



MORAD DIANI (ed.), *Issues of Methodology in Political Science, History, Law, and Demography* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2022), pp. 504.

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Introduction

Social science research is primarily conducted through detailed observations and the application of transparent methodologies to test hypotheses. Methodology¹ is a process governed by theory and cognitive tools to analyse and understand research problems and establish reliable scientific facts. The second half of the 20th century saw a growth of research methods in the social sciences and humanities, especially in international relations. Most academic institutions around the globe currently include modules on research methods as a fundamental part of their

curricula. The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies is one such institution that has contributed to the study of methods. Its volume, *Issues of Methodology in Political Science, History, Law, and Demography*, edited by Morad Diani, is the third in a series of books on the subject.² This review explores the book's contributions to research in political science, history, and law.

The book's chapters focus on political science and international relations, historical and ethnological studies, and other themes in which various research methods intersect and cross disciplines. The book is not a mere review of research methodologies and tools. Rather, its importance lies in its assessment of different analytical approaches to relevant research questions and of ways in which they may be interpreted, based on the theories presented in various disciplines. Indeed, its contributors recognize that "a methodology is not a one-size-fits-all approach".³

This volume also represents an attempt to enrich the Arabic literature on research methodologies, filling a fundamental gap in this area. The sparse work available on the subject has largely attempted to address it through textbooks that serve students at carrying out undergraduate academic research.⁴

¹ The development of the scientific method is largely attributed to English scientist Roger Bacon (1220-1292), although some argue that Italian scholar Galileo de Galilei (1564-1642) also played a vital role. Later, philosophers Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and René Descartes (1596-1650) also contributed to the formulation of the method. Although there is some disagreement regarding its exact characteristics, most scientists agree that it is characterised by: an empirical approach, observation, questions and hypotheses, experiments, analysis, conclusion, and results that can be repeated.

² ACRPS has previously published the following books: Morad Diani (ed.), *Muqārabāt Falsafiyā wa Ibtimūlūjiyyā* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2022); Morad Diani & Mohsen Bouazizi (eds.), *Manāhij al-Baḥṭh fī al-'Ulūm al-Ijtīmā'iyyā wa-l-Insāniyyā: Muqārabāt Ijtīmā'iyyā* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2022).

³ Azmi Bishara, "Fī Awlawiyyat al-Fahm 'Alā al-Manhaj," *Tabayyun*, vol. 8, no. 30 (Autumn 2019), p. 10.

⁴ See: Abdul Rahman Badawi, *Manāhij al-Baḥṭh al-'Ilmī*, 3rd ed. (Kuwait: Wikalat al-Maṭbū'āt, 1997); Mohammad Abid al-Jabari, *Madkhal fī Falsafat al-'Ulūm*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1994); Mustafa al-Tayr, *Usus al-Baḥṭh al-Ijtīmā'ī* (Beirut: Ma'had al-Inmā' al-'Arabī, 1989); Mohammad Shaya, *Manāhij al-Taḥkīr wa Qawā'id al-Baḥṭh fī al-'Ulūm al-Insāniyyā wa-l-Ijtīmā'iyyā* (Beirut: Al-Mu'assasa al-Jāmi'iyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 2008); Mahmoud Zidan, *Al-Istiqrā' wa-l-Manhaj al-'Ilmī* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Jāmi'a al-'Arabiyya, 1966).

Theoretical vs Methodological Approaches in Political Science

In his chapter, Abdelwahab El-Affendi refers to what he calls the “crisis of modern political science”: the inability of the field’s theoretical framework to adapt to major political shifts or to reconcile the discipline’s aspirations as a science with the need for a comprehensive approach to political affairs. He also warns that contests over methodological issues could transform into political disputes, as the politicization of those debates, along with political polarization, have led to exposing the formerly implicit ideological orientations.⁵

Khalil al-Anani’s chapter examines how political science became a “teleological” science incorporating the relationship between power and knowledge, through an examination of the impact of ideology on the cognitive and methodological structures of political science. Anani argues that the relationship between political science and ideology is determined by their respective epistemological natures. He explores this relationship through different patterns of interaction: hierarchy, reciprocity, dominance, and conflict. Anani concludes that while it is hard to disentangle biases in political science, developing research methodologies that transcend social and cultural differences between the global north and south could help ameliorate bias and its consequences for scientific reliability.⁶

Hassan al-Haj Ali focuses on the methodological contributions of in-depth sequence analysis, including mechanisms for tracking causality and how independent variables can affect dependent variables. This process can result in specific outputs in research focused on a single case or can be used as a mechanism to test a specific theory or generate a new one.⁷

Mohammad al-Kharrat examines how mechanisms of social control are imposed through law. He argues that historical anthropology is an important method for dismantling social contradictions, drawing evidence from a study of Tunisian, Lebanese, and Jordanian laws, especially regarding “honour killings” as a phenomenon that reveals the persistence of patriarchal mentalities and the ability of inherited norms and customs to resist change.⁸

International Relations: Methodologies of Causality, the Principle of Parsimony, and Rational Choice

Sidahmed Goudjili’s chapter addresses the principle of parsimony and the lack of its use in Arab methodological and theoretical social science. He examines this principle as a methodology that urges researchers to refrain from overstating or adding superfluous theoretical elements (hypotheses or variables) in their research while attempting to explain as many phenomena as possible. Goudjili bases his argument on the assumption that there is a positive correlation between methodology and the principle of parsimony, meaning that excessive use of, and preoccupation with, methodologies lead to research containing a large number of variables. He argues that this can turn researchers into victims of “methodolatry”.⁹

⁵ Abdelwahab El-Affendi, “An al-Siyāsa wa-l-Siyāsī wa-l-Nazariyya: Ta’amulāt fī al-Sijāl bayn al-Manhaj wa-l-Nazariyya fī Wazīfat al-‘Ulūm al-Siyāsiyya,” in: Morad Diani (ed.), *Ba’d Qadāyā al-Manhaj fī ‘Ulūm al-Siyāsa wa-l-Tārīkh wa-l-Qānūn wa-l-Dīmughrāfiyā* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2022), p. 42.

⁶ Khalil al-Anani, “Ma’zaq ‘Ilm al-Siyāsa bayn al-Idiyulūjī wa-l-Ma’rifī,” in: Diani (ed.), *Ba’d Qadāyā al-Manhaj*, p. 130.

⁷ Hassan al-Haj Ali Ahmed, “Al-Qudra ‘alā al-Istidlāl: Ishāmāt al-Taḥlīl al-Tatabu’ī fī Buḥūth Dirāsāt al-Ḥāla,” in: Diani (ed.), *Ba’d Qadāyā al-Manhaj*, p. 214.

⁸ Mohammad al-Kharrat, “Al-Tashrī‘ al-Qānūnī wa-l-Qiyām: Musāhama fī Anthrubulūjīya al-Qānūn min Khilāl Amthila min al-Qawanīn al-Tūnisīyya wa-l-Urduniyya,” in: Diani (ed.), *Ba’d Qadāyā al-Manhaj*, p. 279.

⁹ Sidahmed Goudjili, “Ma Qalla wa Dalla: Mabda’ al-Shuḥ wa-l-Naz’a al-Mīthūdiyya fī al-Buḥūth al-Siyāsiyya,” in: Diani (ed.), *Ba’d Qadāyā al-Manhaj*, p. 64.

For his part, Mohammed Hemchi discusses the notion of causality in IR as an epistemological question. He argues that the issue of causality arose in IR as a discipline in the 1970s, as a result of behaviouralism. Hemchi seeks to bring the complexity theory into discussions about this problem while drawing attention to the basic lessons that can be extracted to rethink David Hume's traditional conceptions of causation.¹⁰

Marwa Hamid al-Badri argues that if rational choice theory reduces decision-making to a single rational principle – that of maximizing benefits and minimizing costs – then what happens, in reality, is a combination of mental reason and psychological perception. She argues that the process of selection in its descriptive mental sense is subject to the psychological characteristics of the decision-maker along with their rational calculations.¹¹

Research Methodologies in the Discipline of History

In his chapter, Ali Saleh Moula examines the imperative to re-think methodologies in historical writing in the Arab world.¹² Moula poses important questions about obstacles to Arabic historical writing, based on inter-disciplinary principles and with a focus on the New History school, the Annales school, and other methodological approaches used in Arab history.

Similarly, Abdelhamid Hénia presents drivers to localizing methodologies of history writing, aiming to better understand and analyse Arab societies. In his view, such a methodology could help shift research away from Western ethnocentric viewpoints, which portray non-Western societies as static and different in essence, and therefore isolated from major socio-political and historical formations. Hénia does not reject Western knowledge about our societies in general, but rather criticizes research that provides a skewed picture of our reality.¹³

Ibrahim El Kadri Boutchich argues that this symbolic interpretation represents a turning point in the study of history and has remained dominant in hermeneutical and linguistic studies, as well as in anthropological and ethnographic research, more than the work of the Annales and New History schools in the West. Boutchich argues that Arab research in this field has remained the preserve of literary studies and semiosis.¹⁴ He concludes that the symbolic interpretation approach seeks to establish a dialectical relationship between the mind and heritage to better understand the meanings of texts.

Zouhair Soukah considers memory studies as a necessity for Arab academia. He focuses on elements such as memory and culture, memory and ideology, digital memory, memory of the media, and memory and authority, as topics that could contribute to elaborating this discipline in the Arab world.¹⁵

Tareq Madani investigates methods to estimate the population size of Islamic cities throughout history. He proposes the use of demographic theory in conjunction with methods such as reading contemporary

¹⁰ Mohammed Hemchi, "Al-Sababiyya ka Mushkila fi Haql al-'Ilāqāt al-Duwaliyya: Mā al-ladhī Yumkin Ta'allumuh min 'Ilm al-Ta'aqqud?," in: Diani (ed.), *Ba'ḍ Qaḍāyā al-Manhaj*, p. 136.

¹¹ Marwa Hamid al-Badri, "Nazariyyat al-Ikhtiyār al-'Aqlānī wa Badā' iluhā fi al-Siyāsa al-Khārijīyya wa-l-'Ilāqāt al-Duwaliyya," in: Diani (ed.), *Ba'ḍ Qaḍāyā al-Manhaj*, p. 207.

¹² Ali Saleh Moula, "Jiogrāfiyyat al-Haql al-Tārīkhī fi Dū' Taqāṭu' al-Ikhtisāṣāt: Muhāwala fi 'Ādat Tashkīl al-Mafhūm," in: Diani (ed.), *Ba'ḍ Qaḍāyā al-Manhaj*, p. 285.

¹³ Abdelhamid Hénia, "Al-Tajdīd fi al-Kitāba al-Tārīkhīyya 'Abr Manhaj 'Ahlanat' al-Ma'rifa," in: Diani (ed.), *Ba'ḍ Qaḍāyā al-Manhaj*, p. 250.

¹⁴ Ibrahim El Kadri Boutchich, "Manhaj al-Ta'wīl al-Ramzī Liqirā'at al-Tārīkh: Naḥwa Ishrāk Qārī' al-Naṣṣ fi Intāj Dalālātih: Tashkīṣ Nazarī wa Tatbīqī," in: Diani (ed.), *Ba'ḍ Qaḍāyā al-Manhaj*, pp. 360-361.

¹⁵ Zouhair Soukah, "Haql Dirāsāt al-Dhākira fi al-'Ulūm al-Insāniyya wa-l-Ijtīmā'iyya: Huḍūr Gharbī wa Quṣūr 'Arabī," in: Diani (ed.), *Ba'ḍ Qaḍāyā al-Manhaj*, pp. 241-242.

texts and extrapolating statistical data, and mathematical deductions relating to the scale of urban areas and the number of public facilities, to ascertain population dynamics.¹⁶

Conclusion

Methodological issues in the humanities and social sciences have long been the subject of heated debate, focusing on the difficulty of determining which methodology is the most appropriate to understand and interpret a given research question. *Issues of Methodology* fills an important gap in this debate, particularly in the Arab context. The authors have created a dialogue on the topic through critical engagement with the theories that make up methodological approaches in these domains, and through testing their credibility as tools for understanding the Arab region.

This dialogue can be summarized through the central question of the book: Should researchers continue to work with theories as pre-packaged principles to guide the research process? Or are other approaches and methodologies needed that take into account two structural factors: the evolution of methodology and theory in political science, international relations, law and anthropology; and the unique nature of the Arab world, and its regional and international conditions? If the latter is true, it requires a revision of available methodologies and theoretical approaches.

¹⁶ Tareq Madani, "al-Mu'arrikh wa-l-Muqārabāt al-Kammiyya: Dirāsāt Dīmūghrāfiyya li-Ba'd al-Ḥawādir al-Islāmiyya: 'Arḍ Uṭrūḥāt wa Ithārat Tasā'ulāt," in: Diani (ed.), *Ba'd Qaḍāyā al-Manhaj*, p. 488.

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