowasser, 1983).

On the other hand, the world system theory of Wallerstein is a Marxist-inspired theory and it treats religion as secondary and derivative (Swatos, 2011). His theory pays little attention specifically to the role of religious beliefs or religious institutions within society.

It has thus been necessary for other theorists to suggest ways in which the world system perspective might be useful for understanding changes in these beliefs and institutions.

The second difference is about bureaucratisation (historically, bureaucracy refers to government administration managed by departments staffed with non-elected officials; Johnson and Libecap, 1994; Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013). According to Karatas (2006, p. 4), “Ibn-i-Khaldun got five centuries before Keynes the attention of the whole world by stressing the importance of increasing the demand to increase output and further to create public works and confidence in order to increase employment”. Ibn-i-Khaldun mentioned that overtaxation occurs, when the bureaucracy keeps expanding.

On the other hand, Wallerstein believed that wide bureaucratisation aided the limited but growing power of the king by increasing the state’s power to collect taxes. The kings eventually increased state powers to borrow money, and thereby further expand the state bureaucracy (Wallerstein, 1976).

The third point to compare is the effect of the military according to the two development theories.

Ibn-i-Khaldun was arguing that a large army, bureaucracy and overtaxation discourages people from getting economically active (Hassan, 2006). This leads to a decrease in the total income of the state.

From Wallerstein’s point of view, one of the reasons for development was military force to support the centralised monarchy and to protect the new state from invasions (Wallerstein, 1976).

Similarities

After comparing the three main differences, the similarities between the two theories will be discussed.

The word homogenisation[2], which refers to the reduction in cultural diversity (Barker, 2008, p. 159), cannot be found in the texts relating to Ibn-i-Khaldun’s theory. He was a Muslim, and naturally he recognised Sharia as a most important basis of development (He accepted Sharia as the most important basis for development in all aspects of life in society for everybody.) Ordering Sharia could be understood as a kind of homogenisation of the people, which might cause a reduction of social and cultural diversity with the aim of better human cooperation. In his development theory, the individual plays an important role (Mohammad, 1998); according to him, the essential power of human beings is their reflective and deliberative capacities. In addition to their capacity for making things by the agency of their discerning reason, humans have the capacity to organise their relations with their fellow humans for the realisation of individual needs through the collective good. Ibn-i-Khaldun says that “if the power of the individual human being is not sufficient for him to obtain,
e.g. the food he needs, and does not provide him with as much food as he requires to live […] but through cooperation, the needs of a number of persons, many times greater than their own can be satisfied”. This can also be referred to or interpreted as a division of labour (Hassan, 2006).

In relation to human cooperation, Wallerstein is talking about cultural homogenisation of the population. In his theory, this is particularly the case in the advantaged areas of the world economy called core states. In such states, the creation of strong state machinery is coupled with national culture, a phenomenon often referred to as integration. It serves both as a mechanism to protect disparities that have arisen within the world system and as an ideological mask and justification for maintenance of these disparities (Wallerstein, 1976).

The second common point of these two theories is about a strong state. According to Querine Hanlon, strong states (as opposed to weak or failed states) can be defined: by their ability to control their own territory; by their capacity to perform core functions; and by their vulnerability to challenges to their legitimacy (Hanlon, 2011, p. 2).

Ibn-i-Khaldun believes that Sharia cannot ever play a meaningful role unless it is implemented fairly and impartially. Sharia only gives rules of behaviour, it cannot itself enforce them. It is the responsibility of the political authority to ensure compliance through incentives (Adem, 2004). For him, “it is not possible to conceive of political authority without civilisation and of civilisation without political authority” (Chapra, 2008, p. 9).

He also emphasises that “if the ruler is tyrannical and harsh in punishment […] the people become fearful and seek to protect themselves by means of lies” (Chapra, 2008, p. 9).

In relation to this point, Wallerstein is explaining absolutism. He believes that the concept of absolutism relates to the relative independence of the monarch from previously established laws. In fact, this distinction freed the king from prior feudal laws (Wallerstein, 1976).

It is important to mention that Ibn-i-Khaldun says that the state must do things that help people carry on their lawful businesses more effectively and prevent them from committing excesses and injustices against each other. He was against a state which gets directly involved in economic activity.

The next similarity is about specialisation and diversification relating to economic activities.

According to Karatas (2006), Ibn-i-Khaldun indicated the fact that specialisation in economic activities is the major source of economic surplus when there is an environment conducive to specialisation (Karatas, 2006, p. 4). The entrepreneur is encouraged to commit himself to further trade and production. Indeed, specialisation would occur in a place where a person is able to get the benefit of his efforts. The given law and order for Ibn-i-Khaldun's specialisation is a function of population, trade, production and minimum taxation (Karatas, 2006, p. 4).

Relating to specialisation, Ibn-i-Khaldun says:

Each particular kind of craft needs persons to be in charge of it and skilled in it. The more numerous the various sub-divisions of the craft are, the larger the number of the people who (have to) practice that craft. The particular group (practicing that craft) is coloured by it. As the days follow one upon the other and one professional colouring comes after the other, the crafts colouring men become experienced in their various crafts and skilled in the knowledge of them. Long periods of time and the repetition of similar (experiences) add to establishing the crafts and to causing them to be firmly rooted (Karatas, 2006, p. 4).
Wallerstein also speaks about the diversification of economic activities in order to maximise profits and strengthen the position of the local bourgeoisie (Wallerstein, 1976).

Another important common point is foreign trade in both development theories:

Ibn-i-Khaldun’s ideas contributed at that time to the field of economics. According to him, through foreign trade people’s satisfaction, merchants’ profits and countries’ wealth can all increase.

Ibn-i-Khaldun mentioned that “the merchant who knows his business will travel only with such goods as are generally needed by rich and poor, rulers and commoners alike. General need makes for a large demand for his goods […] it is more advantageous and more profitable for the merchants’ enterprise […]. A merchant will be able to take advantage of market fluctuations, if he brings goods from a country which is far away […] merchandise becomes more valuable when merchants transport it from one country to another” (Oweiss, 1988; Khaldun et al., 1978, pp. 2:89-90).

According to Wallerstein, European states participated in active exploration for the exploitation of new markets.

In the sixteenth century, metropolises like Paris, London, Venice and Geneva were very famous trading cities. Wallerstein explains how trade was having a great influence in the development of these cities.

Both Ibn-i-Khaldun’s development theory and Wallerstein’s world system theory have further aspects. One example can be the industrialisation in Wallerstein’s theory, which plays an important role in his work. This is not comparable with any stages of Ibn-i-Khaldun’s theory, because industrialisation was happening in Europe centuries after Ibn-i-Khaldun.

Conclusion

After a short comparison of these two theories we got to know the main differences and similarities between them.

The important points are three similar characteristics in both theories that all countries at any time with any kind of exogenous and endogenous circumstances need to experience. One of them is a strong government (Hanlon, 2011) the second is to have extensive economical activities in different areas and the third is to have people cooperating in the country to reach development (Adem, 2004).

On-going dialogues between student colleagues can enhance discussions on theories of world development and globalisation. The present paper presented only one out of hundreds of analogous discussion papers generated during the first three years of the “Global Studies” curriculum at the University of Graz, Austria with the support of e-learning.

Notes

1. or a brief understanding, “Sharia” deals with many topics including crime, politics, economics, as well as personal matters such as sexual intercourse, hygiene, diet, prayer and fasting. Though interpretations of Sharia vary between cultures, in its strictest definition it is considered the infallible law of God as opposed to the human interpretation of the law. Sharia in Islam means the pathway to follow. The etymology of Sharia as a “path” or “way” comes from the Qur’anic verse “(in Islam Qur’an is accepted as the word of God). Then we put thee on the (right) way of religion so follow on that (way), and follow not the desires of those who know not”. There is not a strictly codified uniform set of laws that can be called Sharia.
2. The author thinks that the aim of homogenisation in societies (i.e. reducing cultural diversity) was to make people to cooperate and work with each other and to make sure that they work with each other for the development of the society (Barker, 2008, p. 159).

References


About the author

After finishing high school in Tabriz, Iran, Atousa Amirabedini continued her education at the Tabriz State University in Law. After finishing her bachelor thesis in Law (about “Comparison of law in different countries about child abuse”), she started her master’s in Private Law at the Tabriz State University, International Campus. After her first year of the master’s programme in Tabriz, the author moved to Austria, to continue her master’s degree in the programme of Global Studies at the Karl-Franzens University of Graz. Atousa Amirabedini can be contacted at: atousa.amirabedini@edu.uni-graz.at

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