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The Social World as a Scientific Problem: Method, History, and Reflexivity in the Production of Sociological Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the foundations of the sociological method by addressing a recurrent gap in discussions of sociological methodology: the tendency either to reduce method to technical procedures of data collection or to present classical sociological traditions as separate and self-contained models of analysis. In response to this limitation, the article proposes an integrative and reflexive account of sociological method as a specific form of scientific knowledge production about social life. Based on a qualitative and theoretical-bibliographical study, the research analyzes selected classical and contemporary works in sociological theory and methodology. The procedure consisted of thematic and conceptual analysis, organized around four analytical axes: the break with common sense and the construction of the sociological object; the relationship between theory, empirical reality, and methodological control; historicity and the denaturalization of social life; and objectivity, value neutrality, and reflexivity. Through a comparative reading of explanatory, interpretive, critical, and relational traditions, the article reconstructs how sociology transforms phenomena that appear evident, natural, or everyday into scientific problems. Its originality lies in showing that sociological method is not reducible to a single analytical model, but is constituted by a plurality of epistemological operations: objectification, interpretation, critique, historicization, relational analysis, and reflexive control over the conditions of knowledge production. The article contributes to current debates on sociological methodology by clarifying the links between theoretical construction, empirical inquiry, historical analysis, and reflexivity. It also suggests that future sociological research should strengthen the distinction between participants' categories and analytical categories, avoid both naïve empiricism and abstract theoreticism, and treat objectivity as a methodologically controlled and socially situated achievement.

INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the foundations of the sociological method, not merely as a set of research techniques, but as a particular way of producing knowledge about social life. Sociology distinguishes itself by transforming phenomena that appear evident, natural, or ordinary into problems of scientific investigation. To achieve this, sociological analysis moves away from immediate explanations, theoretically constructs its objects of inquiry, and articulates concepts, empirical data, and methodological procedures to interpret social reality critically.

The discussion examines some fundamental operations of sociological analysis. First, it considers the break with common sense as a necessary condition for questioning spontaneous and naturalized interpretations of everyday life. Next, it addresses the construction of the sociological object, emphasizing that social phenomena do not appear to the researcher as ready-made or transparent data. Rather, the researcher must delimit, conceptualize, and problematize them. The article also explores the relationship between theory and empirical reality, since social data do not possess sociological meaning in themselves, and researchers must confront concepts with concrete situations of investigation.

In addition, the article presents different ways of producing intelligibility about social life, including the explanation of social facts, the understanding of social action, the critique of historical forms of domination, and the relational analysis of practices. These perspectives show that sociology does not rely on a single, closed, and homogeneous method. Instead, it develops through different theoretical traditions and analytical procedures aimed at explaining, interpreting, and criticizing social phenomena. Finally, the article discusses historicity, denaturalization, objectivity, value neutrality, and reflexivity. These elements characterize sociological knowledge as a rigorous scientific practice, guided by methodological control and conceptual grounding, while also situated within specific historical, social, and institutional conditions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The break with common sense and the construction of the sociological object

A key demand of the sociological method is to distance analysis from common-sense assumptions. This does not mean disregarding everyday knowledge, since actors use practical interpretations to guide action and attribute meaning to experience. However, such interpretations

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do not sufficiently explain social phenomena. Sociology requires critical distance from spontaneous and naturalized evidence and transforms familiar experiences into problems of scientific investigation (Bourdieu *et al.*, 2004; Durkheim, 2007). Durkheim expresses this requirement when he argues that researchers should treat social facts as things: social facts possess objective existence, and researchers must analyze them through specific procedures. Researchers cannot reduce them to opinions, moral judgments, or psychological explanations. The rule that social facts require explanation through other social facts expresses the effort to construct a properly social explanation of reality (Durkheim, 2007).

The same break requires recognizing that the researcher does not simply find a ready-made sociological object. Sociological research therefore demands epistemological vigilance and theoretical construction through concepts, problems, hypotheses, and analytical procedures (Bourdieu *et al.*, 2004). Breaking with common sense does not eliminate the meanings that actors attribute to their actions. Interpretive sociology begins with the meaning intended by agents, but researchers should not confuse this understanding with empathy, opinion, or moral judgment. It requires conceptual construction, comparison, methodological control, and the distinction between factual and value judgments. Understanding social action means reconstructing its orientations within specific social and historical contexts (Weber, 1999, 2001). In the Marxian tradition, the break with common sense becomes a critique of social appearances and ideology. Capitalist relations tend to appear as natural relations between things, free individuals, and equivalent exchanges. Critical analysis reveals that these appearances conceal historically produced exploitation, domination, and conflict. Commodity, wage, private property, and the division of labor function as social forms linked to the capitalist mode of production, not as natural economic givens (Marx, 2013; Marx & Engels, 2007). The sociological imagination distinguishes individual experience from social structure. Sociology relates biography and history, showing that private difficulties often connect to public issues and broader structures. Sociology cannot explain unemployment, poverty, school failure, violence, or marginalization solely through individual attributes, since these phenomena involve institutions, economic relations, power, inequalities, and historical processes (Berger & Luckmann, 2004; Mills, 1982).

Researchers should not reduce the relationship between sociology and common sense to a simple opposition between science and ordinary opinion. Although common sense does not provide sufficient scientific explanation, it remains sociologically relevant as practical knowledge that guides practices, expectations, classifications, and ordinary interpretations (Almeida, 2012; Mathisen, 1989; Thomas, 1978). Common sense functions both as an epistemological obstacle and as an empirical object, since ordinary interpretations reveal

ways of producing meaning and organizing experience. The researcher must distinguish participants' categories from analytical categories and treat common sense as data, not as definitive explanation (Almeida, 2012; Manis, 1972; Peters, 2011).

Thus, the break with common sense operates as a critical and methodological procedure, not as an absolute rejection of ordinary knowledge. It shifts analysis from immediate opinion to conceptual elaboration, from individualizing explanation to relational explanation, and from naturalized appearance to historical understanding. Sociology begins when the social world ceases to appear self-evident and becomes a problem of investigation (Bourdieu *et al.*, 2004; Durkheim, 2007; Marx, 2013; Mills, 1982; Weber, 1999). The construction of the sociological object is central to the method. Themes such as family, religion, work, education, poverty, violence, the state, or inequality do not automatically become sociological objects because they exist in social life. Researchers must transform them into research problems that delimit the relations, institutions, meanings, practices, and historical conditions that constitute them (Bourdieu *et al.*, 2004).

This procedure requires distance from definitions produced by common sense and the construction of the object according to sociological criteria. The researcher must define the object by its external characteristics, coercive power, and insertion in collective life. Thus, this construction moves from immediate experience to an analytical definition capable of apprehending the phenomenon in its social dimension (Durkheim, 2007). Sociology cannot merely reproduce the practical categories that agents use, since these categories belong to the social world under investigation. Research requires epistemological vigilance toward classifications, language, institutional divisions, and problems as they appear in common consciousness or public administration. To construct the object means breaking with spontaneous sociology and producing an analytical perspective on relations that everyday life presents as natural, individual, or isolated (Bourdieu *et al.*, 2004).

The construction of the sociological object also requires delimitation. Researchers cannot investigate any phenomenon as an undifferentiated totality; they must select dimensions, establish boundaries, define concepts, and clarify the guiding problem. Researchers may analyze the school, for example, as an institution of socialization, a mechanism for reproducing inequalities, a space of symbolic conflict, a bureaucratic organization, or a public policy. Thus, the object is not identical to the theme, but results from the articulation between an empirical theme, a theoretical problem, and procedures of investigation (Bourdieu *et al.*, 2004; Weber, 2001). From the perspective of interpretive sociology, the sociological object does not correspond to any human behavior, but to action endowed with meaning and oriented toward others. Its construction requires distinguishing social action from other conduct and reconstructing meanings, while linking interpretation to causal explanation (Weber, 1999).

The ideal type functions as a crucial tool in this process. It does not reproduce empirical reality; rather, researchers use it as an analytical construction to organize, compare, and interpret phenomena. By conceptually ordering aspects of reality, sociology makes historical processes such as bureaucracy, domination, capitalism, rationalization, and religious ethics more intelligible (Weber, 2001). The construction of the object also requires recognizing the relational character of social phenomena. Researchers cannot understand practices, institutions, and beliefs in isolation, since their meaning depends on the relations that embed them. This orientation appears in the analysis of fields, habitus, and forms of capital. A position, cultural practice, or educational trajectory becomes intelligible only when related to the broader social space and to the conditions that produce agents' dispositions (Bourdieu, 1989, 2007).

By emphasizing relations, sociology avoids explaining social life as if it were merely the sum of isolated individual decisions. Poverty, for instance, should not be understood only as insufficient income or as a consequence of personal conduct. It can be examined as a location within systems of inequality, as an outcome of uneven access to resources, as a classification produced by institutions and public administration, and as an everyday condition shaped by territories, organizations, and concrete social experiences. This mode of analysis can also be extended to violence, joblessness, education, crime, religion, and patterns of social mobility (Bourdieu *et al.*, 2004; Mills, 1982). Another defining feature of the sociological object is its historical character. Social phenomena should not be approached as fixed, natural, or timeless realities, but as forms produced in specific historical processes. For this reason, institutions such as the family, the state, schools, markets, prisons, legal systems, and wage labor need to be studied in terms of how they emerged, changed, and became socially legitimate (Berger & Luckmann, 2004; Elias, 1994). From a critical perspective on capitalism, categories such as commodities, wages, capital, private property, and the division of labor are therefore not neutral economic facts. They are historically specific social relations connected to production, exploitation, and domination (Marx, 2013; Marx & Engels, 2007).

A sociological object only takes shape when conceptual reflection and empirical investigation are brought into relation. If research is not guided by theoretical categories, it tends to accept everyday labels and institutional classifications as if they were self-evident. Conversely, when it is detached from evidence, theory risks becoming a purely abstract exercise, lacking criteria through which its claims can be tested and refined. Concepts help determine what should be observed, define the limits of the problem, and give analytical sense to the material collected; empirical findings, in turn, can question, adjust, or reformulate those concepts (Bourdieu *et al.*, 2004; Weber, 2001).

Thus, building a sociological object means transforming a broad social theme into a properly sociological problem.

The analysis moves away from appearances and toward the relations that organize them; it replaces the idea of fixed substances with attention to historical formation; and it explains individual conduct by considering the social conditions that make action possible and intelligible. Sociology, therefore, does not simply take social reality as it is immediately perceived. It reconstructs that reality as an object of scientific investigation (Bourdieu *et al.*, 2004; Durkheim, 2007; Weber, 1999).

Theory, empirical reality, and forms of analysis in the sociological method

In sociological research, conceptual work and empirical investigation are not separate stages, but mutually dependent operations. Sociology neither confines itself to abstract speculation nor becomes a mere accumulation of data. Its analyses require the formulation of concepts, the observation of concrete situations, the definition of methodological boundaries, and the interpretation of evidence. Theoretical perspectives make it possible to interrogate the social world, whereas empirical work gives those concepts precision by examining phenomena located in particular historical contexts (Merton, 1968; Weber, 2001). This connection is indispensable because empirical materials are never meaningful in a purely immediate way. Numbers, interviews, documents, field notes, life histories, and archival records do not automatically become sociological evidence. They acquire analytical value only when they are organized in relation to research problems, conceptual categories, and hypotheses. Method, therefore, is the process through which researchers establish meaningful links among evidence, concepts, and broader social dynamics (Becker, 2007; Weber, 2001).

Durkheim's rule that social facts should be approached as things points to the necessity of examining social phenomena as realities that confront individuals from the outside. It also warns against explanations grounded in personal impressions, moral judgments, or reductions to individual psychology. Empirical reality, in this sense, is not a loose inventory of events. It is produced through observation regulated by objective criteria, allowing social facts to be identified by their properties and interpreted through their relations to other social facts (Durkheim, 2007).

The interaction between conceptual construction and observation also follows from the fact that social life is too complex to be grasped in its totality. Scientific inquiry must select dimensions of reality according to a defined problem and a criterion of relevance. Conceptual tools, especially Weber's ideal types, help order and interpret empirical diversity. An ideal type is not a substitute for reality itself; rather, it is a heuristic device that allows comparison, clarification, and analytical orientation (Weber, 1999, 2001). The same relation between concept and evidence makes possible a critique of appearances. Sociology does not reject empirical reality, but uses it as the material from which theoretical reconstruction

begins. In Marxian analysis, commodity exchange, work, value, accumulated capital, and wages are not merely visible economic facts. They name historically specific social forms embedded in relations of production, appropriation, and domination. Theory, in this case, helps disclose the social relations hidden behind what appears natural or self-evident (Marx, 2011, 2013).

Merton's idea of middle-range theory offers another way to maintain this balance. Such theories avoid the limits of narrow empiricism, but also resist the temptation of grand theoretical systems disconnected from investigation. They orient concrete studies without claiming to provide a complete explanation of social life. For this reason, theory must be broad enough to sustain comparison and explanation, while remaining sufficiently close to empirical research to be revised, tested, and developed (Merton, 1948, 1968).

When conceptual elaboration and empirical work are separated, sociological analysis tends to lose its strength. A theory that becomes excessively formal may detach itself from historical conditions and concrete social problems. Conversely, empiricism without theoretical imagination may turn research into a technical procedure with little explanatory power. The sociological imagination depends on connecting personal trajectories, historical processes, and social structures, so that concepts deepen the interpretation of data and empirical inquiry restrains excessive abstraction (Mills, 1982). Finally, empirical observation always involves interpretation and methodological choice. To describe a practice sociologically, it is necessary to understand the symbolic frameworks through which action becomes meaningful for those involved. Research therefore includes decisions about questions, cases, sources, comparisons, and interpretive strategies, as well as the conversion of empirical materials into sociological arguments (Becker, 2007; Geertz, 1989).

Researchers must understand social phenomena as historical and relational processes. This perspective criticizes static analysis and emphasizes interdependencies, figurations, and long-term transformations. It also problematizes the separation between action and structure by showing that structures operate both as conditions and as results of practices. Empirical reality must therefore appear within processes and configurations (Elias, 1994, 2006; Giddens, 2003). The articulation between theory and empirical reality prevents naïve empiricism, which assumes that society can be known by accumulating data, and abstract theoreticism, which formulates explanations without empirical control. Sociological investigation does not follow a linear sequence of observation, data collection, and later theory. Researchers produce data from problems, concepts, and instruments within the scientific field (Almeida & Pinto, 1975; Greenwood, 1965; Merton, 1948).

Thus, the relationship between theory and empirical reality does not constitute a secondary issue, but a fundamental condition of the sociological method.

Sociology moves between abstraction and observation, concept and evidence, interpretation and control. Without theory, research remains trapped in immediate appearances; without empirical grounding, theory loses explanatory capacity (Godoi, 2011). Sociology produces intelligibility about social life through different methodological matrices: the explanation of social facts, the understanding of social action, the critique of domination, and the relational analysis of practices. These approaches matter not because they provide a single method, but because they offer distinct answers to the problem of how to know scientifically a reality in which individuals themselves participate and which often appears natural or self-evident (Bourdieu, 1989; Durkheim, 2007; Marx, 2013; Weber, 1999).

In the explanatory orientation, researchers must treat social facts as things that is, as phenomena marked by exteriority, coercion, and generality. Researchers cannot reduce them to individual consciousness, intentions, or moral judgments. The rule that one social fact must explain another social fact expresses this requirement of objectification, visible in the analysis of solidarity, cohesion, and pathologies of collective life (Durkheim, 1972, 1999, 2007). In the interpretive orientation, sociology studies social action, understood as conduct endowed with meaning and oriented toward others. Its task is to understand this meaning and causally explain the course and effects of action. Understanding and explanation therefore operate as articulated moments of the method. Ideal types reinforce this procedure by ordering reality analytically and enabling comparison with historical cases. Concepts such as bureaucracy, domination, rationalization, and the spirit of capitalism function as instruments for controlled interpretation (Ekström, 1992; Schütz, 1976; Weber, 1999, 2001).

Under capitalism, relations between people tend to appear as relations between things, especially through the commodity form. Researchers must therefore understand categories such as commodity, value, money, wage, capital, and abstract labor as historically determined social forms, not as natural data of the economy (Marx, 2011, 2013; Marx & Engels, 2007; Pereira, 2018). This critique also requires analyzing social phenomena in their historical totality. Researchers should not treat social elements as isolated domains, but through the mediations that connect them to broader relations. Ideology, in this sense, does not merely represent subjective error; it constitutes a socially produced form of consciousness linked to the organization and legitimation of social life. Critical theory expands this issue by examining political, cultural, and civilizational forms of domination in capitalist modernity (Marx, 2011, 2013; Regatieri, 2013).

Relational and reflexive sociology reworks these problems by overcoming rigid oppositions between objectivism and subjectivism, structure and action, individual and society. Practices emerge from the relation between positions in social structures, internalized dispositions, and concrete conditions of action. Concepts such as

habitus, field, capital, and symbolic violence explain how agents incorporate structures and how practices reproduce or transform social relations (Bourdieu, 1989, 2007; Godoi, 2011; Setton, 2002). Relational analysis requires situating practices within the field of relations that constitutes them. Researchers cannot understand cultural practices, educational trajectories, aesthetic preferences, political positions, or professional strategies in isolation. They must relate them to agents' positions, capitals, field disputes, trajectories, and mechanisms of reproduction (Barreiros, 2022; Bourdieu, 1989, 2007; Scartezini, 2011; Setton, 2002). Sociological reflexivity also plays a central role. Since the researcher belongs to the social world under analysis, sociology must examine the conditions of knowledge production, including the researcher's position, categories, assumptions, and academic institutions (Bourdieu *et al.*, 2004).

Thus, a single operation does not define the sociological method. To explain is to identify causes and social conditions; to understand is to reconstruct meanings; to criticize is to reveal domination and naturalization; and to analyze relationally is to situate practices within systems of relations. These operations may combine in the sociological construction of social reality (Bourdieu, 1989; Durkheim, 2007; Marx, 2013; Weber, 1999).

Historicity and the denaturalization of social life

Historicity constitutes a central dimension of the sociological method. To understand social life sociologically, researchers must recognize that institutions, values, practices, classifications, and social forms are not natural, universal, or immutable. They result from historical processes, symbolic disputes, power relations, and mechanisms of legitimation. Sociology denaturalizes social reality: it questions what appears evident, normal, or necessary as a historical construction (Berger & Luckmann, 2004; Elias, 1994; Giddens, 1991). Researchers can understand social reality through externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Individuals produce institutions; these institutions acquire an appearance of objectivity; and later generations internalize them as natural. Denaturalization does not treat social reality as illusory or arbitrary. Rather, it reconstructs how historical forms become self-evident and appear independent of their production. Thus, the idea of social construction should not be reduced to the claim that something "is not natural," nor confused with subjectivist relativism (Berger & Luckmann, 2004; Vera, 2016).

This operation shows that many categories used to interpret social life have a historical character. Family, childhood, youth, work, school, state, market, crime, punishment, sexuality, citizenship, and normality do not correspond to fixed entities. They function as social forms that vary according to contexts, institutions, regimes of power, and cultural systems (Berger & Luckmann, 2004; Foucault, 1987). Historicity also appears in the analysis of solidarity and integration. The distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity shows that cohesion

varies according to social organization and the division of labor. Social order does not remain permanent; it assumes different forms. Modernity produces new modes of integration, while also generating deregulation and social pathology (Durkheim, 1999). Historicity also plays a central role in the analysis of long-term processes, such as modern capitalism, bureaucracy, legal rationalization, secularization, and legitimate domination. These processes do not express natural tendencies of humanity, but historical configurations linked to meanings, institutions, and power. Weber understands Western modernity through rationalization and legal-rational domination (Weber, 1999, 2004).

In the Marxian tradition, historicity grounds the critique of capitalist social forms. Commodity, capital, wage, private property, and division of labor do not constitute natural economic elements, but historically determined forms of production, exploitation, and domination. Capitalism does not represent a universal expression of economic activity, but a historical mode of production marked by contradictions and class conflict. To denaturalize capitalism means revealing how produced social relations appear as natural relations between things or as inevitable economic requirements (Marx, 2011, 2013; Marx & Engels, 2007). Naturalization does not merely result from an error of perception, since social forms themselves may generate it. Under capitalism, market exchange presents individuals as free and equal property owners while concealing structural inequalities. Contractual freedom coexists with exploitation and dependence. Denaturalization reconstructs the mediations that make relations appear natural, just, or inevitable (Marx, 2013). Researchers may also analyze the historicity of institutions and subjectivation through dividing practices, disciplinary apparatuses, and regimes of knowledge-power. Normality, madness, illness, delinquency, and illegality do not function as natural givens, but as historical productions linked to rationalities that classify, separate, hierarchize, and normalize conduct. Prison, discipline, and surveillance organize power and produce subjects in historically situated ways (Foucault, 1982, 1987). Sociology must also denaturalize the market economy. The self-regulating market does not emerge spontaneously or universally, since its formation depends on institutional, political, and legal transformations. Market society treats labor, land, and money as commodities, although these elements do not originate as goods produced for sale. Institutions and regulation sustain the market economy as a historical construction (Polanyi, 2000).

Modernity constitutes a historical formation marked by the disembedding of social relations, institutional reflexivity, and the reorganization of time and space. It does not continue tradition in a linear way, but transforms institutions, expert systems, trust, and experience (Giddens, 1991). Social structures combine cultural schemas and resources; they condition action, but practices reproduce or transform them (Sewell, 1992). Sociological denaturalization also includes classifications.

Categories such as normal and pathological, civilized and uncivilized, legitimate and illegitimate, masculine and feminine, national and foreign, cultured and uncultured do not merely describe reality in neutral terms. They produce social order by defining belonging, authorizing interventions, distributing recognition, and legitimizing inequalities (Bourdieu, 1989; Durkheim & Mauss, 1981; Foucault, 1987).

Therefore, to historicize social life means rejecting explanations that transform institutions, inequalities, and practices into natural facts. Family, school, state, market, work, prison, sexuality, religion, science, and law constitute historical forms of collective organization. Historicity does not operate as a complement to the sociological method, but as one of its conditions: without it, sociology reproduces common sense; with it, social life becomes process, construction, dispute, and transformation.

Objectivity, neutrality, and reflexivity

The discussion of objectivity, neutrality, and reflexivity is central to the sociological method because researchers study a reality of practices, meanings, institutions, values, conflicts, and historical relations in which they themselves participate. Sociology therefore faces a methodological tension: how can researchers produce rigorous knowledge without ignoring the socially situated character of knowledge itself? (Bourdieu, 1989; Mannheim, 1968; Weber, 2001). Sociologists should not understand objectivity as the absence of values, interests, or assumptions. Socially located subjects produce knowledge through institutional categories, intellectual traditions, and methodological procedures (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Mannheim, 1968; Weber, 2001).

To treat social facts as things means distancing sociology from preconceptions, subjective impressions, and moral judgments. Objectivity therefore depends on procedures that separate scientific analysis from ordinary perceptions of social life (Durkheim, 2007). The issue also requires recognizing that researchers select objects according to values of relevance. Since social reality is infinite, values participate in the choice of the object, problem formulation, and definition of significance. Yet this does not authorize researchers to transform research into normative judgment. Value neutrality consists in distinguishing scientific analysis from practical value judgments (Weber, 2001). It does not mean moral indifference, but the refusal to present personal values as scientific results. Science can clarify causal relations, consequences, means, and meanings attributed to action, but it cannot decide which ultimate values should guide social life (Weber, 2001).

The problem of objectivity expands when scholars recognize thought as socially situated. The sociology of knowledge shifts objectivity from absolute exteriority toward critical awareness of the social conditions of thought. Researchers must recognize that their categories also belong to a historically constituted social world (Mannheim, 1968). The tension between involvement

and detachment is equally decisive. Researchers cannot eliminate their involvement with the world under study, since they participate in relations, affects, values, and conflicts. Yet knowledge requires detachment: the capacity to control emotions, immediate interests, and spontaneous position taking. Sociological objectivity depends not on eliminating social and affective implications, but on controlling them methodologically (Elias, 1956, 1998).

Reflexivity requires researchers to objectify both the research object and their own position in social and scientific space. This involves analyzing intellectual formation, categories of perception, institutional position, academic interests, and power relations that shape scientific production (Bourdieu, 1989, 2003; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Its importance lies in the risk that sociologists may transform their own social categories into universal analytical categories. Apparently, neutral concepts may carry assumptions of class, gender, race, nationality, education, or academic position. Reflexivity therefore extends the break with common sense: researchers must question not only the preconceptions of the agents they study, but also those embodied by the researcher and the scientific field. Its value depends on its use in research, not on a simple declaration of position or identity (Bourdieu *et al.*, 2004; Lynch, 2000).

The claim to value-free sociology may function less as a guarantee of objectivity than as a professional myth that conceals the commitments guiding scientific practice. A reflexive sociology must interrogate both its objects and the conditions of its own production (Gouldner, 1962, 1970). Double hermeneutics adds that researchers interpret a world already interpreted by social agents, while sociological concepts may return to that world and influence practices, institutions, and self-understandings (Giddens, 2003). Similarly, the critique of disinterested knowledge shows that forms of knowledge articulate with specific cognitive interests. Objectivity depends not on denying these interests, but on making them explicit and subjecting them to rational critique (Habermas, 1972).

Objectivity, neutrality, and reflexivity are therefore not equivalent. Objectivity concerns rigorous investigation, conceptual control, coherence, and empirical support. Value neutrality distinguishes scientific analysis from normative prescription. Reflexivity requires examining the social, institutional, and intellectual conditions of scientific practice. The researcher's place in sociological knowledge is socially situated, historically conditioned, and institutionally mediated. Recognizing this does not mean renouncing science, but redefining objectivity as a partial, controlled, and reflexive methodological achievement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article adopts a qualitative and theoretical-bibliographical research design and develops it through a narrative and conceptual review of sociological

literature. Qualitative research suits studies that seek to interpret meanings, concepts, theoretical traditions, and epistemological problems rather than measure variables or test hypotheses statistically (Flick, 2018). In this sense, the article does not analyze a specific empirical case, population, or dataset. Instead, it examines the epistemological and methodological foundations through which sociology produces scientific knowledge about social life.

The study addresses a specific methodological gap: the tendency either to reduce sociological method to technical procedures of data collection or to present classical sociological traditions as isolated and self-contained models of analysis. Against this limitation, the article reconstructs sociological method as a plural and reflexive form of knowledge production, constituted by operations such as objectification, interpretation, critique, historicization, relational analysis, and reflexive control over the conditions of scientific inquiry. Accordingly, the review does not merely summarize sociological authors. It comparatively reconstructs the epistemological operations through which sociology defines its object, relates theory and empirical reality, historicizes social phenomena, and examines the researcher's position in the production of knowledge.

As a theoretical-bibliographical study, the research treats the literature as its primary material of analysis. This procedure follows the understanding of literature review as a research method capable of organizing, comparing, and critically reconstructing a field of knowledge (Snyder, 2019). The review follows a narrative and conceptual orientation rather than a strictly systematic one. It does not seek to exhaust all publications on sociological methodology, but to analyze works that offer theoretical relevance to the research problem and support a comparative reconstruction of different forms of sociological intelligibility.

The article analyzes selected works from authors and theoretical traditions that have played a central role in defining the specificity of sociological knowledge. The corpus includes classical contributions to sociological method, such as Durkheim's formulation of social facts and sociological explanation, Weber's interpretive sociology and reflections on objectivity and value neutrality, Marx's critique of capitalist social forms, and Bourdieu's relational and reflexive sociology (Bourdieu *et al.*, 2004; Durkheim, 2007; Marx, 2013; Weber, 1999, 2001). The article selects the bibliography according to criteria of theoretical relevance, conceptual centrality, disciplinary influence, and pertinence to the research problem, rather than statistical representativeness. Therefore, the selection remains intentional and theoretically oriented.

The article organizes the corpus around four analytical axes: the epistemological break with common sense and the construction of the sociological object; the articulation between theory, empirical reality, and methodological control; historicity and the denaturalization of social

life; and the problems of objectivity, value neutrality, and reflexivity in sociological knowledge. These axes synthesize recurrent methodological problems in sociology and allow comparison among explanatory, interpretive, critical, and relational traditions. They also correspond to the central contribution of the article: to show that sociological method cannot be reduced to a single analytical model, but emerges through different and complementary operations of scientific knowledge production.

The methodological procedure consisted of thematic and conceptual analysis of the selected literature. First, the analysis identified recurring categories, methodological assumptions, epistemological problems, and modes of sociological explanation in the texts. Then, the study grouped these elements into analytical themes and compared them across different theoretical traditions, with attention to convergences, tensions, and complementarities among explanatory, interpretive, critical, and relational approaches. The thematic organization of the material followed the principle that qualitative analysis involves identifying patterns of meaning, organizing them into categories, and interpreting their relevance to the research problem (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The conceptual analysis clarifies how central notions such as social fact, social action, ideology, capital, field, habitus, objectivity, value neutrality, and reflexivity operate within different traditions of sociological thought. This procedure matters because the article examines not only empirical procedures, but also the categories through which sociology constructs its object and produces intelligibility about social life. In this respect, the study follows concept analysis in the social sciences, understood as a methodological effort to clarify, delimit, and compare concepts used in theoretical and empirical inquiry (Sartori, 1984).

The analysis does not treat the selected authors as isolated theoretical systems. Instead, the article interprets their contributions relationally, according to the problems they formulate for sociological knowledge. It analyzes Durkheim's concern with objectification, Weber's focus on meaning and value neutrality, Marx's critique of historically constituted forms of domination, and Bourdieu's reflexive sociology as different yet complementary approaches to the challenge of producing scientific knowledge about a social world in which the researcher also participates (Bourdieu, 1989; Durkheim, 2007; Marx & Engels, 2007; Weber, 2001).

Because this is a theoretical-bibliographical study, the research did not conduct interviews, surveys, statistical procedures, or field observations. The empirical dimension appears indirectly, as a methodological problem discussed by the authors analyzed. Therefore, the article does not test hypotheses through primary data. Instead, it clarifies the conceptual and epistemological operations that make empirical sociological research possible. In this respect, the method follows the view that sociological objects do not simply emerge from reality; researchers

construct them through concepts, problems, evidence, and analytical procedures (Becker, 2007; Bourdieu *et al.*, 2004; Merton, 1968; Weber, 2001).

Finally, the study assumes a reflexive methodological stance. Since researchers produce sociological knowledge within historical, institutional, and social conditions, the analysis recognizes that concepts, classifications, and research problems are never neutral. However, this recognition does not eliminate scientific rigor. Rather, it reinforces the need for conceptual clarification, argumentative coherence, critical comparison, and methodological control (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Elias, 1956; Mannheim, 1968; Weber, 2001).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The theoretical-bibliographical analysis indicates that a single technical procedure does not define the sociological method. Rather, sociology depends on a set of epistemological operations that make scientific knowledge of social life possible. It transforms familiar and apparently self-evident phenomena into objects of systematic investigation through the break with common sense, the construction of the sociological object, the articulation between theory and empirical reality, historicization, and reflexive control over the researcher's position.

The first analytical axis concerns the break with common sense and the construction of the sociological object. Sociological knowledge does not begin with passive description, but with the critical questioning of immediate interpretations. Common sense offers practical explanations, but it often naturalizes social relations, individualizes collective problems, and obscures the institutional, historical, and relational conditions that produce them. Thus, sociology requires an epistemological rupture through which researchers transform ordinary evidence into a scientific problem (Bourdieu *et al.*, 2004; Durkheim, 2007). Social phenomena do not become sociological objects merely because they exist empirically. Themes such as family, work, education, poverty, crime, law, or the state require theoretical delimitation. Researchers construct the object through a problem, concepts, relevant relations, and methodological procedures. Therefore, the object does not coincide with the empirical theme, but results from an analytical operation that reconstructs social reality according to theoretically controlled criteria (Bourdieu *et al.*, 2004; Weber, 2001).

The second axis refers to the relationship between theory, empirical reality, and methodological control. Sociological research cannot reduce itself either to abstract speculation or to the accumulation of data. Theory provides the concepts through which reality becomes intelligible, while empirical materials confront, specify, and test theoretical formulations (Becker, 2007; Merton, 1968; Weber, 2001). This articulation avoids both naïve empiricism and abstract theoreticism. The method therefore requires a controlled movement between concept and evidence,

abstraction and observation, interpretation and empirical grounding (Merton, 1948; Mills, 1982).

The third axis concerns the plurality of sociological analysis. Durkheim emphasizes the objectification of social facts and their explanation through other social phenomena (Durkheim, 2007). Weber focuses on social action, subjective meaning, causal explanation, and ideal types (Weber, 1999, 2001). Marx reveals the historical and conflictual character of capitalist social forms (Marx, 2011, 2013). Bourdieu analyzes practices through habitus, field, capital, and symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1989, 2007). These traditions show that explanation, understanding, critique, and relational analysis do not exclude one another, but constitute different ways of producing sociological intelligibility. The method remains plural, but not arbitrary: it depends on theoretical construction, conceptual rigor, and methodological control.

The fourth axis concerns historicity, denaturalization, objectivity, value neutrality, and reflexivity. Social institutions, classifications, values, and practices emerge historically through social relations, symbolic struggles, institutional arrangements, and power relations (Berger & Luckmann, 2004; Elias, 1994; Foucault, 1987; Giddens, 1991). To denaturalize social life means reconstructing the processes through which institutions and classifications come to appear necessary, legitimate, or self-evident. The market, for instance, depends on political, legal, and institutional transformations (Polanyi, 2000), while capitalist categories such as commodity, wage, private property, and capital constitute historically specific social forms (Marx, 2013).

This historicizing movement remains inseparable from the problem of objectivity. Sociological objectivity cannot mean the absence of values, assumptions, or social location. Rather, it requires methodological control, conceptual clarification, empirical grounding, and reflexive analysis of the conditions under which researchers produce knowledge (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Mannheim, 1968; Weber, 2001). Value neutrality means distinguishing scientific analysis from normative prescription: sociology may analyze values, conflicts, domination, and meanings, but it should not present the researcher's judgments as scientific conclusions. Reflexivity, in turn, requires researchers to examine their categories, assumptions, institutional position, and relation to the scientific field. It does not operate as a subjective confession, but as a methodological procedure aimed at objectifying the conditions of objectification itself (Bourdieu, 2003; Bourdieu *et al.*, 2004; Lynch, 2000). Taken together, these results show that sociology reconstructs social life analytically through concepts, problems, evidence, comparison, interpretation, critique, historicization, and reflexivity. Sociology is explanatory, interpretive, critical, historical, relational, and reflexive. These dimensions do not weaken its scientific character; they constitute the conditions of its rigor. The sociological method thus affirms itself as a rigorous and situated form of knowledge, oriented toward explaining, understanding,

and critically denaturalizing social life.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that sociological method is not merely a set of research techniques, but an epistemological orientation through which sociology transforms social life into an object of scientific knowledge. Sociology becomes possible when researchers reconstruct familiar and apparently self-evident phenomena as analytical problems through the break with common sense, the construction of the sociological object, the articulation between theory and empirical reality, historicization, and reflexive control over their own position.

The analysis showed that sociology's specificity lies in its capacity to denaturalize institutions, classifications, practices, inequalities, and forms of domination by treating them as historically produced realities rather than natural or immutable facts. In this sense, Durkheim, Weber, Marx, and Bourdieu offer distinct but complementary ways of explaining, interpreting, criticizing, and relationally analyzing social life. Finally, the article reinforces that sociological objectivity should not be confused with the absence of perspective. Objectivity constitutes a reflexive and methodologically controlled achievement, grounded in conceptual clarification, empirical confrontation, critical comparison, and the distinction between scientific analysis and normative prescription. Thus, the sociological method affirms itself as a rigorous, situated, historical, and critical form of inquiry.

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