MANIFESTATIONS OF THE INDIVIDUAL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH SOCIETY BETWEEN WESTERN THOUGHT AND ISLAMIC THOUGHT

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Abstract*: The relationship between the individual and society holds a significant and essential place in sociological studies due to the various paradoxes and complexities it entails. Socio-analytical perspectives have varied depending on the intellectual frameworks and references of scholars and researchers. In Western thought, this relationship has sometimes been characterized by the glorification of individualism and the need to enhance it, while at other times, the role of society is exalted, highlighting its influence in shaping individuals through a unidirectional perspective. In contrast, the Islamic vision of thinkers emphasizes functional integration and social harmony that serves the relationship between the part and the whole. The individual-society relationship is seen as one of mutual influence, where the well-being of society is tied to the well-being of its individuals and vice versa.*

Keywords: individual, individualism, society, relationship

1. Introduction

Sociology is concerned with the study of social phenomena, which are its primary focus. It examines the forms, types, and structures of these phenomena, how they are formed, the patterns they take, the systems they build, and the harmony, conflict, or change that occurs between them. The relationship between the individual and society has long been one of the key topics in sociology, especially as it relates to social control. Understanding social life in all its complexities is impossible without delving into this relationship.

It has become clear that the diversity of schools of thought, approaches, and theories in sociology has led to a variety of perspectives and analyses regarding the nature of this central relationship and the mechanisms of its deconstruction and examination. Sociologists and thinkers have approached this in two main directions: one concerning Western sociology and how its thinkers viewed the nature of the relationship, and another that encompasses the perspectives of certain Muslim thinkers, deriving from an Islamic intellectual framework.

In this article, we will attempt to clarify the concepts of the individual and society, and then explore the manifestations of the individual's relationship with society from the viewpoints of both Western sociology and Islamic sociology, following this outline:
1. Concept of the individual
2. Concept of society
3. The relationship between the individual and society in Western thought
4. The relationship between the individual and society in Islamic thought

1. Concepts of study
A. Linguistic definition

According to the Al-Munhaj Dictionary, the term "individual" (Individu) refers to a person, a human being (an individual of any kind, a rational being with free will, as opposed to a being devoid of reason and choice. (Idris, 2013: 65)

In the Arabic language dictionary, the word "fard" (individual) appears in different contexts. The verb *farda* means to spread or lay something out in front, such as spreading a sheet on the bed, laying out a newspaper on the table, or spreading playing cards on a surface.

The verb *farda* with prepositions (such as "bi," "an," or "fi") has various meanings. For instance, *farda bi al-ra'y* means to have an exclusive opinion or decision without involving others (e.g., "he made a decision on his own"). *Farda an asdiqa'uhu* refers to someone distancing themselves from their friends or isolating themselves. In a different context, *farda fi makan mun'azil* means to be alone or secluded. (Omar, 2008: 168)

The verb *afrada* means to separate, distinguish, or isolate something. For example, *afrada hadha al-mawdu'a* means to dedicate a special chapter to a specific topic, or *afrada talamidh al-mutafawiqin* means to place outstanding students in a special class. In other uses, *afrada al-antha* refers to a female

giving birth to a single offspring, or *afrada fi al-ihram* means to perform a solo pilgrimage without combining it with Umrah. (Omar, 2008: 168)

Additionally, "Al-Fard" is one of the Names of Allah in Islamic tradition, meaning the One who is unique in power, creativity, and management, distinct from all things, and self-sufficient. The term "hukm al-fard" refers to an autocratic rule where absolute power is vested in a single individual. (Omar, 2008: 168)

B. Terminological definition

In terminology, the "individual" refers to a unique and singular human being. This concept also carries another meaning, that of totality, something that cannot be divided into smaller components. The Latin term *individuum* parallels the Greek term *atom*, both of which mean indivisibility. The concept of the individual applies only to humans, whereas for inanimate objects or things created by humans, the Latin term *exemplum* is used, meaning a sample or object. (Al-Kahlani, 2004: 18). Ibn Sina (Avicenna) defines "unity" as that which is said of anything as being one, referring to something that cannot be divided by reason. He explains that numbers are a collection of units, and an odd number is one that cannot be equally divided into two. (Al-Kahlani, 2004: 18)

In psychology, the term "individual" is synonymous with a natural person, distinguished from others by their identity and unity, or by possessing special traits that set them apart from others of the same species. In sociology, the individual is a unit within the society, much like a citizen in a state. (Al-Kahlani, 2004: 19)

Based on the above definitions, we can operationally define the individual as a unique biological being, distinguished by specific traits and characteristics from all other creatures, indivisible in all aspects. The individual has their own identity and existence, and is the most important unit forming society, ensuring its preservation and continuity.

A. Linguistic definition : "society"

The term "society" has its linguistic roots and meanings in Islam. Several derivations of the root *jama'a* ,(جمع) *meaning "to gather" or "to come together," are mentioned in the Qur'an. For instance, in the verse, {Say: 'If all mankind and jinn were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce its like'} (Qur'an 17:88). Linguistically, it is derived from the verb *ijtama'a* ,(اجتمع) * which means to gather or come together, and refers to something that has united or formed an assembly. (Ali Bin Hadiya, 1991: 14)

B. Terminological definition:

In terms of terminology, society refers to a network of social relationships among people. This definition emphasizes the importance of social relationships in forming human communities, which are considered essential for the survival of humankind.

Additionally, society is defined as "a specific model of a group distinguished by a comprehensive social coordination that includes all the basic social institutions necessary to meet essential human needs. It is characterized by its independence, not in the sense of complete economic self-sufficiency, but in terms of having all the necessary organizational structures to ensure its survival and continuity over an extended period". (Gheith: 416)

This definition highlights society as a specific model of a social group, indicating that there are multiple models differing from one group to another. These groups are characterized by a general social system or structure, which includes various subsystems that work to preserve and sustain the broader system. These subsystems provide the necessary conditions and resources to meet the demands of the time, or perhaps to achieve prosperity. According to the social systems theory, any imbalance in one of the subsystems leads to imbalances in other subsystems, resulting in a lack of equilibrium in the overall social structure.

Malek Bennabi adds to the previous definitions by stating, "Society is a group that continuously changes its social characteristics by producing the means of change, while being aware of the goal it seeks behind this change". (Bennabi, 1974: 15)

From Malek Bennabi's concept, it becomes clear that constant change is a fundamental characteristic of society. However, he does not specify the nature of this change, and it is commonly accepted that social characteristics tend to be stable. Additionally, he does not clarify whether the goal that the group pursues is a shared one. On the other hand, the importance of change as a key element in

the life of any human group striving to continuously transform its characteristics is evident. This depends on the effectiveness of the tools available to achieve such change.

Based on the aforementioned definitions, society can be defined as a human group with its own culture and diverse systems that contribute to its survival within a network of social relationships, governed by behaviors, norms, values, and roles shared and socially agreed upon by individuals.

3. The relationship between the individual and society in Western thought

Many researchers have delved into the issue of the individual-society relationship through various intellectual schools and approaches. MacIver and Page considered the relationship between the individual and the social system as the starting point and focus of sociological research. The success of sociological research is often measured by how well it addresses the problem of the relationship between the individual and society. Thus, this relationship occupies the attention of researchers, philosophers, and thinkers, who have proposed two main perspectives in defining it:

The First Perspective: This relies on the theory of the social contract, which posits that society is formed based on a real agreement among individuals themselves, or between the people and the government. Proponents of this theory believe that individuals are the source of customs, traditions, values, and systems. They often cite inventors, scientists, and reformers as examples. According to this view, society is considered antagonistic to the individual, as individuals are born inherently good, while society corrupts them with evil. Prominent supporters of this view include Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith, Herbert Spencer, Vilfredo Pareto, Lester Ward, and John Stuart Mill.

The Second Perspective:
This perspective is divided into two approaches:
Approach A: This approach is led by the proponents of the organic theory, which views society as a biological system or a large living organism similar to a human being. According to this theory, society produces individuals and prepares them to become leaders, thinkers, or innovators. Associated with this theory are other concepts such as the theory of the collective mind or universal mind, which emphasize society's role in shaping individuals.
Approach B: This approach is supported by proponents of Marxist theory, who also liken society to a body, with individuals as the cells of this body. They emphasize the idea of society's precedence over individuals, asserting that society has intrinsic value beyond the services provided by individuals. They argue that individuals are naturally opposed to anything that helps maintain society's stability. (Zaimi: 288-290)

Another perspective comes from Max Weber's theory of social action, where he indicated that individuals are influenced by social institutions such as the family, school, workplace, and mass media. However, he did not view the analysis of these influences and their effects as the sole or primary purpose of sociology. For Weber, understanding the meanings that individuals experience in their social lives is more important than merely analyzing what drives or influences them to act the way they do. Despite Weber emphasizing that individual action is a unique experience for each social actor, he believed that it is possible to generalize about social action, as there are, in fact, common patterns of social behavior. Individuals may act rationally, emotionally, or ideally, and it is possible to categorize their actions accordingly. Despite his focus on individual experiences and subjective meanings, Weber remained committed to a scientific approach to sociology (Baghrish, 2018: 143).

From another perspective, Norbert Elias, in his book *The Society of Individuals*, points out that the individual human is the product of other people. Regardless of who a person's ancestors were, they see only a series of fathers and sons, with each becoming a father in turn. Thus, every person is born into a group of people that existed before them.

Nature has imposed the need for each individual to rely on others who came before them in order to survive. Additionally, human existence includes the simultaneous presence of many other individuals connected through relationships. In this context, Elias states, "We cannot gain a clear understanding of the relationship between the individual and society unless we integrate the formation of individuality into the core of social theory. The history of individuality and the phenomena of youth and maturation hold a central place when exploring what we call 'society.' A true understanding of societal integration in humans cannot be achieved unless we comprehend what relationships with others mean for a young child. (Elias, 2014: 36, 42-43.)"

He further adds, "Since the helpless child needs a social formation around them to become a distinct and clearly individual being, understanding the individuality of an adult requires knowing the extent to which their relationships and the structures of the society in which they grew up shaped them. While it is certain that every human being is a complete entity in themselves, an individual who directs their own path and cannot be controlled by others as long as they are capable of self-direction, it is equally certain that the overall shape of their conscious and unconscious self-directed orientations is a complex product. It emerges from the give-and-take of relationships with others. Furthermore, it is well established that the mature individuality of a person is a specific societal form". (Elias, 2014: 43)

Thus, Norbert Elias clarified the existence of an element of interaction in the relationship between the individual and society, based on a system of prevailing norms, values, roles, and expectations within the society. This interaction contributes to shaping both social and individual behavior.

In contrast, Michel Foucault's view of the relationship between the individual and society, as presented in his work *The History of Sexuality*, focuses on exploring the intellectual, social, political, and moral backgrounds that govern this relationship in Western thought. Foucault aimed to revive the Greek and Roman concept of an individual's ability to lead oneself. He believed that the highest achievement of a philosopher's wisdom lies in the ability to direct one's behavior among others. If a person is unable to control their emotions, desires, and conditions, they are not truly autonomous. Foucault's interest in individual behavior, or what he termed "the techniques of self-practice," aimed to deeply explore the external techniques imposed on the individual self, which restrict its internal autonomy (Moussa, 2009: 142).

Foucault also highlighted that the mechanisms of power produced by civilization have led only to the suppression of individuals through constant surveillance, employing precise techniques to discipline bodies and regulate them, or to extract the truth hidden within the individual. This is evident through the classification imposed by power structures on individuals. Foucault believed in the individual's ability to shape their self independently of any authority, thus being capable of freeing themselves from its dominance. He supported this argument by referencing the Greek system, which was based on ethics not tied to religion, science, or law—a system free from any overarching reference that imposes itself as a standard for individual or collective behavior. (Moussa, 2009: 142-145)

From the aforementioned discussion, it becomes clear that all perspectives were, in some way, limited or extreme. While society welcomes the individual and assists them in many aspects, it is the individual's abilities and talents that ensure the continuation, survival, and fulfillment of society's functions. Furthermore, humans are inherently social beings, and their lives, personal development, and lifestyle patterns cannot be fully realized except through interaction with others.

4. The relationship between the individual and society in islamic thought

In Islamic ideological and religious thought, the concept of society transcends the purely materialistic or abstract theoretical view by grounding itself in moral and spiritual foundations. Social relationships within this framework are built on human bonds of love and compassion, rather than solely on material connections. This is emphasized by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in his saying: "The example of the believers in their affection, mercy, and compassion for each other is that of a body; when any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever" (narrated by Bukhari). Without a doubt, these moral relationships, based on affection and mercy, are the foundation upon which human communities are built, creating the bonds that tie individuals together.

In contrast, a society purely based on material interests, such as economics, can be likened to bricks stacked beside each other without strong connections between them, making it incapable of being truly unified. However, a moral society is built on spiritual relationships that bind its parts, creating a cohesive structure that does not fall apart easily. This cohesion is sustained as long as it is nourished by faith and religion. Islam strives to establish this ideal society across the world, as it is a religion that addresses all of humanity. (Morsi, 1989: 6-7)

Abdul Latif Hassan Faraj draws a parallel between the relationship of the individual with society and the workings of a beehive. In a beehive, each bee performs its role precisely and without deviation, and this accurate performance of roles by all bees ensures the success of the hive in achieving its overall goals. Similarly, the advancement of society is dependent on the continuous interaction of the thoughts, emotions, and wills of its members. The notion of collective intellect, collective orientation, and collective will is clear sociological evidence that the progress of society is contingent on the interaction between the minds, orientations, and wills of individuals. Here, the importance of fostering a spirit of loyalty to society

becomes apparent, ensuring that the sense of belonging to the community outweighs the tendency toward individual self-interest.

Ismat Adly adds, "One of the primary conditions for a healthy society, which is self-sufficient economically and thriving culturally, is the presence of cohesion among its members. Each individual should feel a strong sense of belonging to their homeland and society, forming a living organic unit that interacts with the nation's life, grows with its growth, and develops its identity. Belonging is a fundamental pillar of social life, inevitably tied to belonging to the land—that is, to the homeland and society. Every individual should feel that the homeland and society are theirs, and they are responsible for the well-being and continuity of the social structure". (Faraj, 2008: 237).

This highlights the importance of the individual's social role, which sociologists emphasize must be nurtured from childhood. When developed properly, this role becomes a motivating force for the individual, giving meaning to both their individual and social existence. It guides them toward contribution and creativity, and when a person feels they have a functional role within their society, it instills in them a sense of belonging and attachment to their community. This strengthens the bond between members of society, creating unity and, consequently, reinforcing societal cohesion as a unified human entity. This in turn fosters a collective sense of affinity among the citizens of a single nation, which is essential for social security.

Thus, the Islamic perspective resolves the sociological debate surrounding the relationship between the individual and society by asserting that God has created humans with a dual nature—both individual and collective. There is no inherent contradiction between these two inclinations within a person. The reality of society is deeply rooted in human nature through the innate need for belonging. Society is first formed in the consciousness of individuals, and its structure emerges from the internal nature of humans. By their very nature, instilled by God, humans feel the necessity of living alongside their fellow human beings, cooperating, supporting one another, and working in solidarity to achieve beneficial goals. The true essence of individuality is closely tied to society. Despite a person's vast innate potential and the marvel of their creation, they cannot fully exercise their functions without undergoing processes of training and development, which are carried out by society. On one hand, society shapes individuals, and on the other hand, real-world observations affirm that humans possess two sides: one in which they are independent individuals with their own abilities and capabilities, and another in which they are integrated members of a social entity to which they are tightly bound. This connection cannot be severed or dispensed with unless either the individual becomes corrupt or the society to which they belong deteriorates. Collective perceptions, customs, traditions, morals, laws, and systems are common factors shared among individuals. Even though these do not belong to any one individual within society, they represent an extension of the collective ideas and beliefs of its members. Therefore, the interaction between the individual and society is a constant, ongoing process in which both influence and are influenced by one another (Zaimi: 294-295).

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