

Sociological Knowledge and the Problem of Scientific Research in Social Sciences

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Abstract:

In the midst of the great and rapid changes and transformations that the human world is witnessing today, the importance of science and knowledge as tools for human progress and development is growing. So, the importance of Social Sciences and Humanities is manifested in addressing the occurring problems, social changes and societal issues, including the knowledge disciplines concerned with the individual, group, society, culture, politics, and economics... etc.. These sciences also contribute to elevate the civilized, intellectual and value the level of the individual and society through the production and application of scientific knowledge through educational and research institutions, and the early stimulation and support of positive changes and transformations, so that they do not occur in a direction contrary to the formulation of the society's structure. This research paper aims to answer the importance of sociological knowledge, improve the research process, and diagnose the obstacles of innovation, excellence and creativity in scientific research, as well as identify the major problems and obstacles that limit the development of research in social sciences.

Keywords: Obstacles, Scientific Knowledge, Epistemology, Scientific Research, Creativity, Social Sciences.

Introduction:

Scientific knowledge is an important element of the cultural heritage in society that drives the accumulation of scientific and material knowledge, which is the basis for progress and the formation of collective action around various social issues that contribute to serving the goals of the individual and the group, as it means clarifying the foundations and principles, revealing the axioms and hypotheses on which any specialised scientific knowledge is based, and evaluating its results.

Therefore, sociological knowledge includes the epistemological knowledge component that is absent from research in the field of social sciences with research that is amalgamated with the digitisation of social phenomena and disconnected from the act of reflection, theorisation and interpretation that the sociological mind can add to its subject matter.

The interpretive effort that depends on the ability of the sociological researcher and his perception of the process of social phenomena is almost absent in many analyses. For example, we find that Andre Lalande assigned the concept of epistemology to the critical study of scientific principles, hypotheses and results, a study with the aim of identifying its origin (the rational but not the psychological) and its objective value. We should distinguish epistemology from the theory of knowledge, although it is a prelude to it and an indispensable auxiliary work, in that it studies knowledge in detail and in a dimensional manner in the diversity of sciences and subjects rather than in the unity of thought (Mohamed Waqiri, 1987, 8). It is a broad intellectual base, presenting a scientific mental work based on the spirit of criticism, and reflects an in-depth scientific attempt to understand and assimilate the nature of principles, hypotheses, results and laws, which refers us to say that there is a lack and vacuum found in the sociological mind, which is due, according to many, to the state of the social and human sciences, especially those related to the status and nature of their subject matter, and to the impact of the philosophical and ideological currents that accompanied the emergence of these sciences, their development and their historical processes, which calls for intensive critical epistemological reviews. The historical context of the development of knowledge, according to Gaston Bachelard, proved the necessity of conducting a psychological analysis of objective knowledge, where the subject of the analysis is the researcher's feelings, and identifying the barriers that prevent the achievement of objective knowledge, 'epistemological obstacles', on the one hand, and the importance of highlighting epistemological values, that is, www.psychologyandeducation.net

clarifying the meaning of scientific discovery and its significance from the cultural and psychological point of view, on the other hand. Bachelard says: "They are epistemological and psychological values at the same time because they are not only related to scientific development, but their impact affects human thought itself in that they affect its structure". (Mohamed Waqiri, 1987, 223).

These revisions are necessary and vital to maintain the procedural effectiveness of these sciences, as long as their continuity is linked to the conceptual, intellectual, theoretical and methodological adjustments that these revisions can introduce to activate these sciences and rid them of the dependency that almost destroys their legitimacy. The reality of social sciences today in the Arab world requires us to question the theoretical frameworks and the epistemological and methodological approaches that address this reality and determine its cultural and social specificities 'as sociology has not been able to liberate itself from common knowledge or common sense that forms the structure of "spontaneous sociology" or "cultural sociology" which requires the sociological analysis to exceed that simple understanding by creating a break with the interpretive discourse which always transcends the common sense". (Fairouz Mami Zerarga et al. 19, 359).

Sociological theory is also a construction and reconstruction of social reality - which is an extension of the so-called social thought - and constitutes a cognitive system, the purpose of which is to present a set of conclusions supported by observation data, and it includes two basic dimensions.

- The epistemological dimension represented by epistemological issues.
- The methodological dimension represented by the procedural methods and techniques used to analyse the issues.

It is important to pay attention to the early emergence of sociological knowledge requires addressing it in two topics of research necessity, namely.

- The real-life interactions that coincided with the emergence of the theory of interest, i.e. the research on the relationship between the set of real-life events on the one hand and the construction of the theory in terms of its basic propositions and its position in the events.

- The intellectual origins of the theory in terms of a growing episode within the framework of a comprehensive theoretical pattern that has its contemporary historical dimensions.

In order to understand the nature and construction of sociological knowledge, it is necessary to take into account these two dimensions in terms of the importance of real events and data in order to make sense of human existence.

‘Sociology, and whatever subject we apply it to, may be a science of phenomena or a science of illusions. When we have a gelatinous and incorrect idea about sociology, we think that it is lost in abstractions and in the general particularities of being, world and essence, this thinking is futile because we try to present in a scientific form a platitude and facts that are known and even doubted, and therefore are not honourable to rise to principles’ (D’Alebert cited by G. Bachelard, 1966, p. 34).

I. The Epistemological Obstacle in Sociological Studies:

Some epistemologists have attributed the state of the humanities and social sciences to the nature of their subject matter and the impact of the philosophical and ideological currents that accompanied the emergence of these sciences, their development and their historical processes; is it really possible to provide accurate scientific knowledge by relying on the method adopted by the natural and exact sciences?

According to Marc Jacquemain, Bruno Frère, since the 1950s, scholars (mainly Anglo-Saxon) have contributed to the establishment of the epistemology of the social sciences by studying the phenomenon of everyday life. This field orientation (or anchorage) has enriched, in a radical way, the body of traditional knowledge as a result of the researchers' reflexive reactions to their practices. This research aims to question the foundations of sociology by examining the processes involved, which are equally distributed between actors and professional sociological researchers, to translate, re-launch, describe, observe and stimulate motivations (tendencies)’ (Marc Jacquemain, Bruno Frère, 2008, p. 157).

This has led to the need for intensive critical epistemological reviews, which are necessary and vital to maintain the procedural effectiveness of these sciences, as long as their continuity is linked to the conceptual, intellectual, theoretical and methodological adjustments

that these reviews can introduce to activate these sciences and rid them of the dependency that almost eliminates their legitimacy.

We find that most of those working in the sociological field are concerned with the theoretical aspect without the empirical aspect, which has lost much of its scientific and societal lustre and made it confined to classrooms, as Arab universities lack the empirical experience of their societies, so they have not dared to theorise in the sociological field and develop epistemological mechanisms for this field of knowledge, and thus have been satisfied with Western theorising that draws from its societies and its various fields, which makes it imperative for researchers to reconsider the status of these sciences and benefit from the Arab intellectual heritage.

Therefore, placing social sciences in comparison with natural sciences is unfair to social sciences, and such comparisons do not reflect a full understanding of the nature of both social and natural sciences. The social sciences are based on a set of defining hypotheses and have their own claims, which are necessarily different from those of the natural sciences (Al-Damegh Sami, 1993). This confirms that taking social sciences to reality and enabling them to influence human beings is conditional on the integration of sciences in their vision and methodology, so that they contribute to monitoring, understanding and analysing human phenomena, changes, transformations, problems and societal issues, predicting and controlling them and proposing appropriate solutions to them. These sciences also contribute to raising the cultural, intellectual and value level of the individual and society by producing scientific knowledge and applying it through educational and research institutions, and stimulating and supporting positive changes and transformations early on so as not to occur in a direction contrary to the formulation of the structure of society. That is because Social Sciences are also related to practice as a reflection of the social reality and development and the context of its contribution in studying and analysing urgent social issues.

The field of knowledge in which social theories of divergent orientations (the theory of action, subjective and objective structure - the individual and society) emerged and developed in the works of Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim, 'this field was only possible through what we call the rules of the common game accepted implicitly by all, which created a common spatial space for all parties, and in this theoretical space the necessary conditions developed to form a rational discourse that takes society as its subject (Ali Al-Kanz, 1986, 101).

The question has been raised about the issue of stereotyping and moulding the social and human sciences in the same way as their natural science counterparts, which differ significantly in terms of the nature of the object of study and the methodology used. Social and economic sciences are defined as the scientific study of social phenomena, which leads us to question whether the scientific methodological approach is the same for other sciences, and since the researcher in the social sciences takes his living reality as a field of study, can he get rid of all his reference frames and ideological background and put them aside in order to reach laws of the same nature as natural law?

This is in addition to the issue of highlighting the similarity between two phenomena belonging to two different levels, at the same time that sociology began to accumulate efforts to build its theories and to have special topics and methods that varied between quantification and qualification, as a number of researchers pointed out that sociological thinking until the end of the nineteenth century is the fruit of the efforts of Enlightenment philosophers whose questions were linked to phenomena and social investigations that relied on quantification and statistical methods.

In light of what we have presented above, the epistemological obstacle in sociological studies is an obstacle facing sociologists in understanding and studying social phenomena accurately and objectively, this obstacle is represented by the difficulty of reaching the absolute truth about social phenomena, as sociologists deal with a changing and multidimensional social world, and they cannot study every aspect of this world completely and accurately, and the difficulty of reaching the absolute truth is manifested in a set of factors, including.

- The relative complexity of social phenomena and the inability of sociologists to study them comprehensively.
- The multiple influences that affect social phenomena and make it difficult to clearly identify the factors that affect them.
- Reliance on available data and information, which may be inaccurate or insufficient.
- Reliance on theories and concepts proposed by sociologists, which may be analysed, criticised and subsequently changed.

In general, the epistemological obstacle in sociological studies relates to the difficulty of neglecting and thoroughly analysing social phenomena and obtaining accurate and reliable data and information to study these phenomena. Therefore, sociologists need to identify tools and methods to help them overcome this obstacle, such as the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in research

II. Sociological Knowledge: Epistemological Fallacies:

The difficult birth of sociology in exposing social and human reality has led to ideological and epistemological fallacies represented in following the rules of the scientific method in sociology, which requires the absence of personal bias and refraining from making judgements, as facts, whatever their nature, must be left to speak for themselves, but the question arises: Is it possible to draw a parallel between matter and inanimate objects and the social phenomenon that results from the interaction between humans and others?

The work of leading sociologists such as George Gurevitch has shown that what is common between cognitive sociology and epistemology can be seen at three levels.

- The first level is the existence of collective knowledge whose manifestations are experience, intuition and collective judgements... It is a common field for these two sciences, and if the existence of this knowledge raises for cognitive sociology the question of its manifestations and its relation to other social phenomena, it raises for epistemology a question of another kind that is specific to it as a science, namely the question of the collective knowing subjects and the validity of their cognitive acts and the value of these acts.

- The second level is the realm of cognitive symbols, such as coherent images of the external world, logical propositions, mathematical expressions, and the conceptual apparatus of various sciences, which are of interest to both epistemology and cognitive sociology.

- The third level is the research into semantics and what it signifies. Semantics is the medium by which scientific knowledge is transmitted. The task of epistemology is to investigate their suitability to fulfil the function, while cognitive sociology investigates the transformations that occur in these signifiers as a result of their relationship with societal structures. (Mohamed Waqiri, 1987, 248-249)

Therefore, each distinct societal stage has its own methods and techniques that are more appropriate, accurate and sensitive, to study the societal and scientific issues of concern and to reveal the determinants and mechanisms governing them, because scientific research in the social sciences is of great importance, especially in our current time in which social life is complex, and the facts emanating from it impose not to stand at the boundaries of the deceptive and flimsy borders that our impression of them establishes. The crisis of sociological knowledge has been linked to the method and theory, and we will not add anything if we describe the Arab humanitarian and social experience as being characterised by the fact that in its theoretical and methodological dimensions it still suffers from the persistence of a multi-image gap between the subject and the method, between theory and practice, between consumption and production (Al-Ghali Aharshaw, 1994).

Facts related to human behaviour are not rigid but full of life, and therefore are not immune to the personal attitudes and preferences of individuals as researchers or research subjects, without forgetting the influence of values. (Ismail Kira, 15-17).

The research choices also reveal the exploitation of social science students, and their use of research opportunities within topics and interests that are amenable to empirical testing and easy to accomplish, such as interviewing respondents and using purposive sampling, especially those that are available, convenient and scientifically and practically controlled, or within topics that reflect a pathological interest in abnormal social and human behaviour rather than normal patterns, as described by Emile Durkheim.

In this context, it can be said that sociology lacks a specific and meaningful hypothesis stemming from the social reality of Arab society. 'In fact, the crisis of sociology stems from the conditions of socialisation to which the Arab child is exposed, as he grows up in an authoritarian family environment, where the father is in control of the family, and any deviation from the authoritarian system subjects the individual to humiliation, repression and punishment (Hassan Al-Jilani, 2017). Sociology cannot properly understand reality without a philosophical framework to refer to in abstracting social phenomena and linking them with the data of history and society, and any social philosophy that moves away from reality and is not based on it becomes a form of abstract thinking that is difficult to test.

This leads us to talk about the crisis situation in the social sciences in general as a result of the acceleration of societal changes and the failure to keep pace with the scientific development of these changes, theoretically it can be said that the crisis lies in the subject itself - society in general - due to its movement and dynamism and thus the inability to capture and stabilise it, which makes the results achieved through research subject to the criterion of relativity in a large and profound way.

On the other hand, research methods and methodological tools pose another issue related to the inability of the latter to familiarise themselves with the societal reality and be able to exploit its variables, which raises the question of their limitations in achieving stable, general and effective results due to their inability to formulate historical laws, as sociological production must have a degree of objectivity and a deep understanding of the theory in order to build cognitive methods capable of explaining our social reality and effectively diagnosing societal phenomena, as we find that Pierre Bourdieu criticises the traditional objective understanding of social realities and the subjective understanding of human management, arguing for the need to integrate theory and reality.

Many specialists in the social sciences repeat and try to prove and project theories that were born and raised in Western social conditions and environments, which are spatially, temporally and culturally different from Arab societies, and this is an undeniable fact. There is a great focus on Western theories in analysing and explaining the Arab social reality without trying to adapt them to the specificities of Arab society. Instead, they must be studied and analysed as an important stage and basic efforts in the emergence of sociology, taking into account the reality of Arab societies that require special knowledge tools.

Third: The issue of creativity and scientific research in Social Sciences and Humanities:

Scientific research in its simplest meaning is the investigation and inquiry in order to reach the truth, as it is an activity that seeks to collect, analyse and interpret information in order to answer the issue or questions raised. "Scientific research by its nature deals with the unknown and with the most abstract human products, namely ideas (John B. Dixon, 1987, 24), and it is the sum of the mechanisms that are adopted and the innovative and creative works and projects that are implemented in an organised and integrated manner, with the aim

of increasing the stock of knowledge and culture of humans, including the knowledge of man and society using this knowledge to build new applications, improve human life, increase economic growth and production effectiveness. (Abd Al- Mohsen Al-Husseini, 2008).

Amidst the rapid and profound changes that the human world is experiencing today, the importance of science and knowledge as tools for human progress and development is growing. Therefore, the significance of social and human sciences lies in understanding and studying societal problems, changes, and contemporary issues. These disciplines encompass various fields of knowledge that focus on the individual, groups, society, culture, politics, economics... etc. These sciences contribute to elevating the cultural, intellectual, and moral levels of individuals and societies through the production and application of scientific knowledge via educational and research institutions. Additionally, they stimulate and support early positive changes and transformations to prevent them from occurring in a direction that contradicts the shaping of society's structure."

The challenge of research in sociology is typically associated with innovation, creativity, and transformation of research outputs into goods and services. Financial and economic institutions invest significant capital in developing these products to achieve competitive commercial advantage. "Creative research activity aims to increase knowledge in various scientific fields; therefore, spending on these activities is considered an investment according to appropriate plans and precise scientific methods". (Nizar Kazem Al-Khaikani, 2010, 100)

Creativity in social research is "a process of assembling several elements or components into a sound structure that fulfils a specific need or benefit. The stronger the connections between the basic elements of the problem are, the more likely an individual is to reach a more creative solution. A creative person is one who can form a large number of verbal and non-verbal links between ideas". (Adnan Yusuf Al-Atoum et al, 2007, 129).

Creativity in the social sciences is used to express an individual's ability to reorganize existing knowledge or create new knowledge that contributes to the advancement of knowledge or products in various fields and specialties. Many countries allocate sufficient resources for scientific research to encourage and support individual and group initiatives (research teams). Sociological research provides society with benefits that require adequate

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attention, including services that help understand some of its fundamental problems based on useful knowledge and interpretive principles". (Fatiha Maataouq, 2000, 21).

This analysis leads us to discuss what Pierre Bourdieu considered sociological vigilance, which social researchers should possess. It is a response to the scientific desire, where "vigilance for the sociological researcher is a quality that imposes a kind of open-mindedness" (Pierre Bourdieu et Allia; 1968, 12). Researchers must be armed with this quality, which is primarily a product of their cultural and reference background in one of the branches of sociology, namely the sociology of knowledge. They must realize that the production of sociological knowledge is a historical mission aimed at transferring and creating the possible means to confront the fluctuations and social changes in various fields".

Scientific research is the primary tool that has transformed societies and propelled them into the digital age, intensifying economic and commercial competition. Institutions that fund scientific research have emerged, allocating substantial budgets and enhancing the competitiveness of products, as well as increasing the profitability of other production factors like capital and human resources, which are fundamental to research in terms of preparing and implementing programs and plans that ensure all the governing controls for investing in and developing research activities. Therefore, investment is a crucial tool in social development.

The leading role of the university and scientific research in this context is to provide services to society by enlightening the community, addressing the problems and challenges it faces, proposing appropriate solutions, and confronting foreign phenomena that affect its values and beliefs. It extends to serving the community's issues through its units, centres, facilities, and laboratories, which provide their expertise and equipment to all bodies and institutions (Saeed bin Hamad Al-Rubaie, 2008, 27, 28).

Those working in the social sciences are considered part of society, and their problems are part of society's problems in general (Mohamed Ezzat Hijazi, 1986, 56). If the research product of the social sciences is fuelled by societal factors, primarily the characteristics of power, forces, and dominant social and political movements, which are characteristics that combine to create and practice opposing consciousness, to develop sociological production, and to mobilize demand for it and employ it, then it perpetuates practices and values that

besiege creativity with prohibition and restrict freedoms, including academic freedoms and the right to access data from various official and field sources, and shackles the mind and intimidates it with ideological and intellectual fanaticism and tribalism (Abd Al-Bassit Abd Al-Mouati, 1998, 5).

Talking about the problems of scientific research naturally leads us to discuss the obstacles to creativity and the weak productivity of researchers in the social sciences, including problems related to scientific methodology and research and exploration methods. The social researcher lacks the ability to think critically and innovatively, which weakens their creative abilities. No matter how good the methods and books are, and no matter how many resources and tools are available, all of that is worthless unless there is a creative professor in his personal characteristics, scientific, professional, and cultural formation, along with academic freedom.

In general, we can talk about all the factors that stand in the way of the researcher, limiting their ability to innovate and renew in their field, whether they are organizational factors related to the organization, psychological factors related to the researcher, or social factors related to the society and social environment. This is supported by the lack of a public policy for scientific research. Universities and research centres, in general, do not adhere to predetermined collective programs or policies or a specific style of publishing or exchanging the results of their research (Samir Naeim Ahmed, 1988, 262).

In this context, empirical data show that the subjects of study in the field of sociology are subject to social practice and reality, and their contribution to diagnosing and solving problems and interpreting and understanding various emerging phenomena. This leads us to delve into a matter that seems to us to be of the utmost importance and is primarily related to the academic environment and the obstacles it contains, which are primarily related to the absence of incentives and a healthy positive climate. "The university that seeks success and creativity must rely on effective management, human relations, and participation in continuous decision-making for university activities and continuous feeding to correct the course and ensure that each individual performs their duties effectively" (Madaawi Ali Mohamed Al-Sabil, 2013, 36).

Perhaps one of the most significant obstacles that limit the performance and creativity of the researcher is the rigidity of the administration, its resistance to change, and its strict adherence to laws and regulations, as well as the monopolization of decisions, along with the great emphasis on teaching at the expense of research and improving knowledge and innovation to increase the number of students with a shortage of supervising professors. Furthermore, the curricula are still mired in a distorted regurgitation of Western theories, which leaves no room for building critical thinking. The Arab researcher - in these decades that we are living in - does not enjoy full freedom during his research practices. He is restricted by many supervisory and administrative bodies characterized by narrow-mindedness and bureaucracy. "Supervisory bodies prevent professors from teaching certain books and impose conditions for obtaining permits to conduct surveys and field studies, which hinders research in the field of social sciences. Also, the researcher cannot announce the results of his research publicly and officially as long as these results do not agree with the vision of official, political, and administrative bodies" (Fairouz Mami Zerarga, 2019, 42)."

Therefore, innovation in humanities and social sciences requires a radical change in education and its renewal to create a qualitative education capable of changing society, producing knowledge, and advancing the economy. "Foreign experiences have proved that the larger the number of universities in a country, the lower its performance and the weaker its ability to compete globally" (Fairouz Rasham, 2017). This is in addition to discussing the political system and its significant impact on the quality of social research, the lack of support and care, the oppression of researchers and innovators, and society's failure to understand and accept new ideas. Moreover, the problem of creativity in social research, in general, lies in the absence of a philosophy of knowledge that protects thought and research from imitation and dependence and works to establish the values of freedom in research and expression and break rigid molds. This can only be achieved through processes of encouragement, reinforcement, and appreciation of every effort.

Conclusions:

Sociological knowledge today poses the need for integration between the self and collective knowing selves and the validity of their actions with the manifestations of collective experience and judgments, as well as the social phenomena. In addition to what the

complex and special nature of social reality requires, a questioning and review of the sociological studies and research that have addressed this reality is needed, through an evaluation and reading of the theoretical and methodological framework dedicated to studying and understanding this reality. "John Dewey believes in the necessity of linking scientific research to specific and limited real-world problems that must meet the conditions and arise from actual social tensions, social needs, and social troubles whose substance is determined by the circumstances that are the material means leading to a specific situation related to a hypothesis that serves as a plan and policy for an actual solution with which we solve a social situation" (John Dewey, 1960, 758). It is difficult to trust the interpretations and conclusions provided by social research based on Western approaches in the name of serving the Arab reality. Moreover, it has not yet occupied its rightful place in the field of studying the characteristics of the local human being, nor does it possess the essential keys to understanding the components of this human being and the forces that drive him internally and socially.

Scientific research plays a crucial role in the field of progress and change and is one of the most important pillars on which the process of development is based. It contributes to the accumulation of knowledge and is the engine of the global system, which has opened the door for us to delve into the most important factors that achieve this process, namely creativity, innovation, and distinction among its individuals. The existence of discoveries that affect the nature and understanding of humans and their view of the world and reveal the new, for scientific research is the derivation of knowledge and the development of the product, and it is contingent upon financial support and academic freedom.

Needless to say, the low level of research is not attributed to the lack of distinguished and creative researchers, but also to the social and legal reality that surrounds the field of scientific research in Arab countries and Algeria in particular. The absence of a philosophy of success, planning policy, and the weakness of the research budget and its lack of financial capabilities and incentives, as well as political instability, bureaucratic management, and the lack of equipment, laboratories, and applied teaching tools, all provide factors to expel competencies and stifle creative abilities and skills.

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