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## CRISIS WITHIN SOCIAL THEORY AND THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AS A DISCIPLINE

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### **Abstract**

*The study attempt to critically examine the crisis with in the social theory and the future development of sociology as a discipline, it is very imperative to define the concepts of "social theories " and " crisis "so as to form the basis of research work.*

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***Keywords:*** *Crisis, Social theories and Sociology*

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### **Introduction**

The concept crisis has no single acceptable definition, the definition of the concept depends on the individual perception and understanding of what the concept really means, crisis therefore can simply mean a period of predicaments and consequences that affects not only individuals but organizations as well, the predicaments sometimes poses danger or brings progress, development and opportunity to the affected parties. The positive aspect of crisis may come in form of a revolution that aimed at correcting abnormalities for progress and development to take place.

Therefore according to Elliot (2008) defines contemporary social theory as an analytical framework or paradigm used to examine social phenomena,

according to Elliot, contemporary social theories encompasses ideas about how societies changes and develop about methods of explaining social behavior James and Gilliland (2001) defines crisis as a perception or experience of an event or situation, as an intolerable difficulty that exceeds the person's current resource and coping mechanisms.

Therefore, the crisis in contemporary social theory is not a new thing, is as old as the crisis in the discipline itself. The discipline "sociology" was founded by philosophers and scholars who were mostly scientist and engineers who wanted to use their background knowledge to develop methods of research to be used in conducting research in sociology, the moves that was rejected on the grounds that sociology study objects that are not similar with the objects being studied by the natural sciences, for them to use the methods that were developed and used by the natural sciences in conducting research in sociology it might end up not giving desirable results.

Consequently, the crisis in contemporary social theory became more pronounced in the 1960s when some new theoretical paradigms were formed which prompted the question on the existing quantitative, empiricist, and positivist conceptions of social theory. The prevailing dissatisfaction of the dominant methodologies and theories produced by the mainstream sociologist prompted the search for alternative methodologies and conceptions that would be used in social theory while the new paradigms of phenomenology, structuralism, feminism, ethno-methodology, critical theories and Marxism proffered new solutions and conceptions which was assumed to be more adequate and accurate in describing contemporary society and in providing motivation and direction for transforming social theory. Though, these theories have caused more confusion in the field of social theory and have inspired intense debates over the scenery, methods, and goals of social theory.

Furthermore, postmodern and poststructuralist social theory have further challenged the conventional social theory and science, by holding their basic presuppositions to task. Moreover, Marxism, structuralism, phenomenology, and other critical paradigms have been criticized for resolutely taking part in the building of methods of modern, enlightenment rationality and traditional social theory. The Frankfurt school of thought offers different range of interdisciplinary strategy for social theory which made up of perspectives from philosophy political economy, anthropology, sociology, cultural theory, and

history but yet their efforts has not yielded any positive result because their targets towards overcoming the fragmentation endemic in contemporary social theory was not achieved as the contemporary social theory remained in the state of crisis.

### **CAUSES OF CRISIS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY**

The following are the reasons behind the crisis in the contemporary social theories;

- i. Disagreement on whether social theories should use the methods developed and used by the natural sciences to study human society.
- ii. The problems associated with racism or racial discrimination
- iii. Discrimination on the basis of gender
- iv. Ideological difference within the discipline

The disagreement on whether social sciences should adopt the methods developed and used by natural sciences to study human society was one of the causes of the crisis in contemporary social theories. The crisis was ignited as a result of the division within the sociological theories which was associated with mutually exclusive approaches that were linked with a disagreed epistemological view point. Among the viewpoints that emerged were those that took anti structuralism and humanistic perspective. Augustine Comte and Emile Durkheim were among the leading scholars in the positivist school of thought, the positivist suggested that sociology should use the methods developed and used by the natural sciences to conduct empirical research in the society, the motion that was vehemently rejected by the interpretive school of thought based on the ground that the anti positivist doubted the probability of a scientific sociology and did not consider the structures of the positivist methodology, thus, the anti naturalist type of interpretive sociology opposed the probability of any form of science or scientific methods in studying human society and human action, as a result of that social theory suffered a conflicting circumstances or scenarios that seems to be very difficult to be reconciled.

Kuhn (1962) states that the natural sciences did not develop in the manner described by the standard of positivist account of gradual accumulation of knowledge but instead through a series of revolutionary disjunctions in paradigms, according to Kuhn, the crisis in the social theories was worsened by the fact that there was no new paradigm to take over from the dominant

paradigm at that time which eventually resulted to crisis or disagreement within the social theory.

Giddens (1977) criticizes positivism on the ground that its approach to social inquiry has no space for conception of the actor as a reasoning agent which may at the end led to the use of knowledge in a calculated manner so as to achieve the intended goal.

Moreover, Giddens and Habermas, had similar view as regard to the crisis in contemporary social theory, according to them, the crisis in the social theory should have been solved by the scenario that caused it rather than allowing it to escalate.

Parson (1935) had a similar view with Habermas and Giddens on their position on the crisis in contemporary social theories, Parson observed that the objective and subjective should be connected only after understanding the contribution of each of them to the sociological analysis and writing. According to Parson, the analysis of human behavior from the objective and the subjective view should correspond.

Going by the above views by different scholars, it is pertinent to note that there is a fragmentation within the contemporary social theory and the divisions are being caused as a result of the back ground knowledge each of the scholars had and wanted to apply the same in social theory in order to seek for solution into the problems in human society. The post modern theorist once declared that, due to the crisis that engulfed the contemporary social theory and rendered it ineffective, they therefore declared that sociology was a past history while the positivist believed that what makes contemporary social theory to be fragmented into series of mutually inconsistent parts is something to be regarded as incurable condition of the social inquiry as modern societies enter a post modern stage.

Furthermore, the problem of racism and racial discrimination within the social theory remain another very strong factor that created not only crisis within the social theory but also division among the scholars within the discipline of sociology. The white sociological inner caucus historically ignored and rejected the contributions and efforts of the black sociologist on the basis of their color of skin but not on the content and quality of what they have contributed, while by contrast the black sociologist have been honoring and accepting all contributions made by the white even though some of their theories are racially

biased but yet the blacks use those theories in their school curriculum, hospitals, and criminal justice system departments. One of those theories that were racially biased was the theory of Cesare Lombroso on crime which categorized all blacks as criminals, because the features he outlined as the features of potential criminals are the features of all blacks, those features include wooly heir, broad nose, thick lips, projecting ears, red eyes despite the biasness of the theory but yet it is regarded as useful to some organizations because no knowledge is useless.

Nevertheless, due to the racism and racial discrimination in social theory the contributions of black scholars within the discipline are never being acknowledged by the white main stream sociology, people like W.E.B Du Bois, Staurt Hall, Bhambara and Fanon have contributed a lot to the development of social theory but yet their efforts were never acknowledged by the white sociologist. Du Bois during his life time, contributed tremendously to the growth and development of social theory by contributing close to two thousand bibliographies, research, novels, poems, pamphlets and newspaper article but yet his efforts were never appreciated or acknowledged by the white mainstream sociology.

Moreover, W.E.B Du Bois, one of the important contributors in sociology was never acknowledged, commended or mentioned as one of the founding fathers of the discipline despite his massive contributions to the development of social theory and sociology at large just because he was a black man but Sheldon who contributed less than him was celebrated as among the founding fathers of the discipline by the white.

Bhambra (2014) noted that, there was segregation in the contemporary social theory and sociology at large, she explained that there were two distinct traditions in sociology, one black and the other one white; she noted some exceptions in the work of Robert Blaumer and David Wellman. She argued that the white sociology failed to address the issue of race in the United States of America or to make provision for it in sociology department in the whites' universities.

Furthermore, gender stratification is another aspect of inequality that has been among the major causes of crisis within the social theories. Female sociologist are segregated and discriminated by their male counter parts on the basis of gender but not on the quality of their contributions to the advancement and

development of social theory and sociology at large, they are often been segregated, dominated and relegated to the back bench in all affairs of the discipline. The attitude of the male sociologist towards the females in most cases result to protest by the female to express their dissatisfaction on the manner at which they are being treated and similarly their efforts and contributions are often been neglected or not acknowledged, as a result of that, the female social theorist often protest against their humiliation and segregation by the male gender which has contributed to the crisis in the contemporary social theory.

Gunaratnam (2015) noted that the consequences of the gender inequality or stratification on the black feminist scholars is at alarming and as a result of that the female scholars do experience segregation, discrimination and above all they are never engaged in any empirical research by their male counterpart who out rightly do regard them as weak gender which the female within the social theory never accepted that they are weak gender as a result they respond to their male counterpart in an aggressive mode which in most cases leads to crisis.

Nevertheless, differences in ideology played a vital role in causing crisis within the contemporary social theories and sociology in general. Sociology as a discipline came into being in response to the social problems that engulfed society at that time. The discipline comprises of scholars and philosophers from different countries and regions around the globe with different ideological background, for instance, scholars and philosophers who came from the communist or socialist states or countries tend to postulate theories to portray and defend the communist ideology in all their works and contributions to social theory while those who are from the capitalist countries like the United states tend to defend and protect the tenets of capitalism in all their work and contributions to the social theories and sociology at large, none of them would be ever ready to sacrifice his or her ideology to the other as a result of that differences in ideology the scholars and philosophers are always at loggerheads with each other in the process of protecting their ideology and the ideology of their own country.

### **SHOULD CONTEMPORARY THEORY BE IN A STATE OF CRISIS?**

Going by the above background and analysis of the contemporary social theory it will be very correct to say that, contemporary social theory has been battling and managing crisis since the founding of sociology as a discipline. Based on

the findings of this research, contemporary social theories is confirmed be to in a state of crisis and for the sake of progress, advancement and development of contemporary social theories I suggest that it should not be in a state crisis because of the following reasons based on the findings of this research;

- There would be no meaningful achievement in any organization that is battling with crisis
- For any achievement to recorded in contemporary social theories there must be harmonious working relationship
- No progress and achievement of any kind can take place in an environment where discrimination of any kind exist

One of the reasons why contemporary social theory should not be in a state of crisis is, there will be no meaningful achievements and developments in any atmosphere where there is no peace, any organization that does not encourage peaceful coexistence among its members that organization will surely achieve little or nothing. Contemporary social theory has been engulfed by serious crisis some of the crisis were as result the racism and racial discrimination more especially among the American sociologist which black American sociologist felt they were segregated base on the color of skin, their theories and findings are not recognized by the white Americans which as a result of that contemporary social theory in America is divided on a racial lines, the blacks on one part while the white on the other part. For any meaningful achievement to be recorded in social theories scholars should be treated with no segregation of any kind so as to give them a sense of belonging and encouragement to perform optimally towards the progress and development of the contemporary social theories.

Furthermore, another reason why contemporary social theory should not be in a state of crisis is that, it will be difficult for the contemporary social theories to achieve it set goals and objectives if it remains fragmented or not united and focused so for the contemporary social theory to be successful, it needs to be united toward achieving a common goal and if it fails to be united then it would be disastrous and at the end rendered it ineffective because the set objectives might not going to be achieved.

Moreover, one of the major reasons why contemporary social theory should not be in a state of crisis is that there will be no united leadership to coordinate the affairs of the social theory if it is left in the state of crisis. In the event of crisis,

everything will be done not the way it supposed to be done but rather base on selfish interest or to protect the political ideology of the country they came from, for instance those from the communist or socialist countries tend to postulate theories to defend the ideology of their country whether their position was wrong or right they tried to justify it in their writings at all cost likewise the scholars or philosophers that came from the capitalist countries they tend to protect the political ideology of their countries by all means.

### **REMEDIES TO CRISIS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY**

The following are the remedies to the crisis in contemporary social theory;

- a. Segregation on the ground of gender should be discouraged for contemporary theory to be free from crisis
- a. Racism and racial discrimination should be stopped
  - Reports of any empirical research should be reported objectively but not to portray one's country's political ideology
  - Acceptable methods of research should be developed and be acceptable to all social theorist

One of the suggestions on the remedies to the crisis in contemporary social theory is discrimination and segregation on the ground of gender should as a matter of importance should be discouraged or eliminated so as to give everyone a sense of belonging and be free to contribute to the best of his or her ability objectively towards the progress and development of contemporary social theory and sociology at large.

Moreover, another suggestion on the remedies to the crisis in the contemporary social theory is, discrimination on the basis of color of skin should be discouraged or stopped. Scholars should be given their freedom to contribute their quarter towards the development of the contemporary social theory without being discriminated on the basis of the color of skin and to also have their work or contribution being honored and acknowledged by the white sociologist or alternatively the issue of either white or black sociologist should be discouraged and banned so as to have only one sociology for every race.

Furthermore, another solution to the crisis in contemporary social theory is, report on any empirical research should be reported objectively but not to be reported in such manners to portray or protect any political ideology of any country or nation.



Nevertheless, as part of the solutions or remedies to the crisis in contemporary social theory, an acceptable method of research should be developed separate from the one proposed by the positivist and the research method should be used in all empirical research.

Conclusively, based on my personal opinion I suggest that, the contemporary social theory should not be in a state of crisis based on the reasons outlined above, but notwithstanding however, crisis is still very relevant in some cases because it is used as a tool for expressing dissatisfactions and grievances on certain abnormal happenings in either society or any organization with the aim of bringing an end to the injustice that motivated for the crisis.

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