

SOCI301/321

FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIAL THOUGHT

Session 1 – THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGY: THE HISTORICAL, SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL CONTEXTS

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2014/2015 – 2016/2017

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Session Overview

- **Introduction:** This session describes pre-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries socioeconomic and political conditions in Europe and identifies the major factors that led to the emergence of sociology as a scientific study of society
- **Goals and Objectives:** By the end of this session you should be able to:
 - describe the socio-economic and political conditions in Europe before the 18th and 19th centuries
 - describe the social change or the great social transformations that Europe experienced in the 18th and 19th centuries that necessitated the scientific study of society
 - Identify and explain the major factors that account for the development of sociology.

Session outline

Two topics are discussed in this session. They are:

- Description of socio-economic and political conditions in Europe before the 18th and 19th centuries
- The major factors that account for the emergence of sociology

Reading list

- ALLAN K. (2005) *EXPLORATIONS IN CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY: SEEING THE SOCIAL WORLD*, LONDON: PIN FORGE PRESS
- ASHLEY D. AND D. M. ORENSTEIN (2001) *SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY: THE CLASSICAL STATEMENTS*, BOSTON: ALYN AND BACON.
- DZORGBO, D-B. S. (2013) *SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY: CLASSICAL IDEAS AND THEIR APPLICATION IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT*, ACCRA: WOELI PUBLISHING SERVICES
- DZORGBO D-B. S. (2009) *SOCIOLOGY: FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIAL THOUGHT*: LEGON-ACCRA: CENTER FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF GHANA.
- RITZER G. (2008) *SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY*, BOSTON: MCGRAW HILL
- RITZER G. & DOUGLAS J. GOODMAN, (2004) *CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY*, BOSTON: MCGRAW HILL

Topic One:

Europe before the 18th and 19th Centuries

European societies before the 18th and 19th centuries were largely:

- Agrarian and rural like many parts of Africa before colonialism and even today
- Most people on Europe at the time had their worldview was dominated by traditional, mythical, religious, and superstitious explanations.
- Most Europeans lived in relatively small and isolated communities dominated by kinship and extended relations; most were illiterates
- The Church, Kings and feudal lords or the nobility occupied high positions/statuses in society and ordinary people called serfs worked on the lands for them
- There was little science and technology in society; societies were largely rural and agrarian with little cottage industries

Topic One:

Europe before the 18th and 19th Centuries ;

- Communities were relatively homogenous and stable. There was face-to-face interactions, members were familiar to each other and society was relatively stable
- Although there was relatively peace these societies were not just as the majority the serfs were exploited by those highly placed in society
- There were social distinctions and the wealth that existed were in the hands of the few: feudal lords, the monarchy and clergy or the church who preached that such unjust social arrangements were sanctioned by God and the majority: the peasants or serfs should accept these arrangements and not question them
- Even though these societies were relatively harmonious and peaceful because the social order was sanctioned by religion and tradition.
- These harmonious societies were to be subject to cataclysmic social change the scale of which Europeans had never experienced before and so set in attempts to understand scientifically this change and future direction of society

Topic Two

Factors that account for the emergence of sociology

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the major European societies that experienced the social change were France, Germany and Britain. The major factors we can identify as precipitating the study of society scientifically (i.e. sociologically) are:

1. The French Political Revolution of 1789
2. The Growth of Science and Technology
3. The Industrial Revolution and Urbanization
4. Growth of Cities and Social Problems
5. The Rise of Socialist Ideas
6. The Decline of Religion
7. The Enlightenment Ideas
8. Colonialism and Europeans Exposure to other Peoples and Cultures

Factors that account for the emergence of sociology

THE FRENCH POLITICAL REVOLUTION

- The French Political Revolution brought about civil disobedience that resulted in the destruction of the French monarchy
- It questioned and challenged the existing social order and authority
- Resulted in social anarchy, instability for about 10 years onwards
- The positive effects were: the proclamation of equality and freedom for all French people, the development of democratic egalitarian, republican and humanistic ideas
- The negative effects of social disorder and anarchy worried social philosophers such as Auguste Comte.
- He thus called for a new discipline he called sociology to scientifically study society to understand its nature and dynamism in order to re-establish social order and stability

Revolution



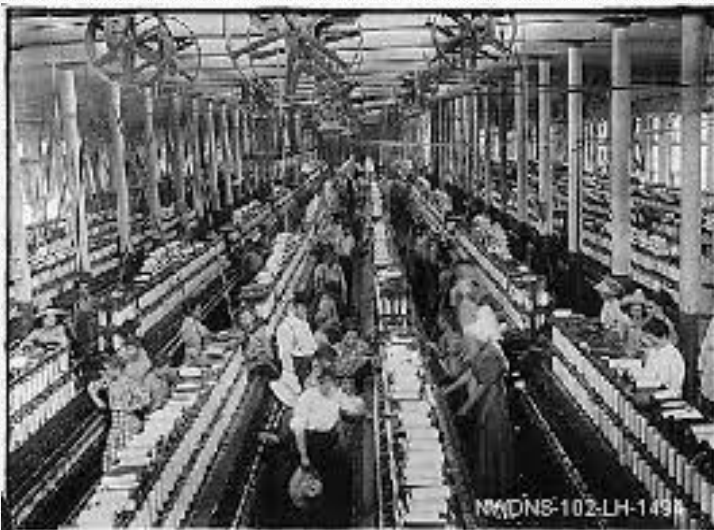
Factors that account for the emergence of sociology (;Coÿt'd)

The Growth of Science and Technology

- Long before Europeans experienced this 18th and 19th centuries changes, a period of renaissance and enlightenment from roughly 1400-1700 saw Europeans having new ideas emerging about these societies to replace religious ones.
- The culminating point of this development is the celebration of the reasoning powers or capacities of human beings and their ability to understand nature (rather than worshipping it)
- This led to the emergence of the natural sciences (Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry and Biology Astronomy)
- The practical achievements in these sciences is technology and the revelations of the wonders of natures and this also led to the idea that society could also be studied scientifically and not continuously be explained in religious and superstitious manner.
- Social philosophers at this time were of the view that if natural sciences could explain the physical environment and nature so well and create technologies which were benefitting society so much, a science of society could also offer understanding of society and generate scientific knowledge that could benefit society as well

Factors that contributed to the emergence of sociology Industrial Revolution and Urbanization

- With the development of science and technology industries began to be set by private individuals thereby ushering Europe into an industrial revolution, the first time in the entire human history
- The emergence of industries in towns led to towns growing into cities and thus triggering massive movement of people from villages and rural areas to cities in search of jobs: urbanization



Factors that contributed for the emergence of sociology; Coût'è

The Growth of Cities and Social Problems

The effects of industrialization and urbanization were:

- People moved from face-to-face and closed-knit simple, agricultural, traditional communities to complex, industrial and modern anonymous urban centres, creating problems of isolation, alienation and destitution
- In the emerging urban centers, traditional norms and values could no longer be counted on for social security and protection
- Traditional family and kinship systems began to crumble; people had to be organized on large-scale to work in with people from different background who were unrelated in any way except through industrial work
- Industrialists exploited the workers so much and subjected them to long working hours in working extreme and unsafe working environments without any protection as it is the case in many countries today, so there were many industrial accidents
- Industrial workers were exploited through low wages, they subject to chronic dismissals as trade unions and minimum wages were forbidden
- Urbanization also created many social problems and vices: unemployment, overcrowding, prostitution, armed robbery, slums, alcoholism, mental depression and suicide
- Industries also polluted the environment and the air; all these issues attracted the attention of serious minded social analysts and thus constituted materials for sociological analyses and study. They helped broaden the subject matter of the emerging sociology

Factors that contributed for the emergence of Sociology; Coût'è

The Rise of Socialist Ideas

- Because of the inherent social problems or the evils associated with the emerging capitalist industrial production system, some social philosophers like Karl Marx sought through his writings to stir up workers' rebellion or effective revolt to overthrow the capitalism
- Capitalism is the system of production that came with the industrial revolution. In this system, it is not states or governments but individuals (the private sector as we call it today) who owned the factories and the important means of production: the banks, the machines, etc. Marx did not like capitalism because it exploited and dehumanized the factory workers and created classes in society: the few rich (who owned property and great wealth) and the poor (who owned very little or nothing except their labour power). Marx sought capitalism's destruction and worked for its replacement with socialism
- Socialism is the opposite of capitalism; it means that all economic activities (planning, production and distribution) in society should be or is undertaken by the state so that everybody becomes state employee. Socialism would end the exploitation and dehumanization of the many by the few. In other words, private ownership of property or wealth would cease and there would be no class distinctions in society.
- Many of these ideas appealed to some of the philosophers of the day.
- The Rise of socialist ideas also shaped how sociologists think about societal arrangements and they constructed theories and concepts to explicate the nature and functioning of capitalist societies and how better socialist or human-centered societies could be constructed.

Factors that contributed to the emergence of sociology

The Decline of Religion

- As noted the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries were a period of remarkable transformation of Europe as new ideas about nature, the universe and society were generated that went contrary to the long established teachings of the church.
- In the period enlightenment and with the growth of science, many people started questioning the religious leaders and their ideas and their claim that Kings and Queens had the divine right to rule
- Also there was rebellion of Martin Luther against the Catholic Church and denunciation of some of its doctrines and practices all these factors combined to undermine the influence of religion in the affairs of humans

Factors that contributed for the emergence of sociology

The Enlightenment Ideas

- The Enlightenment period was the age of reason, a time when many people believed that the reasoning capacities and powers of humans (and not blind religious explanations) should be used to understand the nature and human conditions
- As Enlightenment ideas and science were coming of age, religious ideas were relegated to the background and thus losing much of their explanatory powers
- Enlightenment philosophers and their ideas encouraged reflections on societies, social institutions, social practices. Many people asked questions about society and subjected it to critical analysis.
- During the enlightenment period, people begun to question the right of the monarchs and the priest in the society
- In a way, much of the social-ills, anarchy and instability that pervaded the French and other European societies at the time that led to the call for scientific study of society were the result of the Enlightenment ideas . No wonder some social philosophers of the day held their counterparts as responsible for this anarchy and sought through their work (counter-enlightenment philosophies) to return their societies to the good old days when religion was dominant and there was social order and peace
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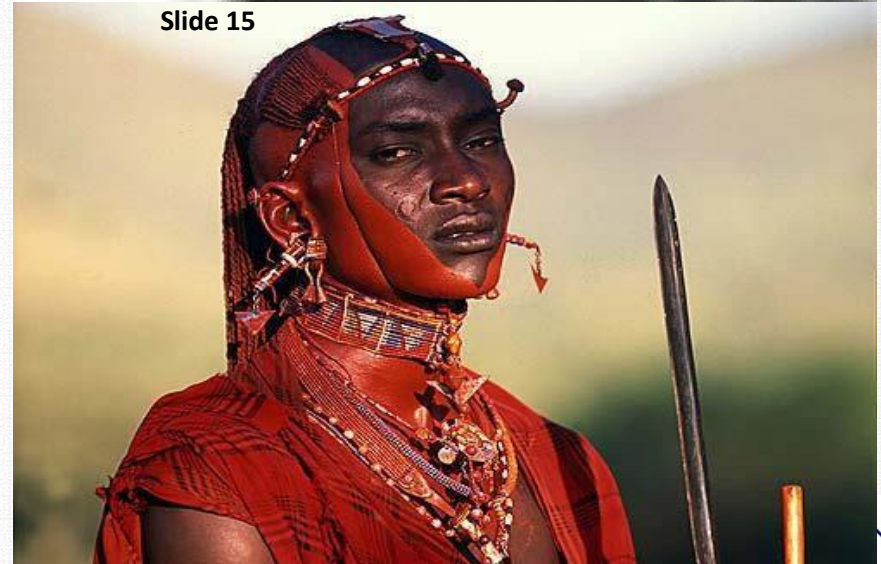
Factors that added to the emergence of sociology; Colonialism

Colonialism and Exposure to other Peoples and Cultures

- The discovery of other continents and different peoples and cultures by Europeans challenged some social philosophers and emerging social scientists (sociologists and anthropologists) and missionaries/evangelists to study the human societies in general and in comparative terms thus further broadening the scope, concepts and theories of sociology.



Slide 15



Summary of the Session

In this session we learnt about how Europeans lived before the 18th and 19th centuries and how their world changed dramatically and the consequences thereof necessitated the development of sociology. More specifically the following factors are often isolated and discussed as leading the development and consolidation of the sociology. They are

1. The French Political Revolution of 1789
2. The Growth of Science and Technology
3. The Industrial Revolution and Urbanization
4. Growth of Cities and Social Problems
5. The Rise of Socialist Ideas
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In the next session, we consider what the founders of sociology said that have constituted the foundational ideas of sociology as a scientific discipline of society