

# Global Journal of Sociology: Current Issues



Volume 9, Issue 1, (2019) 001-005

[www.gisoc.eu](http://www.gisoc.eu)

## Influence of historical & social events on knowledge & knowledge production: A focus on some selected social theorists

**Abdullahi Muhammad Maigari\***, Department of Sociology, Al-Qalam University, Katsina PMB 2137, Nigeria  
**Ibrahim Arafat**, Department of Sociology, Gombe State University, Gombe PMB 2137, Nigeria

### Suggested Citation:

Maigari, A. M. & Arafat, I. (2019). Influence of historical & social events on knowledge & knowledge production: A focus on some selected social theorists. *Global Journal of Sociology: Current Issues*. 9(1), 001–005.  
<https://doi.org/10.18844/gjs.v9i1.3470>

Received from December 20, 2018; revised from March 26, 2019; accepted from April 01, 2019.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Mustafa Gunduz, Cukurova University, Turkey.

©2019 United World Center of Research Innovation and Publication. All rights reserved.

### Abstract

This article examines the relationship between knowledge produced by social theorists and the social events that occurred before and during their lifetime. The aim of the paper is to identify the social events and how they shaped the thoughts and knowledge produced by the selected theorists. This was approached through a review of secondary literature and narrative style to analyse the sourced materials. The paper examined three social theorists, philosophers or thinkers: Ibn Khaldun, Hegel and Comte. The study found that the knowledge produced by these theorists have traversed beyond disciplines classified as social sciences. It shows that the knowledge produced is intertwined with what happened before and during the time they lived which is reflected in their intellectual works. The paper submits that knowledge cannot be separated from the social reality of its producer. Therefore, the paper concludes that social theorists examined thought and wrote based on the social realities they encountered.

**Keywords:** Historical event, influence, social theorists, knowledge production.

---

\* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Abdullahi Muhammad Maigari**, Department of Sociology, Al-Qalam University, Katsina PMB 2137, Nigeria. E-mail address: [kariyoma2@yahoo.com](mailto:kariyoma2@yahoo.com) / Tel.: +23 48039500105

## 1. Introduction

Existing events have a great deal of influence on the direction of thoughts and knowledge produced by intellectuals. Put differently, the historical events and the prevailing philosophical ideas of an era shapes the thoughts and writings of social thinkers on one hand and the close-knit relationship between knowledge and knowledge production with history on the other. Hegel (1911) advanced that, any human society and all human activities, such as science, art or philosophy, are defined by their history. So, that their essence can be sought only through understanding that. The history of any such human endeavour, moreover, is not only built upon but also reacts against what has gone before. That is the source of Hegel's famous dialectic teaching usually summed up as a thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Hegel's famous aphorism, philosophy is the history of philosophy (Hegel, 1911). A student of Hegel, Marx, in materialist doctrine stated that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and therefore, changed men are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing (Abraham & Morgan, 1985).

The aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between social events and the knowledge produced by social theorists. Specifically, the paper seeks to identify the events and examine how they shaped the knowledge produced by Ibn Khaldun, Hegel and Auguste Comte. These theorists produced vast knowledge in social theory generally and Sociology in particular. This is approached through a qualitative method and sourced for review and analysis.

### IBN KHALDUN

Abu Zayd Abdel Rahman Ibn Khaldun, a fourteenth-century Arab Muslim philosopher born in Tunis, North Africa, on May 27, 1332, and died in 1406. The life and writings of Ibn Khaldun were intricately interwoven with the great political upheaval and military power of his times. In *Al-Muqaddimah*, the goal of Ibn Khaldun was to explain the historical processes that led to the rise and fall of civilisations. The work examined the pattern of recurring conflicts between tough nomadic desert tribes and sedentary-type societies with their love of luxuries and pleasure (Cheddadi, 2000). Therefore, Ibn Khaldun could be described as a veritable fountain of knowledge because he was able to provide coherent socio-historical accounts of civilisations in the Arabian Peninsula.

Therefore, Ibn Khaldun observed that advanced civilisations which were developed in densely settled communities are accompanied by a more centralised political authority system. As he observed, the political system was characterised by the gradual erosion of social cohesion within the population. As a result, such societies become vulnerable to conquest by tough and highly disciplined nomadic peoples from the unsettled desert. Eventually, however, the hardy conquerors succumbed to the temptations of the soft and refined lifestyle of the people they had conquered, and therefore, the cycle eventually repeats itself.

It could be deduced from the above that, this led to the development of a cyclical theory of Ibn Khaldun. The cyclical theory was based on Ibn Khaldun's observations of social trends in the Arabian Desert. The main goal of Ibn Khaldun was to develop a general model of the dynamics of society and the process of large-scale social change. He was able to capture the historical, military and political metamorphoses before and during his lifetime. These were clear in his explanations and analysis of the tussle between the nomadic tribes of the desert on one and the rise and fall of civilisations in the Arabian Peninsula at that time. These were the main themes in virtually all the works of Ibn Khaldun. He spent a great deal of his intellectual life writing and proffering solutions for social disorder. However, the influence and works of Ibn Khaldun have less currency in social theory and sociology partly because of the growing dominance of Western Europe over the Arab world in succeeding centuries (Cheddadi, 2000). The foregoing discourse revealed that thoughts of Ibn Khaldun shaped but the warfare that was prevalent between different Arabian tribes. The knowledge he produced was designed to address the communal violence and the transient nature of civilisations which

characterised the periods. Similarly, it showed a relationship between social events and the knowledge produced by a social theorist.

## HEGEL

Hegel was born in the city of Stuttgart, Germany on August 27, 1770, to Georg Ludwig and Maria Magdalena Louisa Hegel (Strathern, 1997). Like Ibn Khaldun, Hegel lived during a time of great tumult and uproar in Germany and Europe in general. Major upheavals such as the French Revolution, the Romantic Movement and the Industrial Revolution all combined to transformed Europe more than any other period since the Renaissance period. Politically, economically, socially and culturally charged era in Europe has tremendously shaped Hegel's worldview and his writings. Additionally, a revolutionary figure, Napoleon was born in 1769, only one year before Hegel. It has been observed that Napoleon had a momentous impact on Hegel's life, thoughts and knowledge he produced particularly dialectics.

Hegel, like other intellectual figures of his time, he revered Napoleon as the embodiment of the *Weltgeist* (world spirit) who came to change the world. He believed in Napoleon's ultimate goal of liberty through the common people overthrowing a repressive aristocracy (Dyde, 2005). Hegel observed that changing times seemed to mean that even the most fundamental institutions, such as political systems, cultural institutions and even philosophies could be overthrown. Just as Napoleon, who sought to conquer the world with his army, Hegel sought to master it with his mind (Dyde, 2005).

Additionally, Hegel lived in a time where revolution and change were affecting Europe and its culture. This prompted him to take part in this revolutionary spirit in his own way, through his philosophical writings. Indeed, one of the most important parts of Hegel's revolutionary philosophy was the incorporation of history into philosophical thought. In fact, Hegel's philosophy was vast it essentially encompassed history. It could further be deduced that Hegel's philosophy was so dense and open to multiple criticisms (Strathern, 1997). From the foregoing discourse, different social unrest and chaos that occurred in Europe and the reigning philosophical thought as at that time (Napoleon's philosophy) served as his point of departure. The knowledge produced by Hegel reflected the era he lived and the dominant intellectual thoughts which later influenced the ideas and thoughts of Karl Marx. The knowledge produced by Hegel was comprehensive and depth because his thought was not only shaped by social events and political upheavals but in addition, philosophical currents that permeated Europe at that time. It could be inferred that there is a link between dominant political thoughts, social, economic and what the social theorists produced in reaction to the social currents.

## COMTE

Another social theorist and philosopher though not a contemporary of Ibn Khaldun and Hegel is Auguste Comte. The French Sociologist and Philosopher was born on January 19, 1798, in the Southern France city of Montpellier and died on September 5, 1857 (Fletcher, 2000). He was a product of the Enlightenment era, a tradition of philosophers of the progress of the late 18th century Europe. Comte was a thinker in the tradition of Bonald and de Maistre, a resolute antagonist of the individualistic approach to human society that had predominated throughout the eighteenth century. Comte lived in the aftermath of the French Revolution which disrupted the family structure and created social instability in the entire society. Comte was disturbed and distressed by the disorder of his time and by the material and cultural poverty of the people. These social problems and instability prompted him to sort for a science that would restore the French society back to its normal state

Therefore, it could be deduced from the foregoing discourse that Comte was appalled by the breakdown of the social order in France and this necessitated him to seek for the reconstruction of a moral community. In this regard, it could be observed that the entire writings of Comte reflected his fundamental and lifelong preoccupation on how to replace disorder by order, how to accomplish the total reconstruction of society.

Similarly, he considered the French Revolution as the crucial turning point in the history of humanity. The old order had gone which was totally inadequate for the new trends and conditions of scientific knowledge and industrialisation. He attempted to restore French society to the state of equilibrium, stability and harmony. Therefore, the knowledge he produced particularly in Sociology, was aimed at introducing a new science of society that could address complex social disruptions, chaos and instability caused by the French Revolution and industrialisation.

Similarly, it could be deduced that Comte was strongly influenced by his Catholic background and was able to develop a considerable body of knowledge and enjoyed currency in France, as well as in a number of other countries in Europe at that time. The discourse on Comte has depicted the influence of the social environment and its effect on the thoughts of social theorists. More than Ibn Khaldun and Hegel, the thoughts of Comte was shaped and influenced by his religious affiliation, the dominant philosophy, social upheavals and political events in France. These were prevalent in the works of Comte where he depicted three stages of society: theological, metaphysical and scientific. Also, Comte aimed was to explain the trajectory of changes and how society could be a return to homeostasis.

## 2. Discussion and conclusion

Every knowledge in human history is to a large extent a product of the dominant social events, religious belief and ideas. This explains an intricate relationship between knowledge, knowledge produced, time and place where theorist lived. It could be observed that with the exception of Ibn Khaldun among the theorists discussed in this paper, the ideas and knowledge produced by the other two were greatly shaped and influenced by the Enlightenment period. It was a period beleaguered by social turmoil, turbulent social unrests and revolution, intellectual developments and change in philosophical thoughts and scientific breakthrough.

The paper also revealed that during the Enlightenment Period, some ideas and theories, as well as paradigm, related to social life, were discarded and replaced with scientific-based evidence after rigorous analysis and deductions. Prominent theorists associated with the enlightenment period were the French philosophers Charles Montesquieu (1689–1755) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) (Davis, 1996), which were influenced by two intellectual currents; 17th-century philosophy and science. Seventeenth-century philosophy was associated with the work of Rene Descartes, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke (Davis, 1996). The emphasis was on producing grand and very abstract systems of ideas that made of rational sense. The later theorists associated with the Enlightenment period made an effort to derive their ideas from the real world and to test them empirically. In other words, they tried to combine empirical research with reason. The above discourse revealed that historical currents of a particular period have in no small-scale measure had profound impacts on and influenced the thoughts, ideas and knowledge produced by social theorists that lived in such period. Similarly, it is also evident that the knowledge produced by Ibn Khaldun was shaped by the contemporary Arabian society before and during his lifetime. The social upheavals that characterised the rise and fall of kingdoms and empires, the breakdown of social institutions particularly the role of Asabiya and Umran in the Arabian society was focused on the knowledge he produced. In sum, it could be concluded that one cannot think outside his reality, that is, the events which happened before and during the lifetime of theorists have direct influence or relationship with the body of knowledge they produced. The paper concludes that knowledge production and social events are intricately connected in social theory and sociology particularly.

## References

- Abraham, F. & Morgan, J. (1985). *Sociological thought*. Delhi, India: Macmillan India Ltd.
- Cheddadi, A. (2000). Ibn Khaldun. *Quarterly Review of Comparative Education*. UNESCO, (XXIV).
- Davis, N. (1996). *Europe, a history*. Oxford, UK: OUP.

Maigari, A. M. & Arafat, I. (2019). Influence of historical & social events on knowledge & knowledge production: A focus on some selected social theorists. *Global Journal of Sociology: Current Issues*. 9(1), 001–005. <https://doi.org/10.18844/gjs.v9i1.3470>

Delancy, T. (2005). *Contemporary social theory*. New Delhi, India: Pearson.

Dyde, S. W. (2005). *Hegel, philosophy of right*, translated. Mineola, New York: Dover.

Fletcher, R. (2000). *The making of sociology*. Jaipur and Delhi, India: Rawat Publications.

Hegel, G. W. F. (1911). *Philosophy of history*..

Strathern, P. (1997). *Hegel in 90 minutes*. Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee.