

## The Problematic of Scientific Knowledge Production in the Social Sciences within Arab Universities

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### Summary:

The production of scientific knowledge constitutes one of the most vital functions of the university, serving as the effective primary engine for progress across all fields. Consequently, it has become a metric by which the advancement or stagnation of nations is measured. Within the context of cognitive structures, we find that the problematic of scientific knowledge production in the social sciences stands as one of the most acute and intractable crises facing academic institutions. Undoubtedly, many Arab nations have sought to revitalize the scientific research sector in alignment with the requirements of the knowledge age. To this end, they have adopted various orientations and mechanisms, establishing numerous research laboratories aimed at intensifying and upgrading research output to reach global standards. However, based on the theoretical frameworks through which we examined the reality of scientific knowledge production in social science fields within Arab universities, we concluded that such production is remarkably meager—almost non-existent—when compared to developed nations. Furthermore, this output often lacks qualitative depth, dominated instead by a vast quantity of research that offers little utility and adds nothing of substance to the existing body of knowledge.

**Keywords:** Scientific Knowledge Production; The Reality of Scientific Research; Obstacles to Knowledge Production in the Social Sciences.

### 1. Introduction:

The greatest challenge facing institutions of higher education and scientific research today is the emergence of the "knowledge society," characterized by the utilization, dissemination, and employment of knowledge across all spheres of life as a primary factor of production and a cornerstone of global competition. In the face of this challenge, it is incumbent upon these institutions to prioritize knowledge and its production. As a social, cultural, and educational entity that both influences and is influenced by society, the university plays a pivotal role in leading the desired movement for social change. It fulfills this mission through its diverse functions—chief among them being scientific research—aiming to generate high-quality scholarly output that enhances its standing both locally and globally across various disciplines.

The social sciences are among those disciplines concerned with studying the characteristics of human groups, their diverse interactions, and the reciprocal relationships between individuals, as well as the capacity to predict future developments. Many Arab scholars consider “**Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldun**” to be the true founder of the social sciences. Through his keen observations on the nature of human civilization recorded in his famous *\*Muqaddimah\**, he was the first to signal the existence of this field, defining its mission by stating: "It is a science with a specific subject, namely human civilization and social organization, and specific problems, namely the explanation of the accidents and conditions that attach themselves to the essence of civilization one after another. This is the case with all sciences, whether based on authority or on reason" (Ibn Khaldun, 1993, p. 38).

However, the social sciences in the Western world have occupied a leading position, bolstered by the advancement and influence achieved by developed societies. This strength was clearly reflected in the social knowledge of that era and its diverse theoretical models. In contrast, the social sciences in most Arab societies emerged alongside colonial entry, rendering them relatively nascent compared to their counterparts in developed nations.

Perhaps the most significant reason for our focus on the problematic of social scientific knowledge production in Arab universities is the current reality of these institutions as centers of knowledge production and

their low standing in global rankings. Furthermore, the university's role has often been restricted to its classic instructional function, overlooking the other primary purposes for which it was established: scientific research and the production of knowledge. Scientific knowledge production constitutes a fundamental pillar of academic institutions; beyond that, it is the benchmark by which national progress is measured. The development of universities is gauged by the knowledge they produce and the research competencies they possess. This necessitates a study

of this pillar to assess its scale and strength, identify its weaknesses and problems, and subsequently attempt to address these issues to reinforce and consolidate this foundation.

To address this issue and uncover the reality of scientific knowledge production in the social science fields within Arab universities, we pose the following questions: **What is the current state of scientific knowledge production in the social sciences in Arab universities? What is the status of research competencies in these universities? What are the obstacles hindering the production of scientific knowledge in the social sciences within the Arab academic context?**

## **2. Scientific Knowledge Production:**

To begin with, the concept of knowledge is not new; it has accompanied humanity since the dawn of consciousness, evolving from primitive levels alongside the expansion and deepening of human perception until reaching its current peak.

In its simplest form, knowledge is defined as the perception and conceptualization of things. The philosopher “**Bertrand Russell**” distinguished between two types of knowledge: knowledge by acquaintance (direct contact), which is perceived directly through the senses, and knowledge by description, which involves mental inferences (Mohamed Turki, 2012, p. 20).

Despite the numerous classifications and types of knowledge, scientific knowledge is distinguished by the characteristics of clarity, decisiveness, and certainty—all of which are essential prerequisites. It is further characterized by a mode of thinking grounded in the rules of the

scientific method for identifying objects and uncovering phenomena. This involves the inductive approach, which relies on the systematic observation of phenomena, the formulation of hypotheses, experimentation, and the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data to discover the laws and theories that govern them.

In general, scientific knowledge refers to that socio-historical process consisting of human activity directed toward understanding and portraying reality within the consciousness of a specific society; it is the result of the accumulation of ideas and experiences.

The term "production" (Arabic: Intaj) stems from the verb "to produce" (Antaja), meaning to manufacture or bring into existence (Ratib Ahmed et al., n.d., p. 93). Production is defined as the human activity that renders resources suitable for satisfying human needs. It also refers to any labor that generates utility. This concept extends to include every human effort to transform or adapt natural resources—including experience and knowledge—to make them capable of fulfilling human requirements (Mohamed Al-Hassan, 1999, p. 73).

Based on the foregoing, by scientific knowledge production, we refer to the capacity of faculty researchers to add to the existing body of social knowledge through the scientific research and studies they conduct within the university setting. This work occurs within research laboratories, research

teams, or individually within the social sciences, resulting in the production of books, articles, conference papers, or seminars.

### **3. Prerequisites for Scientific Knowledge Production:**

The success of knowledge production is contingent upon a country's ability to secure the essential requirements for its development. Undoubtedly, providing a suitable environment and the necessary conditions for conducting scientific research is vital to providing the researcher with the genuine motivation for achievement, creativity, and innovation. Among the most important of these conditions are the following (Houidi & Zaidi, 2016, p. 481):

**3.1 Planning:** By planning, we refer to the formulation of purposeful strategies and the linking of scientific research outcomes to development plans. Defining the objectives of research programs, their economic justifications, and their impact on developmental projects facilitates the creation of the plans necessary to overcome obstacles.

**3.2 Preparation of the Scientific Researcher:** The human element is the backbone of the scientific research structure. Consequently, universities are dedicated to prioritizing this effective component due to its significant importance and impact on development fields. The university's mission is no longer merely the transmission of knowledge, but rather assisting in its production and generation by cultivating **human capital** capable of achieving socio-economic and scientific growth. Therefore, the process of preparing a scientific researcher must begin at the undergraduate level by focusing on high-achieving students, nurturing their intellectual capacities, and encouraging them to pursue advanced studies and research.

**3.3 Laboratories and Equipment:** Scientific laboratories serve as the actual foundation for conducting research and producing diverse forms of knowledge. This is impossible without the necessary equipment, which requires the allocation of essential funds to acquire hardware, tools, and other material and human resources required by these laboratories.

For the production of scientific knowledge to occur, the university system must first recognize the shift in the nature, status, and role of knowledge in contemporary societies (**knowledge societies**). Subsequently, it must reform knowledge production centers (specifically universities and research centers) to ensure they keep pace with the era of the "knowledge explosion" and actively contribute to it. Furthermore, this system requires that university reform not be decoupled from other aspects of reform in our society (cultural, political, socio-economic, etc.). In this regard, we place particular emphasis on the human resource as **intellectual capital** and a mental energy for knowledge production, given its priority in correcting and developing the future vision and trajectory of the university institution.

#### **4. The Positioning of the Social Sciences in Arab Universities:**

The social sciences in Arab academic institutions are ranked at the bottom of the hierarchy of scientific disciplines. From an advisory standpoint, students

whose low grades disqualify them from other fields are often funneled into these disciplines. Furthermore, social science departments in many universities suffer from a deficiency in resources and physical infrastructure compared to technical and technological tracks, reflecting a state of marginalization and exclusion.

It is noteworthy that the rapid expansion of social science and humanities departments across Arab universities in recent years—relative to technological and medical sciences—does not reflect a genuine interest from policymakers. Rather, it serves as a mechanism to absorb the massive human influx resulting from rising student numbers. Official statistics indicate a very high annual growth rate in student populations. Opening social science departments is perceived by officials as the easiest and most cost-effective solution, as they believe it only requires classrooms and faculty, without the expensive laboratories and equipment necessitated by technical, technological, or medical fields.

#### **4.1 Faculty Conditions:**

Upon examining many social science departments in Arab universities, one immediately notices fractures, divisions, and conflicts underpinned by ego, cliquishness, regionalism, and ideological leanings. Empirical evidence confirms the existence of sharp divisions where conflict often triumphs over opportunities for cooperation and teamwork. Furthermore, there is a visible struggle between "newcomers" and "established actors." The older generation often seeks to maintain control over positions of influence, failing to provide space for young, creative talents to emerge. Instead, these younger researchers are often shackled by loathsome bureaucratic procedures that hinder their academic advancement. Far from a spirit of scientific objectivity, social networks often interfere in the evaluation of scholarly work and publication, leading to a monopoly on knowledge. Such conditions encourage the dominance of opportunism and the exclusion of genuine competencies.

Additionally, the prevalence of ideological conflicts has led to a lack of communication and cooperation between professors with opposing viewpoints. Academic groupings are often determined by ideological affiliations, and even the supervision of graduation theses has become subject to ideological convictions. In such an environment, the hallmarks of scientific objectivity and cultural exchange vanish—a state of affairs that contradicts established scientific and social traditions (Yaich, 2010, p. 18).

#### **4.2 Student Conditions in the Social Sciences:**

Social science departments have recently witnessed a significant surge in enrollment due to the proliferation of humanities specialties across various universities. Moreover, these disciplines have become a magnet for lower-achieving students who were either unable to register elsewhere or were directed there following repeated failures in their original tracks. There is also a high demand from employees seeking degrees to facilitate professional

promotion. Consequently, a sense of frustration and despair prevails among social science students, manifesting as apathy and a lack of perseverance—a reality that contrasts sharply with the medicine and exact sciences tracks. This negatively impacts academic achievement. Accordingly, many researchers argue that the recipients of these sciences are themselves a cause of the crisis, as they entered the field due to poor academic performance. This is compounded by a general decline in standards resulting from fragile educational systems across most Arab nations—an issue affecting all university disciplines. Many students lack linguistic proficiency and the ability to apply acquired knowledge to analysis, interpretation, or the conduct of scientific research (Triki, 2016, p. 123).

Generally, practitioners in the social sciences now find themselves asking to what extent their field responds to the major transformations occurring in Arab societies. While these societies are undergoing rapid changes, the social sciences have been characterized by stagnation and an inability to keep pace with, interpret, or influence reality. Social practice

in the Arab world has adopted a legacy that is incapable of analyzing current, complex societies. This is because the developments characterizing social knowledge evolved alongside the social realities of Western societies through various theoretical currents—from Positivism and Dialectical Materialism to Structural Functionalism and Individualism. In this sense, social science research should be a continuous production of social knowledge that keeps pace with the specific challenges of a given society. This reality compels social science practitioners to pose epistemological, theoretical, and methodological questions to approach the problems and challenges emerging from the specific nature of Arab societies.

### **5. The Status of Research Competencies in Arab Universities:**

In light of the holy verse: “*And He taught Adam the names - all of them...*” (Al-Baqarah, verse 31), man can be considered a "being of science"—that is, a being characterized by the production of knowledge as an inherent trait. However, his actual knowledge began with the knowledge of "the other." As studies in the history of science suggest, man did not become a notable figure in scientific or speculative knowledge until his understanding of other things had advanced (Belkacem Ferhati, 2016, p. 15).

Accordingly, the human element is viewed as a specialized resource in a given field who practices research, whether theoretical or empirical. This individual represents the "research competency" that investigates factual knowledge with the aim of introducing new additions or modifications to a scientific field to produce scientific knowledge.

Those monitoring scientific research protocols in Arab universities observe that researchers are tasked with pursuing and completing research in specific scientific and technical fields to find novel solutions to existing problems and meet socio-economic, scientific, and technological needs; this, of course, is what *should* be.

The professional and administrative status of the researcher in Arab universities has undergone several historical developments, encompassing

the conditions governing both the practice of scientific research and the role of the professor-researcher.

If we examine the extent to which professor-researchers in Arab universities contribute to the production of scientific knowledge, we find it to be very meager—nearly non-existent—compared to developed nations, particularly in the social sciences. This can be attributed, on one hand, to factors related to the training of professors since their early educational stages, recruitment procedures, government policies, established laws, and the bureaucratic apparatus surrounding this group (work conditions and the organizational environment). On the other hand, the reason may also lie in the mindset and the psychological and social characteristics of the Arab individual.

We can conclude that, despite the efforts made by the overseeing ministries, the professor-researcher in Arab universities remains primarily an academic and pedagogical teacher. This is evidenced by the fact that most research conducted at the university level consists of academic theses (Master's and Doctoral) in general. While there is a segment of professor-researchers who strive, work, and produce, they are unfortunately few and barely visible due to a lack of professional valuation and recognition.

Therefore, for the elite—by which I mean all effective research cadres—to secure a strategic and effective role in revitalizing the scientific research sector, they must internalize all quality standards, both theoretically and practically. This, in turn, will open the door wide for competitiveness in scientific knowledge production based on our specificities and the requirements of Arab societies.

## **6. Difficulties Facing the Scientific Researcher in the Field of Social Sciences:**

It is undeniable that scientific research in the experimental sciences differs from that in the social sciences, leading to difficulties and obstacles facing the social science researcher. Below, we highlight some of these difficulties (Bin Al-Saghir, 2013, pp. 28-29):

- **Complexity and Fluidity of Social and Human Phenomena:** It is an accepted premise that human and social phenomena are neither static nor stable as long as they relate to human beings, whose conditions change

from one state to another and across time and space. Consequently, it is logical for these phenomena to be complex.

- **Lack of Homogeneity in Social Phenomena:** Each social phenomenon possesses a unique, non-recurring character.
- **Biases and Personal Inclinations:** It is difficult to study social and human phenomena objectively, free from personal whims and emotions. Social phenomena are more sensitive than natural ones because they focus on man as an interacting member of a group; thus, social science material is heavily influenced by human will and decisions.
- **Imprecision of Terminology and Concepts:** There is a clear difference between the use of concepts in the social sciences versus the natural sciences. Social concepts are characterized by flexibility, ambiguity, and multiple usages, whereas concepts in the natural sciences are more precise and stable.
- **Difficulty in Generalizing Results:** This is evident in the difficulty of reaching clear and fixed laws, given the constant change of social phenomena. Furthermore, theories reached in the humanities and social sciences remain relative and lack the precision and scientific rigor that characterize the natural sciences.
- **Difficulty of Laboratory Subjugation:** The inability to use laboratory methods in the humanities and social sciences stems primarily from the difficulty of placing social phenomena under controllable and monitorable conditions. Unlike the natural sciences, the social researcher must study and observe the phenomenon in the world at large and wait for it to occur, as they cannot recreate the conditions of its occurrence or control them precisely. From this perspective, human and social phenomena cannot be subjected to experimentation.

In light of the above, we see that the subject matter of the humanities and social sciences is man and his activities across all fields, which raises complexities in research. As a complex living being, the researcher cannot adhere to absolute objectivity when studying his activities. Furthermore, laboratory study is extremely difficult because a subject's reactions change when they feel observed in artificial conditions. It is also difficult for the researcher to identify and isolate all causes of a social phenomenon; while they may discover some causes, they cannot grasp them all because they

are multifaceted, overlapping, and intertwined due to cultural diversity and human personality differences. All of this creates obstacles for the researcher in controlling the social phenomenon, thereby resulting in limited scientific knowledge production in this field.

Before discussing the reality of scientific knowledge production in the social sciences in Arab universities, we must examine the reality of scientific research in the Arab world and its problems, as detailed below:

### **7. The Reality of University Scientific Research in the Arab World and Its Challenges:**

Scientific research has gained immense and increasing significance, particularly in the contemporary era, due to its direct impact on diverse economic, political, and social spheres. It is regarded as a vital vehicle for the development of knowledge, modernization, innovation, and invention.

Engaging with the current state of scientific research in the Arab world compels us to examine its reality and the extent to which it keeps pace with Western civilization, which is in a state of constant advancement. Comparative analytical studies between the Arab world and developed nations have yielded several key findings—most notably that Arab scientific research has yet to reach the scientific heights achieved by Western countries. Arab universities have been primarily preoccupied with teaching vast numbers of students, far

exceeding their human and material capacities. This has negatively impacted their ability to fulfill other core functions: research, innovation, creativity, and knowledge production. Consequently, the volume of globally significant research emerging from Arab universities remains very low, and it is exceedingly rare to witness a major invention or scientific discovery attributed to a professor within an Arab university (Al-Tall, n.d., p. 53).

While scientific research has become a focal point for officials due to its role in regional advancement, it continues to face a set of obstacles and problems. Although their manifestations may vary, they constitute a genuine crisis. Scholars interested in university affairs and knowledge

production differ in defining the nature and causes of this crisis, as well as the path to resolving it. These obstacles include:

- **Absence of Clear Scientific Policy:** Most Arab countries lack a clear scientific policy that defines goals and priorities based on available resources. There is a marked absence of effective national policies to link and support the technological processes that complement economic activity. A recurring error is the setting of unrealistic goals that do not align with Arab labor markets and their specific needs, leading to a drain on resources and discouraging sustained efforts (Shihab, 2001, p. 127).
- **The Gap Between Policymakers and Researchers:** There is a wide rift between the designers of development plans (politicians) and those who implement them (researchers and scientists in universities and centers). One can identify three political perspectives regarding the university:
  - 1- **Positive:** Viewing the university as a scientific facility worthy of care and protection.
  - 2- **Negative:** Viewing the university as a collection of arrogant individuals detached from the concept of political authority.
  - 3- **Neutral:** Viewing the university as just another state department, akin to customs, transport, or municipalities. Many political decision-makers do not believe in the utility of university research.
- The crisis of scientific research is inextricably linked to the reasons behind the Arab world's lag behind the successive civilizational and scientific renaissances of the developed world. Although the Arab world contains over 400 research centers (20% specialized, 12% university-affiliated, and 51% affiliated with other entities), no Arab university was ranked among the top 500 in the world according to UNESCO classifications. This is due to a massive "knowledge vacuum" and developmental stagnation; remaining outside the circle of scientific evolution and research is the primary cause of this lag (Karkoush, 2011, p. 176).

- Lack of Institutional Dialogue: The absence of dialogue between state institutions, the private sector, and research bodies has led researchers to refrain from participating in solving human development problems.

Total spending on scientific research in Arab countries does not exceed 0.5% of the Gross National Product (GNP), whereas some developed nations allocate up to 6% of their GNP to research (Razzouq, 2004, p. 159).

Funds are meager, especially as major corporations and institutions do not contribute to supporting research centers, explaining the weakness of financial budgets.

- Research institutions are subject to bureaucratic patterns and routine restrictions that limit their effectiveness. The researcher deals with state administrations saturated with a "bureaucratic tendency," which constricts their scientific freedom. Researchers often require data and information that state administrations frequently withhold under the pretext of "confidentiality." Furthermore, there is a lack of modern references and research services in certain disciplines, coupled with the difficulty of accessing publishing venues for knowledge production.

Undoubtedly, scientific publications and patents are useful indicators of research activity, both of which are nearly non-existent in the Arab world. However, these alone do not fully capture innovative activity. There remains a difficulty in measuring knowledge production and obtaining accurate, integrated data on the outputs of Arab research. Global markets are almost devoid of Arab innovations, indicating that research in Arab countries has not yet reached the stage of innovation required to enter the knowledge economy. Consequently, there is a vast disparity—rendering comparison almost impossible—between Western and Arab nations in terms of knowledge production relative to population size.

Consequently, the reality of scientific research in the Arab world has become starkly apparent to all observers. While practitioners in this field have proposed numerous solutions to revitalize Arab scientific research, decision-makers have failed to implement them on the ground. This is particularly evident at the conclusion of every conference discussing research challenges in the region, where the recommendations remain

predictably identical (e.g., the lack of clear strategic policy, the absence of specialized funding funds, and the need for coordination between various research institutions). The problem persists so long as these conferences remain purely theoretical, detached from the necessary—yet missing—intervention of decision-makers.

## **8. The Status of Arab Universities Regarding Scientific Knowledge Production in the Social Sciences:**

Higher education institutions in the Arab world have gained significant importance recently, with a growing realization of their effective role in shaping scientific progress, fostering development, and driving comprehensive national growth.

Generally, the Arab world—from the Mashriq to the Maghreb—did not experience the same historical revolutions or scientific accumulation as the West. Instead, it encountered Western civilization and its achievements early on through colonialism. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Arab world became

acquainted with what is known as the "Social Sciences," which are viewed as the result of a civilizational friction between the industrial West and the agrarian East.

The discourse surrounding the social sciences has become a matter requiring special attention in the Arab world, particularly concerning their status and presence at the academic, social, economic, and political levels. This is intrinsically linked to the quality of produced knowledge and its ability to provide genuine insight into social reality with all its manifestations and transformations. This leads us to the question: What is the current state of the social sciences in the Arab world? The answer involves highlighting three primary dimensions: research topics, methodological approaches, and responsiveness to social reality (Al-Triki, 2016, pp. 117-119).

### **8.1 Research Topics in the Social Sciences:**

Research topics in the social fields reflect the extent to which social practice responds to social reality and contributes to diagnosing problems

and interpreting new phenomena. In this context, empirical data reveals a gap between research topics and the requirements of social reality in Arab countries, manifested in:

- A large portion of Doctoral and Master's studies focuses on "exhausted" research topics that have been sufficiently addressed in existing literature. Researchers often fail to justify re-testing these subjects while neglecting the dynamic dimensions of social reality and fundamental issues worthy of study—issues that could inform policymaking and help overcome societal problems. Furthermore, many studies focus on marginal and limited topics without referencing the broader social structure. There is a visible inclination toward "easy" topics with narrow geographic and human scopes, even in doctoral dissertations. Often, these studies do not aim to provide intellectual additions to human thought or clarify approaches to specific social aspects. Instead, authors are frequently driven by immediate pragmatic goals, such as defense requirements and professional promotions, which negatively impacts the quality of the produced knowledge.
- A closer look at studies in Arab universities shows that the selection of topics is a major hurdle. Topics are often classified as either "sensitive" or "non-sensitive." This selectivity narrows the scope of social production and strips social research of its authentic purpose: the search for truth.
- Social studies in the Arab world are split into two types: critical social studies influenced by the French School (prevalent in former French colonies like the Maghreb), which focus on critiquing social reality; and social studies focused on justifying and legitimizing reality rather than critiquing it (prevalent in countries following the Anglo-Saxon approach, like the Mashriq). This division is a major obstacle to the emergence of a unified Arab social science.

## **8.2 Methodological Approach:**

One of the most prominent indicators of the decline in social production today is the lack of methodological precision and rigor. Most

studied phenomena are treated with superficial description without delving into deeper interpretive or explanatory analysis. There is often an element of improvisation and a narrowness of vision in analysis. Furthermore, research tends to focus on the outward form of things rather than their essence, whereas the true role of social science—according to Pierre Bourdieu—is to uncover the hidden, or "the unspoken" (*le non-dit*).

### 8.3 Responsiveness of Social Sciences to Social Reality:

Indicators in the Arab world suggest that social research is unable to provide explanations for many emerging phenomena. There are few attempts aimed at "understanding the new conditions created by scientific and technical progress and the resulting challenges in order to respond to them rationally."

In this regard, the social sciences in Arab societies have remained detached from the social environment. There has been little response to pressing issues such as unemployment, poverty, development, and civil liberties. The social sciences were largely confined to the pedagogical sphere. Because states adopted developmental movements in the mid-1980s based on industrialization and technology, interest was skewed toward technical sciences, leaving the social and human sciences as passive observers of the resulting imbalances. Key reasons for this lack of interest include:

- Accusing social science practitioners of being unable to address societal problems.
- Mimicking Western solutions despite differing social environments.
- Ignorance of, and alienation from, the actual reality of these societies by practitioners.
- Entrenching inequality between the sciences.
- Neglecting the specific cultural specificities of Arab societies.

Consequently, social sciences and knowledge production in the Arab world are experiencing a puzzling decline. In the recent past, the Arab sociological scene was rich with prominent names whose contributions were recognized globally. Today, despite the opportunities provided by

Artificial Intelligence—such as communication tools and vast knowledge repositories—serious contributions and distinguished works, especially at the theoretical level, are very few.

As a result, most research papers and dissertations end up on library shelves as mere theoretical references, unimplemented on the ground. This gives the impression that the social sciences are "useless" in our societies, reflecting the wide gap between social practice and its environment.

Dr. **Al-Tarawneh (2017)**, a professor at the University of Jordan, noted in an interview that social sciences in the Arab world are "not serious" and do not

reach global standards (though he acknowledged there are serious individual attempts). He attributes this to a failure to meet global scientific challenges, a lack of institutional adoption by states, and the personal motivations of researchers seeking only appointment or promotion. He also highlighted a "consumerist, superficial culture" that avoids depth, which he considers the most significant barrier.

Similarly, Dr. Al-Wreikat (2017)—Professor of Higher Education and Head of the Sociology Department at the University of Jordan—confirmed in an interview that social scientific knowledge in the Arab world is very modest compared to its counterpart in Western countries. He attributes this to several factors, most notably: the lack of financial support for social sciences; the absence of a suitable research environment; issues regarding information security and freedom of access to data; and the failure to apply research findings. He also noted that researchers often work primarily for professional promotions and that exchange agreements between Arab and Western countries remain largely inactive. He emphasized that direct engagement with the global scientific community is essential for production and openness. Furthermore, he suggested that researchers may not be adequately prepared for research in these fields, pointing also to the language of publication; since most research is published in Arabic, Arab social sciences remain virtually invisible internationally. To achieve genuine social knowledge production, he argues that there must be investment in both material and human capital and, crucially, the creation

of an encouraging environment free from unproductive conflicts and trivial disputes.

### **9. Obstacles to Producing Social Scientific Knowledge in Arab Universities:**

There are several obstacles hindering the production of social knowledge, which can be summarized as follows:

- Arab social sciences lack well-defined, general social theories with integrated conceptual systems that can be empirically tested or possess the explanatory and predictive powers found in Western social sciences. Consequently, most Arab social studies remain confined to descriptive research.
- Failure to establish a specialized scientific methodology applicable to Arab social studies—one that accounts for the specific nature and unique characteristics of Arab social issues.
- There is a marked lack of coordination between Arab social studies, coupled with a failure to unify concepts and terminology. Reliance on imported social schools and references has created a state of chaos and inconsistency among practitioners, resulting in wasted efforts and destructive rather than constructive scholarly environments.
- The Problematic of the Intellectual and Philosophical Reference Frame for Scientific Theory: Most attempts by Arab researchers to establish indigenous Arab theories have relied on intellectual reference frames belonging to Western philosophy or Soviet-era leftist thought. Alternatively, these theories were framed according to the researcher's idealized conception of what the Arab intellectual and philosophical framework should be, rather than reflecting the current reality of this thought. This occurs without considering the necessity of grounding social theory within a philosophical reference frame that inherently belongs to the society in which that theory is intended to operate.
- Emphasis on Theoretical and Speculative Aspects in Social Research: There is a lack of capacity or seriousness in moving

forward to test the empirical reality of research and the practical validity of its hypotheses. Writing, authoring, and translation are often conducted for the sole purpose of academic instruction, or for ideological and cultural reasons, rather than focusing on achieving the broader objectives of social knowledge production.

- **The Problematic of Generalization and Fragmentation:** This is a persistent characteristic of most Arab social research, which tends to be either superficial and general—touching upon subjects externally without delving into the depths of the problem for proper analysis and understanding—or, conversely, focused on fragmented, empirical issues without considering the necessary general theoretical framework. This reveals a simplistic tendency toward extreme fragmentation and over-specialization.

Furthermore, other barriers hinder the establishment of Arab social sciences, including political and religious obstacles, as well as constraints regarding funding, translation, and scholarly output, all of which have prevented the foundation of an indigenous Arab social knowledge.

Consequently, one of the barriers to the dissemination of knowledge production in Arab societies is the negative perception of the social sciences—a subordinate and dismissive view that regards them as sterile and useless disciplines. This is due to multiple, overlapping factors; indeed, it represents a crisis of confidence between the social sciences and official bodies in Arab countries, in stark contrast to developed nations. This may be attributed to a failure to discover the importance of social studies and research in the fields of social planning, opinion polls, and forecasting and prediction methods, as well as a general ignorance of the true foundations of the social sciences. The deteriorating status of the social sciences in Arab societies can also be explained by the decline of values that encourage science in general—as it is no longer seen as the primary path to achieving aspirations—compounded by the absence of criteria for valuing excellence, performance, effectiveness, and competence.

In addition to the aforementioned factors, one of the most significant obstacles is the absence of a serious role for social science practitioners as

an elite force within society. The question of the actual and influential presence of elites is a compelling problematic in Arab societies. Based on the defining role of elites—intellectual production, the capacity for influence and change, and positive distinction—it can be said that this role is virtually non-existent in Arab universities. Furthermore, (the public sphere) in Arab society witnesses a total absence of these elites, which has left a vacuum filled by opportunists and mediocrity.

Generally, the presence of social science practitioners is often unimpressive. One observes an improvisational and narrow vision in analysis that does not differ from the perspectives of non-specialists; at times, personal viewpoints on a subject are even attributed to these sciences. This contributes to disseminating a distorted image of the social sciences within social circles and, consequently, hinders the production of social knowledge (Al-Triki, 2016, pp. 123-124).

Consequently, the roles of many practitioners in these fields have shifted toward consultancy or media-centric roles. This highlights a prominent approach in contemporary social sciences: viewing reality with indifference and lack of concern, or regarding the social sciences merely as information to be transmitted to students or interested parties, detached from the actual existence of individuals as conscious subjects. Here, the issue of the empirical trend arises, which engages with reality by separating the general from the specific and qualitative, linking to it pragmatically only to obtain data representing fragments of reality without theoretical guidance.

Overall, the obstacles preventing the production of social scientific knowledge can be classified as follows: **Socio-cultural Obstacles:** These are the most widespread, primarily including the absence of a research culture and a lack of societal respect for scientific inquiry; **Administrative Obstacles:** These include the bureaucratization of scientific research, poor organization, and inefficiency in managing human and material resources; The lack of funding and the absence of a permanent, clear, and dedicated budget for scientific research; **Researcher-specific Obstacles:** Relating to the researcher themselves, such as a lack of desire or seriousness in conducting research; **Other Obstacles:** These include the marginalization of the university's role by authorities and the absence of academic freedom.

Based on the foregoing, it is clearly evident that there are numerous and interconnected obstacles preventing the production of effective social scientific knowledge within Arab universities. This critical situation cannot be overcome except through the provision of a suitable and positive environment that allows for the emergence of an elite capable of contributing, producing, and applying knowledge to serve society through: (Al-Triki, 2016, p. 12)

- **Expediting the Reform of University Systems:** Finding effective mechanisms for the university to open up to its surroundings, reclaiming its status and leadership role in society, and prioritizing quality over quantity.
- **Re-evaluating the Content of Social Science Programs:** Ensuring they keep pace with the ongoing changes in the socio-cultural structure of Arab society, and adapting them to meet the requirements of economic and social development.
- **Providing Support for Researchers:** Reducing professional burdens to allow researchers to dedicate themselves to research and knowledge production, and to participate effectively in serving society and development issues.
- **Establishing Specialized Higher Schools and Research Hubs in the Social Sciences:** These would serve as spaces for the emergence of authentic social sciences that contribute to the civilizational building of Arab societies, as well as venues for gathering creative minds and competencies in these fields.
- **Encouraging Scientific Knowledge Production:** Valuing effectiveness and creativity, and fostering an atmosphere conducive to the emergence of competent and creative talents.
- **Encouraging and Funding Specialized Translation Activities:** This is essential to keep pace with international developments in social research and to enrich the Arab library with books and references containing new studies and research.
- **Establishing Specialized Regional Centers at the Arab Level:** These centers would serve as a foundation for building distinct Arab social sciences that serve the interests of Arab societies and respond to the requirements and needs of the Arab reality.

## 10. Conclusion:

From the foregoing, we can conclude that the social sciences in the Arab world emerged from the same perspective as their Western counterparts—a point that is indisputable and was perhaps inevitable, given that they were a product of colonial circumstances. This influence extends to both theoretical trends and methodological tools; indeed, most empirical studies have served as a genuine reflection of these theoretical and methodological pathways. This implies that the social sciences in the Arab world have functioned as a faithful expression of the ideological positions adopted by the social sciences in the Western world.

However, despite the widespread presence of the social sciences across almost all Arab universities, they continue to face numerous deficiencies and obstacles. This is primarily because they remain academic sciences *par excellence*; they are confined within a closed university framework, detached from the concerns of society and social demand. These are institutional sciences restricted to instruction rather than the kind of research capable of producing social knowledge that diagnoses the Arab social reality. Consequently, we maintain that scientific knowledge production in the social science fields within Arab universities is remarkably meager—almost non-existent—compared to developed nations. It is dominated by a vast quantity of output that offers little utility and adds nothing to the existing body of knowledge due to a lack of quality. Nevertheless, this does not negate the efforts being made at the level of universities, laboratories, or by serious individual researchers who strive to produce social knowledge, however limited it may be.

Therefore, the discourse on scientific knowledge production in the social sciences within Arab universities remains of particular importance and requires a continuous evaluation system.

Such a system would ensure that intellectual activity proceeds according to a rigorous scientific methodology to achieve leadership. This can only be accomplished by adopting a strict strategic plan that directs scientific research in alignment with development requirements across various fields and in accordance with international quality standards. Yet, the reality of knowledge production in the Arab world remains hostage to political ambitions and a

complex reality. Despite efforts to improve and develop research conditions and support researchers—notably through the establishment of research laboratories in these fields—the sector still suffers from clear inadequacies at all levels, particularly regarding administrative and material support, as well as the motivation of researchers and society’s dismissive view of the humanities and social sciences.

Moving toward the production of social knowledge requires greater attention to higher education and scientific research, especially in the era of Artificial Intelligence. This sector is a vital tool for the advancement and elevation of societies through the preparation of necessary human forces, encouraging them to produce knowledge, and providing the material and moral means for such endeavors, alongside the establishment of specialized research centers in the Arab world. Success further depends on the integration and harmony of a set of fundamentals, each playing a complementary role, with the necessity of ensuring effectiveness in every link of this chain. These fundamentals can be summarized into three essential pillars upon which any successful and productive research plan rests:

1. **Rigorous Scientific Methodology:** It is essential to adopt a scientific methodology and a strategic plan capable of keeping pace with the latest developments and transformations occurring in the Arab world.
2. **The Effective Researcher:** For effective research cadres to secure a strategic and influential role in revitalizing the scientific research sector and producing scientific knowledge in the Arab world, they must internalize all quality standards—both theoretically and practically. This, in turn, will open the door wide for competitiveness in knowledge production, grounded in our unique cultural specificities and the requirements of our societies.
3. **Collaborative Administration:** This is the fundamental cornerstone for the success of any research plan. It involves providing a scientific environment that encourages research and knowledge production, while fulfilling various material and moral research requirements, such as modern literature and both financial and professional incentives.

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