From the Lifeworld to Civil Society: An Investigation of Habermas's Concepts*

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Abstract
This article develops an investigation of several key concepts in Habermas's theory. It tries to feature civil society as the vehicle through the theses of colonisation and lifeworld/system dichotomy can be addressed. This article is concerned with the origins of the ideas that are absorbed and re-expounded in Habermas's own language. It proposes to go into the consideration of Lockwood's social/system-integration distinction as to approach Habermas's theory.

Keywords: civil society, Lockwood's social/system-integration, lifeworld/system distinction, colonisation of lifeworld, communication

As discussed by Habermas, we are acquainted with communicative action as a cooperative action undertaken by individuals based upon mutual deliberation and argumentation. While Habermas has dealt with communication action in terms of its deliberative function to establish legitimacy, its discourse content to claim validity and its public implication of social spatiality, he attempts to re-visit the sphere of illocutors where communication action is initiated and performed. Habermas, by presenting in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) a classical catalogue of the necessary constitutional rights in the interest of a well functioning public sphere – that is, freedom of speech, association and equality of vote, etc. – effectively establishes a number of private individuals who thereby acquire, and are meant to exert, their influence in the process of opinion formation. However, whereas the rationalisation of the lifeworld takes place, to portray modern civil society and state as a product of the free choices of equal individuals is to repeat the bourgeois ideologies in attempting to present particular interests as universal. With this ideological attempt in emphasis, no single publicly expressed discourse is ever ontologically possible to live up to the universal postulates. Also, to complement the institutional guarantees of the constitutional state, a differentially organised lifeworld that distinguishes itself from political and economical systems is strongly needed on the functioning of the public sphere. Thanks to his previous work, it is not hard to understand why Habermas makes a "rediscovery of civil society" in the early 1990s.

Habermas's architecture of "system" and "lifeworld" is an important clue as to the post-Marxist conceptions of civil society, in large part because post-Marxists do not identify civil society with the state and because they go on to differentiate between civil society and the economy. More specifically, post-Marxists begin with its dissimilarity with the system world and, thus, locate civil society in the lifeworld. Post-Marxist...
conceptions of civil society rest on a tripartite model – state, economy and civil society – of ideal social organisation that is greatly indebted to the differentiated structure of modern society as established by Habermas’s theory. In drawing on Habermas, post-Marxists make and strengthen the idea of civil society to become a critical tool in the democratisation of modern societies.

Our aim in this paper is to recount and reconstruct Habermas’s conception of civil society, that (a) the discussion of civil society ought to relate closely to the thesis of solidarity in relation to the communicative paradigm of lifeworld/system, and (b) the premises for civil society have undergone substantial change into that which is later discussed in Between Facts and Norms (1992). Viewing Habermas’s civil society from this perspective, we suggest, could highlight the originality of his contribution to democratic theory.

I. The Historical Origins of a Concept

As acknowledged, the idea of civil society was first articulated in the eighteenth century by the philosophers of Scottish Enlightenment. Adam Smith, David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, Adam Ferguson and Henry Home Kames were the most significant of these philosophers, trying to come to terms with the particularity of individual interests whilst offering different universalist counter-narratives which aimed to avoid what was meant to be a collapse of civilisation into chaos. The particularity which was borne out of the increasing thirst for private wealth and had escalated to the verge of disrespect of external authority, saw a threefold need for civil society to arise (Baker, 2002: 4). The first was the concern with the escalating tension between individualism and communitarianism. The second was the subjection of the state to the rule of law. The third was the quest for some form of public spiritedness or common value. From this perspective, civil society does not only inculcate established beliefs; it is also the locus of social contestation where collective values and identities are fostered.

Adam Ferguson’s classic work, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1995), sketches a natural history of the human species in its progression from past forms of life, such as classical Greece and the Roman republic, to modern commercial societies such as Britain. However, because of his indebtedness to the older tradition of civic humanism, Ferguson is by no means an apologist of modern progress. Modern civil societies, with the increasingly applied division of labour principle as the main cause of corruption of public spirit, have no choices but to abandon civil and communal values.

For that reason, Ferguson warns that civil society has a close affinity with despotism: “The rules of despotism are made for the government of corrupted men” (Ferguson, 1995: 240). In a paradoxical twist, the dialectic between civil society and political despotism enters into Ferguson’s discussion. Although Ferguson is able to identify associationism as the key normative principle to counterpose the loss of “public spirit” among its citizens, civil society is not to be left outside the realm of the state (Keane, 1988: 42-44). What is proposed here by Ferguson and his fellow Scottish Enlightenment contemporaries is still an essential unity between civil society and the state. Their defence of civil society subservient to constitutional monarchy is characteristic of the eighteenth-century theological thinking, which predicated on the transcendental mutuality of individual recognition in the process of exchange (Baker, 2002: 5; Seligman, 1992: 27).

In *The Philosophy of Right* (1821), Hegel comes to the conclusion that the notion of quasi-transcendence which Kant thinks can mediate between morality and politics needs substantial revision (Schechter, 2000: 36). In contrast to Kant’s suggestion of a pre-given critical public which exists beyond space and time, civil society for Hegel has to be seen as a historically produced sphere of ethical life that is the outcome of a long historical transformation (Keane, 1988: 50). Following his reading of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, Hegel is convinced that the expansion of economic forces had completely changed the idea of private sphere and civil society. His political philosophy is led to the inclusion of economy into what Kant regarded as the private sphere, even to the extent that the economy overtakes and dominates civil society. Meanwhile the state, which would not give up the subjugation of civil society with higher surveillance, is challenged by the expansion of economy and emerges by now as a separate political
sphere. It is at this point that the idea of civil society has blossomed into a recognisably modern form. However, Hegel’s deep trust in state regulation fails miserably to answer the question of checks and balances on the universal state, and obviates the fear of despotism that motivated Ferguson to reflect on civil society. Although it has, thanks to Hegel, assumed economical character and developed as a distinct entity, civil society is still viewed as dependent on state supervision.

Also a Hegelian, Marx praises Hegel for recognising the separation of the state and civil society as the hallmark of modernity. Hegel’s influence is particularly obvious in Marx’s understanding of the civil society as economic base-structure and the state as political superstructure. However, the Hegelian civil society is, as one critic says, an “antagonistic totality…[that] survives only in and through its antagonisms and is not able to resolve them” (Adorno, 1993: 28). The more Marx identifies himself with the Hegelian dichotomy, the more concerned he is to deny that the state has some kind of ontological and historical primacy over civil society. The central question for Marx is that while Hegel overcomes the historical intertwining of private/public spheres by institutionalising modern state and, effectively, blocking the connection between lived daily experience and what is the Kantian Publizität, why could not civil society itself be the basis of politics? Revolting against the Hegelian conception of civil society as constitutive of several elements such as judicial system, police and corporation on top of economic life, Marx narrows down its meaning to the total sum of productive relations. The consequence of Marx’s modification of the Hegelian conception is twofold. On the one hand, the relation of civil society to the state is reversed, from the fixation with legal and constitutional relations to an ideal of political life in which people directly and spontaneously participate. On the other hand, the idea of civil society is dehistoricised and appears natural and external to its participants (Peleczynski, 1984: 275). Marx thereby embodies, in theoretical form, a self-governing civil society where the political consciousness could correspond to social life, at least for those who are free, i.e., the proletariats.

Last but not least, Gramsci articulates what is probably closest to the post-Marxist version of civil society. Marx’s rejection of the organic conception of the national state left him and his followers without specifically political grounds. However, culture and ideology, the product of historical and political contingencies, must be also taken into account if one is to adequately explore the possibilities for a democratic civil society. By no means an orthodox Marxist, Gramsci renovates the analysis of civil society with the highlight of the significance of superstructural layer in the Marxist system. It is true that Gramsci adheres to Marx in interpreting ideology as secondary phenomenon after institutions. But it is also true that Gramsci is openly indebted to Hegel for asserting cultural – ideological, so to speak – capital plays an important role for the survival of the hegemony of capitalism. In Gramsci, ideologies would have taken a new life as forces “capable of shaping and creating a new history and contributing to the formation of a new power which will progressively emerge” once civil society starts transiting from the sphere of necessity to that of freedom (Bobbio, 1988: 88). With this shift, Gramsci is able to produce the last missing piece in the construction of a post-Marxist framework that distinguishes civil society from economy, political society and the state.

The post-Marxists proceed from the conception of civil society as a bulwark against the systematising effects of the state and economy. In its opposition to what are, in sociological terms, characterised as increasingly purposive-rational in Weberian sense, civil society brings simultaneously into focus the socio-cultural dimension of the world of norms, roles, practices, relationships. This of course draws on the system/lifeworld dichotomy presented by Habermas. And if, for the idea of democratisation which emerges out of the European communist context and post-Marxist thinking since the 1970s, the model of civil society is one of locus of mutual understanding between autonomous individuals, for the Habermasian theory it is one rooted, most often, in the social integration of the lifeworld. This is even so in Cohen and Arato’s working definition of civil society as “a sphere of interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family),
the sphere of associations (especially voluntary organisations), social movements, and forms of public communication” (Cohen & Arato, 1992: ix).

Having linked, on the one hand, the internalist, agency-oriented view with the lifeworld of a social group and, on the other hand, the externalist perspective with society only as a system of actions, Habermas believes that systemic integration is relevant only in areas of life where these two perspectives can be combined (Habermas, 1987a: 151). Moreover, the normative imperative to communicatively coordinate modern society would mean that civil society can and must occur in order to re-establish the continuity between the self-steering system world and goal-oriented lifeworld.

II. Lockwood’s System Integration and Social Integration

The way in which Habermas defines the system-lifeworld model, i.e., the splitting of society between functional subsystems that are integrated through system integration and lifeworld through social integration, is indebted to Lockwood’s attempt to marry structural functionalism with conflict sociology. While it is true that social structure, institution or subsystem is the most adequate object to start with in terms of macro-level social analysis, it is also true that the actions of individuals and groups play a significant role in the explication of a relatively autonomous core possessing causal powers which are irreducible and temporally prior to the possible conception of system part. This dualist strategy cannot be seen as a purely theoretical construct, but an experience that one must relate to in everyday life. In order to understand such a strategy, Lockwood’s formulation of social/system-integration must be taken in account – this strategy is further developed in Habermas’s The Theory of Communicative Action (1981).

In his 1964 seminal paper, Lockwood first employed the terms “social integration” and “system integration” to indicate some fundamental problems in both the normative functionalist theory of Parsons and what he came to label as “conflict theory”. Upon examining in detail the positions of pro-and-cons of normative functionalism, Lockwood assigns matters in relation to the relationships between individuals or actors to the mechanism of social integration, and what refers to those between parts of a society to system integration (Lockwood, 1964: 245). This distinction is important because it allows Lockwood to propose suggestions on how to bridge these two approaches – macro-level social functionalism and action-oriented analysis on micro level. Conflict theory, as a reaction to functionalism, emphasises group conflict as the ultimate cause of social change; whereas functionalism downplays the importance of actors and focuses on parts of social system. However, Lockwood begs to further differentiate the general functionalist standpoint from the more specific form, that is, normative functionalism with Parsons being its main exponent. Unlike general functionalism where there is no necessity for a prior commitment to values, normative functionalists are also concerned with the analysis of normative order that has authoritative power in performing its functions and promoting its general interests. In the latter case, the parts of the system are best described as institutions and it is then, and only then, that one can proceed to how these institutional arrangements come to interrelate.

On the one hand, the problem that conflict theorists have with normative functionalism, according to Lockwood, centres exactly on this rigidified description of institutions as “moral entities, without rigorously exploring the interplay between norms and power that is universally present in major institutional contexts” (Lockwood, 1964: 246). On the other hand, in spite of successful reconnection between social and system integration due to their Marxist roots, Lockwood argues that both Dahrendorf and Rex take a step perhaps too far in identifying an antithetical model in class antagonism as
the principal means of social integration. Neither approach is adequate because each deals with only side of agency/structure problem. It is ironically Marx whom Lockwood wishes to revisit because he not only clearly differentiates social and system integration but also decidedly envisages the determinacy of system contradictions over social conflicts. To quote Lockwood:

The propensity to class antagonism (social integration aspect) is generally a function of the character of production relationships (e.g., possibilities of intra-class identification and communication). But the dynamics of class antagonisms are clearly related to the progressively growing “contradictions” of the economic system (1964: 249-250).

In the light of the above, one may consider Lockwood’s Marxist functionalism to have a close affinity with normative functionalism as far as system integration is concerned. This is especially true when the significance of consciousness is absent in both Lockwood’s and Parsons’s accounts. Yet it is obvious that Lockwood’s Marxist interpretation attempts to see structural contradictions as decisive factors in the account of social change, while in normative functionalism “institutional patterns emerge as the only generally identified and systematically differentiated components of a social system between which there can be conflict and resultant strain” (Lockwood, 1964: 250). However they are not ontologically different because one’s constitutive “material basis” is not different to the other’s. As highlighted, the fundamental difference between Marxism and normative functionalism lies not much in the way in which contradictions arise on the system level, but in the fact that normative functionalists never try to “link systematically such contradictions with an analysis in terms of collective actors” (Mouzelis, 1974: 402). Despite its constant reference to norms and values in the course of action, the Parsonian functionalism is blind to the possibilities of reshaping institutions on the part of collective actors and group. Collective actors, as shown by Mouzelis, are as well the producers of the social system.

While Lockwood’s social/systemic-integration distinction later evolves into that between normative and factual orders, which nonetheless creates certain problems in relation to the durability of institutionalised complexes of norms/roles (Mouzelis, 1997), there is no doubt that the two-tier concept of society which focuses on agency on the one hand and view social phenomenon from systemic perspective on the other hand is adopted and reformulated by Habermas. The distinction between system and lifeworld has to be seen as a reinterpretation – though in more complex terms – of what Lockwood’s Marxist functionalism understands as the basic components of society. As Habermas remarks, “[t]he rationalisation of the lifeworld...has to be located in a systematic history accessible only to functional analysis” (Habermas, 1987a: 111).3

III. Habermas’s System and Lifeworld

Habermas has already adopted lifeworld as a term in some of his earliest essays and it soon becomes a core concept in his repertoire. It is in Legitimation Crisis (1973) that he begins to explore extensively the relationship between lifeworld and what can be called the system (Edgar, 2006: 89). Lifeworld, a terms that Habermas adapts from Husserl and Schutz, becomes relevant to his theory of communicative action because (a) it forms the horizon within which actors get to perform communicative action and (b) it is used to counterpose the social theory of not only American functionalist sociologies but also first generation critical theorists, who can be said to be overtitled to the emphases on powerful supra-personal conditions, though from different angles. By borrowing an actor perspective from the phenomenological tradition, the communication-theoretic concept of the lifeworld puts more weight on the theme of mutual understanding and thus has a horizon capable of change according to relevance to the theme: “lifeworld contexts of relevance... are concentrically ordered and become increasingly anonymous and diffused as the spatiotemporal and social distance grows” (Habermas, 1987a: 122-123).

3 It can be argued that Habermas makes a U-return to functionalism and system theory, in stark contrast to his reservations in the early years about not only Parson’s functionalist framework but also the possibility of ever developing a comprehensive analytical theory. See the last section of Habermas (1988: 186-189).
Until this point, Habermas follows faithfully with the phenomenological conception that, while the lifeworld itself cannot be thematised, only fragments of the lifeworld can be extracted as themes and injected into the horizon of the action situation. In order to keep up his game, Habermas decidedly gives his concept of the lifeworld a linguistic twist and, because of the close connection made by Humboldt between language and cultural traditions, he proposes to see the lifeworld specifically "as represented by a culturally transmitted and linguistically organised stock of interpretative patterns" (Habermas, 1987a: 124). However, as Habermas recognises, to say that the lifeworld is constituted by the totalities of language and culture and it is all concerned with the continuation of knowledge is to paint only one part of the picture. He suggests that the concept of the lifeworld can be made more serviceable for social science if one adopts the everyday concept of the lifeworld that "defines the totality of state of affairs that can be reported in true stories" (Habermas, 1987a: 136).

To render more fruitful this concept of the sociocultural lifeworld, it is important for Habermas to explain the three basic functions that are taken care of by language as the medium of sociocultural lifeworld. Firstly, through its function of mediating the achievement of mutual understanding that one finds within the Husserlian tradition, language reproduces and passes on cultural knowledge. Secondly, whereas language is used in order to coordinate the actions of individuals' communicative actions, it foregrounds the Durkheimian institutionalist bias towards the conditions for social integration and solidarity. Thirdly, through its function of socialisation, communicative action moves in the Meadian sociopsychological fashion to mediate the formation of personal identities. Thus, the lifeworld is reproduced in "the continuation of valid knowledge, the stabilisation of group solidarity, and the socialisation of responsible actors" (Habermas, 1987a: 137).

As Habermas argues that society cannot be analysed as a subject with knowledge and influence over itself (Habermas, 1987b: 357), it is equally important to distinguish the reproduction processes of the symbolic structures of the lifeworld from their linguistically corresponding material substratum: culture, society and personality.

Culture refers to the stock of knowledge which serves as a valid resource for social actors in their understanding about something in the world. Society refers to what institutionalistically determines interpersonal relations. Personality, lastly, refers to individual's competency for communicative actions in the construction of identity. Recall that the theorem about the base and superstructure of society, which is to give priority to material base. Habermas's lifeworld as discussed so far fails as orthodox Marxism because it does not make ontological claims societal structures and the interdependency of its part. Habermas's differentiation is intended to provide just such an explanation.

It may be noted that, despite the special contributions of each of three reproduction processes to each of three structural components, the three processes are not linked to the three components in an exclusively one-to-one relation. Yet, culture-cultural reproduction, society-social integration and personality-socialisation should be seen as the core functions among others (Habermas, 1987a: 142). Specifically, the cultural reproduction of the lifeworld can secure the continuity of tradition and coherence of cultural knowledge by linking up semantic instances with the lifeworld, that is, culture; the social integration and solidarity process provides legitimacy while linking up coordinating instances with the lifeworld, that is, society; the socialisation process links up individual life history with the lifeworld, that is, personality.

For these to be possible, Habermas, firstly, follows Parsons in his externalisation as established norms, conventions and institutions of the internally normative expectations. Secondly, he adopts Lockwood's agency/system perspective. On the one hand, there exist institutionalised ideas about which normative obligations the internalist agency-oriented worldview has. On the other hand, the process of value internalisation must be enacted to motivate agency to act in accordance with the regulatory patterns geared towards the viewpoint of lifeworld context as a whole. To look at society as different sub-systems which maintain internal and external balance by exchanging resources is to complement the hermeneutic interpretation of the actors’ own use of symbols. The reason is that, not different to Lockwood's formulation,
symbolically mediated social relations are not accessible from a pure observer perspective. And agents are not able to see, from their lifeworld perspective, the units systems theory takes for granted. To Habermas the fundamental problem is not one of whether to combine a lifeworld perspective with a systems perspective, but one of how “in a satisfactory way” (Habermas, 1987a: 151).

In his treatment of the lifeworld and system, Habermas decidedly introduces Weber’s interpretivism that is tied to “the perspective of self-interpretation of the culture under investigation” (Habermas, 1987a: 148). What Habermas has done, effectively, is to depend on “the interpretive accomplishments of the participants themselves” and on their “risky (because rationally motivated) agreement” (Habermas, 1984: 70). This means that the worldviews stored in the externalist form of structural components of the lifeworld have no choice but to become decentred. Thus, social integration takes precedence over system integration because as the former is linked with “a normatively secured or communicatively achieved consensus” and the latter with “a non-normative regulation of individual decisions that extends beyond the actors’ consciousness” (Habermas, 1987a: 117).

Of course, the orthodox Marxist conception of the primacy of the economy whose overpowering influence can be felt even on the level of individual behaviour and communicative relations stands in stark opposition to Habermas’s claim about the respectable quality of the lifeworld. Where the distinction Habermas makes between the linguistically engendered lifeworld and the functionalist sub-systems has received critical attention, his reconceptualisation of the Marxist notion of base-superstructure relation is much needed for lifeworld members – that is, civil society – to respond to the media of money and power and restore “endangered ways of life” (Habermas, 1987a: 392). Moreover, as opposed to Adorno’s description of modern capitalist development as a totally administered society in which individuals have been integrated to such an extent that they are incapable of envisaging a social order other than the prevailing one, Habermas characterises an ideal socially integrated lifeworld that is palpably distinct from the systematically integrated economy and state. It is to this process by which society as system intrudes into society as lifeworld that we shall now turn.

A few complications nevertheless arise along with this adherence to communicative coordination. On the one hand, the decision to place interpretivism at the centre of the lifeworld is methodologically problematic. It is in my opinion somehow problematic because the prioritisation of social integration over system integration as consequence of this decision somehow defeats the purpose of the Lockwoodian internalist/externalist perspective. Habermas could have just adopted the Marxist base/superstructure distinction and, following the developments of post-Marxism, shifted the primacy to social integration, which is exactly what is proposed by the conflict theorists such as Dahrendorf. On the other hand, critics focusing on the coordination mechanisms repeatedly question the degree to which integration is based on communicatively achieved consensus. Mouzelis rightly stresses that the internalist perspective is not always receptive of integration via mutual understanding in language. Mechanisms of integration that are not based on normative consensus, whilst enacted and even followed, could as well constitute an integral part of the lifeworld (Mouzelis, 1992: 269). Needless to say, Habermas follows Durkheim in seeing social integration as “the unity of a social life-world through values and norms” (Habermas, 1979: 144). Thus, he links systemic problems that arise in the base directly to society’s self-understanding and believes that they can – to a large extent, not fully – be solved with resources available in social integration. Our suggestion is to look at Habermas’s rework of historical materialism, where he sees Marx’s relevance but nevertheless wishes to emphasise the significance of communicative action.
IV. The Uncoupling of Money and Power as Systems Media from the Lifeworld

The theoretical core of The Theory of Communicative Action is Habermas’s revision of Parsons’s AGIL functionalist schema in order to describe the erosion of legitimacy of society, which Habermas calls by the term of colonisation of lifeworld. While Parsons uses the AGIL paradigm to explain societal equilibrium that is achieved by the seamless coordination of the four functions assigned to their separate subsystems, Habermas basically reinterpret the categories as what we have briefly mentioned as everyday context for communicative action. As opposed to Parsons’s teleological model of action that is supposed to “regulate decisions in the dimensions of setting ends and choosing means” (Habermas, 1987a: 207), Habermas believes that, in spite of being bound to “an institutional order of legitimately regulated interpersonal relations”, his theory of social/system-integration – drawn heavily from the Kantian idea of autonomy constituted by both the empirical and the transcendental – cannot be established without “purposive action orientations” (Habermas, 1987a: 208). There is no willingness on the part of Parsons to sociologically acknowledge the personal recognition of the moral authority of an order: even to plunge into the talks about the motivated compliance in later stages cannot disguise his failure to carry through the primacy of action in a radical fashion (Habermas, 1987a: 234). This has led Habermas to object that Parsons’s development of the ideas about money and power as quantitatively generalised symbolic medium of interchange make it appear as though the communicative media are not only virtually absent, but utterly irrelevant even where present. Referring to “the monetary redefinitions of goals, relations and services” and “the bureaucratisation of decisions, duties and rights”, Habermas was trying to limit those areas which are concerned with the material reproduction of society to the purposive rationality (Habermas, 1987a: 322-323). By way of highlighting the contrast between the two theorists, it may be said that while Parsons concentrates on solely system integration mechanisms of coordination, Habermas insists that “[t]he process of reaching understanding upon which the lifeworld is centred...have to interpenetrate and form a rational interconnectedness via the transfer of validity that is possible in the performative attitude” (Habermas, 1987a: 327). In a further, more specific point of contrast to Parsons, who believes that money and power and they alone can steer economic and administrative subsystems, Habermas likes to think that his “communicative concept of the lifeworld...constituted from a network of communicative actions” together as well equally recognises “cultural tradition” and what is “stabilised in legitimate orders” (Habermas, 1996: 80).

Appearing to echo Parsons, though to a qualified extent, when he writes that the organising media-controlled subsystems work in accordance with positivist procedures (Habermas, 1987a: 365), Habermas also contends that the systemic imperatives of money and power have become unrelated – or, to use Habermas’s language, uncoupled – to the lifeworld’s communicative infrastructure. Yet he nowhere argues against Parsons that steering media of money and power are necessarily not applicable to action coordination; that is, that money and power can be trusted as media if they are anchored by positive law. In fact, Habermas implies that the systems media bypass the drawn-out process of consensus-building and make possible the measurement of their strategic influence (Habermas, 1987a: 183).

To the extent that action is hardly coordinated only by the promise of positive sanctions, the lifeworld context as resources of interpretation can describe itself as the indispensable condition which all sorts of action must presuppose. Habermas, as already known, posits that only communicative action has the ability to regenerate influence and value-commitments. Although the quantitative systemic media can express influence and value-commitments, they are unable to produce these qualities.

It could be argued that, on the one hand, condensing media of the communicative kind, inasmuch as they continue to be connected with the lifeworld, do not pose any threat in Habermas’s view; on the other hand, the crisis of contemporary modernity arises, moreover, not as the direct consequence of the media calculability; rather, it is the transgression of the purposive rationality – contained in the replacing, systemic
media of non-linguistic kind – beyond its natural border, which in turn blocks actors’ access to the lifeworld context and furthermore relegates the lifeworld below the systems, that sends the project of enlightenment on a self-destructive course.

V. Reification, or the Colonisation of the Lifeworld by Systems

Despite the necessity of the systems in modern societies, the tendency inherent in the systems not only dislocates itself from the lifeworld (uncoupling) but also attempts to relegate the lifeworld to the command of its economical and administrative subsystems. Habermas terms the process as “colonisation of the lifeworld”: “the imperatives of autonomous subsystems make their way into the lifeworld from the outside – like colonial masters coming into a tribal society – and force a process of assimilation upon it” (Habermas, 1987a: 355). Moreover, the problems created by these colonial masters involve the penetration of cognitive-instrumental reason into the lifeworld: “its symbolic reproduction cannot be transposed onto foundations of system integration without pathological side effects” (Habermas, 1987a: 322-323).

Habermas’s discussion of colonisation not only sounds familiar; it is ipso facto the revision of the theory of reification that was developed firstly by Lukács and later taken up by Adorno (Baxter, 2011: 4). When he was writing The Theory of Communicative Action, as Habermas revealed after its completion, his main concern was to “develop a theoretical apparatus with which the phenomena of ‘reification’ (Lukács) could be addressed” (Habermas, 1993: 170). Whereas Lukács hypothesises an objective reason that characterises the “totality of the stage of development of society as a whole” as reification, Habermas reformulates the concept in his own words: “the form of objectivity that predominates in capitalist society prejudices the world-relations, the ways in which speaking and acting subjects can relate to things in the objective, the social, and their own subjective worlds” (Habermas, 1984: 355). As accentuated by Cook, who foregrounds the fragmentary discussion of colonisation in the terms that Habermas himself would have agreed with: he synonymously uses “reification” and “colonisation” to describe the incursion of subsystems into the lifeworld (Cook, 2004: 41).

However, on the basis of abundant potentials provided by his theory of communicative action, Habermas has a much more analytical view of the nature and extent of how “a reification of the communicative practice of everyday life” takes place (Habermas, 1987a: 386). Unlike the first generation Frankfurt School members on the one hand, who suspect that all spheres of life are reified and therefore have no choice but to advocate transcendental, immanent forms of social criticism, and Lukács, on the other hand, who, along with his insufficiently supported dialectical philosophy of history, one-sidedly sets the limit to reification, Habermas is extremely guarded about the lack of a more complete theory on either side that includes mediation between the individual and the social structure. Emphasising that the democratic constrains on the dynamics of system is an analytically equally legitimate perspective, he adds that “the theory of late-capitalist reification, reformulated in terms of system and lifeworld, has to be supplemented by an analysis of cultural modernity” (Habermas, 1987a: 355).

Recognising the critical impetus in Lukács’s concept of reification, Habermas’s conception of the mediatisation between the structures of communicative action and reproductive constraints as “a compromise between mutual understanding” reflects a rather different assessment of the rationalisation of the lifeworld (Habermas, 1987a: 187). This mediation ultimately calls into question the viability of Lukácsian theory of reification as a sufficient tool against the systemic imperatives on the lifeworld. In fact, besides his examination of the pathologies of modern societies that the changeover of roles to employees and clients opens up the lifeworld for the systems to overtake (loss of freedom) and that the lifeworld members, once having taken up the roles of consumers and employees, will orient their actions towards purposive rationality (loss of meaning), Habermas in Between Facts and Norms adds that “[t]he research on effect and reception has... done away with the image of passive consumers as 'cultural dopes' who are manipulated by the programs offered to them” (Habermas, 1996: 377). Furthermore, already in The Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas identifies the
rise of expert cultures that turn into what he calls cultural impoverishment in the face of which the theory of reification is ineffective. The lifeworld is culturally impoverished because the public of laymen in a communicative action has been "robbed of its power to synthesize" (Habermas, 1987a: 355), despite that the expert knowledge and skills originated in the lifeworld.

While he does not claim that "enlightenment by mechanism of reification" is the antidote to the competition between social and system integration, Habermas readily acknowledges that the pacification of class conflict in the welfare state foregrounds the fragmentation of everyday consciousness. Opposed to what was proposed by Lukács as class consciousness, it is now unrealistic to assume that individuals can acquire a comprehensive perspective to understand the ways how the systems colonise the lifeworld. Only under conditions that systems rationality undermines moral-practical rationality and that everyday consciousness is prevented from global interpretation would Habermas be prepared to label these phenomena as colonisation.

VI. Decolonisation of the Lifeworld, or the Reinvigoration of Social Solidarity

Today, the colonisation of the lifeworld has manifested itself in the forms of capitalist economy and welfare state. The negative effects on social integration are especially palpable when they distort communicative interactions in school and family as mediating links between individuals and the political and economic imperatives (Habermas, 1987a: 369). In other words, social integration rather than socialisation of individuals has become the major victim of the colonisation of the lifeworld. More importantly, in The Theory of Communicative Action, rather than elaborating so ipso the havoc on the lifeworld, Habermas criticises the prevailing conditions for having undermined the centrality that the lifeworld is meant to assume in the discursive process of reaching understanding. To be sure, he is less interested in preserving the lifeworld from the sort of reification effects that Lukács – or, more aptly, Adorno – describes than he is in the effects of the systemic incursion into the lifeworld.3

However, rejecting to repeat the errors made by the earlier critical theorists as well as the Marxist functionalists in viewing processes of reification merely "as manifestations of a repressive integration emanating from an oligopolistic economy and an authoritarian state", Habermas contends that in the rationalised lifeworld systemic imperatives would always meet strong oppositions from "independent communicative structures" (Habermas, 1987a: 391). Adorno's undialectical and biased overstatement that pays too much attention to the pathologies caused by reification appears insensitive to the "potential for protest" with which communicative actors "develop, confirm and renew their memberships in social groups and their identities" (Habermas, 1987a: 139). This potential, constitutive one of the central theses of The Theory of Communicative Action and recurring in Between Facts and Norms, is what is greatly endangered in modern societies as social solidarity against which social integration can be measured.

To quote Habermas:

In complex societies, the scarcest resources are neither the productivity of a market economy nor the regulatory capacity of the public administration. It is above all the resources of an exhausted economy of nature and of a disintegrating social solidarity that require a nurturing approach (1996: 445).

While questions are raised about whether Habermas is correct in assessing the extent to which the damaging effects of reification has caused (Cook, 2004: 137), he clearly believes that solidarity has not been completely vanished in the colonised lifeworld and that it "can be regenerated... in the forms of communicative practices of self-determination" (Habermas, 1996: 445). Retaining a view of societal community that

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3 As Deborah Cook claims, Habermas himself does not give a clear explanation for the causes of colonisation. Nevertheless, Cook iners four conditions for the colonisation of the lifeworld to take place: the pacification of class conflict, the rationalisation of the lifeworld, the regulation of interchange relations between system and lifeworld through the conceptualisation of sets of connected behaviours and obligations in social situations (i.e., loss of freedom) and the privatistic motivations of the lifeworld members (loss of meaning). See Cook (2004: 188).
still has a pivotally positive role to play in the reproduction of the lifeworld’s society component, Habermas is ready to advocate that school and family, despite their services for the state and the economy as institutional anchors, have in themselves contained conditions needed for a counteraction by which the citizens can disrupt the prevailing unconstitutional circulation of power and money. Although communicative practices have been afflicted with reifying distortions, they are nonetheless already rational thanks to the rationalisation of the lifeworld. What is really required to redeem modernity’s rational potential is a reformed “liberal-egalitarian political culture sensitive to problems affecting society as a whole – a culture that is even jumpy or in a constant state of vibration, and thus responsive” (Habermas, 1996: 488).

In what ways, one may ask, can solidarity be restored and brought about as a counteraction to colonisation of the lifeworld? While Habermas is only prepared to go so far as to endorse “procedures that cannot prejudge the participants’ concrete goals” (Habermas, 1996: 489), he nevertheless has suggested a normative model in which self-organized public spheres must develop the prudent combination of power and self-restraint that is needed to sensitise the self-steering mechanisms of the state and the economy to the goal-oriented outcomes of radical democratic will-formation. In place of the model of society influencing itself, we have a model of boundary conflicts – which are held in check by the lifeworld – between the lifeworld and two subsystems that are superior to it in complexity and can be influenced by it only indirectly (Habermas, 1987b: 365).

Repeating nearly verbatim earlier remarks in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985), Habermas once again speaks about the task of a democratic civil society in *Between Facts and Norms*, only with a newly adopted move towards proceduralism:

> [t]he socially integrative force of solidarity, which can no longer be drawn solely from sources of communicative action, must develop through a widely diversified and more or less autonomous public spheres, as well as through procedures of democratic opinion- and will-formation institutionalised within a constitutional framework (Habermas, 1996: 299).

While denying that there is a collective subject of history in the Durkheimian sense that the homogeneity of a single group is established through a single collective identity (Habermas, 1987a: 57), Habermas implicitly suggests that participants in moral discourse share a minimal or weak socially binding collective political identity on which a plurality of communicative practices can be geared to reach agreement on what is good life for all. With this discursively constructed commonality as foundation, the idea of civil society can also be inferred from its provision of solidarity for different social groups joining together to make democratic claims.

**VII. Civil Society and Communicative Power**

In a curious contrast to his claim in *The Theory of Communicative Action* that communicative rationality seems capable of protecting everything in the lifeworld from unhealthy distortions, Habermas in *Between Facts and Norms* has a rather concrete conception of the public use of communication freedom when he limits it to more influence over the political system. Whereas Habermas meant then by “communicative rationality”, and what he means now by “communicative power”, is the motivating force of shared beliefs reached through unconstrained communicative action (Habermas, 1996: 147), it can be argued that, depending on context, this rationality can, on the one hand, amount to discursive power produced within informal public spheres or, one the other hand, be linked up with the institutional power in relation to decision-making. However, in order to deal with the complexity of political issues, he shifts the earlier focus of discourse theory on moral questions to later a wide range of differentiated discourses and bargaining processes. In the end, it is only when influence-turned-communicative power passes a “generalisability of interests” test through the filters of such as parliamentary debates and courts that political power can be generated (Habermas, 1996: 371-372).

The self-imposed limitation on communicative power is all the more surprising because Habermas in the meanwhile sees the communicative power of citizens as “jurisgenerative” in the sense that it “influence[s] the production of legitimate law”
(Habermas, 1996: 147). Furthermore, Habermas adds that communicatively generated power is hardly consulted in the operation of liberal democracies: “the normal business of politics, at least as it is routinely conducted in Western democracies”, cannot satisfy the strong conditions for legitimacy described in the definition of communicative power (Habermas, 1996: 356).

Most of the Western states go on their own ways to set agendas and are relatively indifferent to what lies in the general interest of their citizenry. As characterised by his critic, “the systems” now constitutes for Habermas “the central complex of modernity, of which the lifeworld becomes the periphery” (Anderson, 2005: 122).

This characterisation has significant implications for Habermas’s conceptions of the lifeworld and the circulation of power. While the lifeworld has been allocated central importance in The Theory of Communicative Action, without which the communicatively generated power for a genuinely democratic polity would be impossible, Habermas in Between Facts and Norms, almost to the extent of reversing what he carefully elaborated as the primacy of the lifeworld in earlier works, decidedly reorients towards decision-making circuit that normally characterises politics. But, this is not to say that the lifeworld context of communicative action must now be relegated into oblivion, nor is it to say that functional relations as they are present in modern societies should be thematised. Habermas’s point instead is to relieve the lifeworld from the burden of involvement in the increasingly complex and time-consuming business of politics. Furthermore, the reconceptualisation of the political system that Habermas presents in Between Facts and Norms gives a more balanced account of legal and political process than what he wished to resist in The Theory of Communicative Action as administrative system would allow. Here, in somewhat bitter words of Deborah Cook: “Habermas ultimately endorses the unofficial, unconstitutional circulation of power that he had criticised earlier in Legitimation Crisis” (Cook, 2004: 96).⁹

⁹ There is a distinction between official and unofficial models of circulation of power. The model is official when the civil society can via public sphere exercise its political autonomy that is then fed into parliamentary debates, and come out as legitimate laws for the executive and the judiciary to follow. This is how things are supposed to be according to the self-understanding of constitutional democracies. Conversely, if the power does not flow from the periphery citizenry to the political centre, but in opposite direction, this model of power circulation is unacknowledged and unofficial. See Thomassen (2010: 120).

As a descriptive analysis of the Habermasian circulation of power, Cook is no less right in singling out the political system – through the medium of law – as a compromised hinge between system and lifeworld that could eventually defuse communicative power. But it may be more plausible if law is understood as a sort of transformer that takes the normative resources of the lifeworld and turns them into legal code which, while open to moral communication, can also communicate with the steering media of money and power (Habermas, 1996: 81). Viewed in this way, Habermas has actually specified necessary conditions for genuine, rather than merely formal, democracy: firstly, links between the lawmaking institutions of the political system’s core, on one side, with the peripheral political public sphere; secondly, vibrantly voluntary associations of civil society as social basis for the political public sphere; thirdly, a common democratic political culture that meets the political system halfway (Habermas, 1996: 358). Inferred from this model, Habermas can be said to have suggested that the course of progressive functional differentiation would see networks of noninstitutionalised public communication operating at their best capacities if they can “elude legal regulation, administrative control, or political steering”. To empower institutions to democratically deal with societal problems in a constructive manner, there is now “growing need for integration” between “decentred, increasingly autonomous social sectors” (Habermas, 1996: 358-359).

Habermas’s account of the relation between civil society and the political public sphere also plays an important role in the normative content of democracy, which must not be restricted to “institutional arrangements at the level of democratic constitutional state” (Habermas, 1992: 451). The concerns and issues of everyday life are discussed within the circles of civil-social associations before they become items for the political public sphere to discuss on. Civil society is, Habermas says, “attuned to how societal problems resonate in the private life sphere, distill and transmit such reactions in amplified form to the public sphere” (Habermas, 1996: 367). The political public sphere, in turn, is where citizens generate their communicative power that must be able to pass through the “sluice” of official deliberative procedures and “penetrate the
constitutionally organised political system” (Habermas, 1996: 327). Together, civil society and the political public sphere establish a link between system and lifeworld.

Whereas in *The Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas saw the lifeworld’s private sphere as distinct from the perspective of the economic and political subsystems to which it was “lifeworld environment” (Habermas, 1987a: 319), the appearance of civil society in *Between Facts and Norms* reflects a new interest precisely in the relation between the private sphere of the lifeworld and the political systems. What Habermas is investigating is “how a set of elaborate but fragmented elements of legal and political theory can be brought into a common framework” (Outhwaite, 2009: 149), that is, the political significance of the private sphere. Civil society’s “lifeworld” location has guaranteed its important role in Habermas’s theory, to the extent that it provides critical impulses through which

enfranchised citizens must, in exercising their public autonomy, draw the boundaries of private autonomy in such a way that it sufficiently qualifies private persons for their role of citizen. This is because communication in a public sphere that recruits private persons from civil society depends on the spontaneous inputs from a lifeworld whose core private domains are intact (Habermas, 1996: 417).

VIII. Civil Society as Distinct yet Complementary to the State and the Economy

As we have touched earlier, Habermas’s lifeworld/system model in *The Theory of Communicative Action* was designed to demonstrate the reifying effects that systems have on the lifeworld. His diagnosis of the pathologies of modern societies takes especially the form of a kind of crisis theory: the colonising tendencies of economic and bureaucratic systems faces unavoidable limits rooted in the functional necessity of symbolically reproducing the lifeworld (Baxter, 2011: 168). With his colonisation thesis, Habermas makes concerted efforts to warn about the encroachments of political and economical imperatives – with money and power as steering media – on the sacred lifeworld. This line of analysis has been taken up by theorists such as Touraine, Cohen and Arato, Peleyinski and others, who are certainly familiar with the themes of social movements and civil society.

New social movements concerned with the discourse and practices of globalisation and the technicalisation of politics are no less successful in mobilising citizens on various occasions with the aim of reversing the illegitimate process of decision-making. However, it seems that the struggles against “profit-dependent instrumentalisation of work in one’s vocation, the market-dependent mobilisation of labour power” (Habermas, 1987a: 395), though described as catalysts for the renewal of civil society, are in various ways arguments for a different kind of politics other than what Habermas advocates. For the generally critical Deborah Cook, Habermas errs in believing – or at least making his followers into believing – that “the communicative power of...a sporadically mobilised citizenry is all that is required to realise democracy’s normative ideal of self-determination”. Moreover, despite his social integration model that aims to hold against money and administrative power, Cook also accuses Habermas of conceding too much to Luhmann’s idea of autopoietic systems that retain “the most oblique forms of rational control” (Cook, 2004: 97). In other words, whether it is derived from rationalist thinking (Cook) or post-Marxist argument (Cohen and Arato), civil society is regarded as working at its best while insulating itself from the interferences from economy and state.

This view has implications for how one sees the relationship between civil-societal associations and systems. Although Habermas would not disagree that, to autonomously generate opinion, citizens must be free from the subverting influences of economy and state, he would nevertheless question the necessity of relinquishing the influence by the lifeworld members on systems. While the radicalism of Marx or Lenin has lost its appeal nowadays, is there any prospect for partnership other than zero-sum competition between citizens and systems?

When Habermas addresses the crises of the administrative and economic systems, this tend to take place in the form of reservations about money and power as steering media. However, along with the almost complete disappearance of colonisation thesis
in *Between Facts and Norms*, “influence” and “value commitment”, in the form of communicative power, while not steering media in his earlier account now takes the central stage as better objects of his communicative action analysis. This development has to do with the fact that reification does not arise *ipso facto* from the mere existence of money and power, but only in instances where the influences of the lifeworld members cannot be channelled and felt in the formation of communities, cultural reproduction and socialisation.

Even in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas acknowledges such a disparity when he argues that, even within the economy and the state, “interactions are still connected via the mechanism of mutual understanding” (Habermas, 1987a: 310), whereas in *Between Facts and Norms*, he speaks of the non-exclusive between political and economic subsystems and the lifeworld that “the money-steered economy and a power-steered administration develop out of, and only out of, the ‘society’ component of the lifeworld” (Habermas, 1996: 55-56); that is, they develop out of autopoietic law and are also encapsulated together by this law. Viewed in this way, Habermas is consistent in his belief that modernity’s better potential is actually embedded in existing practices as to allow capitalist economy and liberal democracy to continue more or less as they were, while, in light of such arrangements, subordinating political and economical systems to the rationally generated interests of civil society in such a way that citizens are the masters to define the pattern of society. All of these can be made possible only through law as the transformer that holds together civil society, economy and state.

**IX. Concluding Remarks**

What Habermas’s account of civil society prescribes is, in effect, the parts of society to be in communication with each other to reach a consensus where they construct the political public sphere. What he importantly claims is the necessity and advantage for these parts to come up with concerns of various nature. Looking back on “the great issues of the last decades”, Habermas says, civil society has been proven extremely successful in attracting attention in the media to the matters ranging from nuclear-arms race to feminism before they go on to be placed on the “public agenda” (Habermas, 1996: 381). In other words, Habermas pins his hope for a more healthy political system – as in distinction to the categories of administrative and economic subsystems – on the legitimacy that is gained by the participations of the members of society, that is, a multiplicity of civil-social associations. Ralf Dahrendorf put it well: “[T]here is such a thing as society. What is more, there has to be if we do not want to end up in a state of anomy. The word, association, also indicates the necessary element of cohesion in civil society” (Dahrendorf, 1997: 78).

In terms of theoretical significance, the political concept of the social-legal state in post-war Germany is heavily indebted to the tradition of organic-corporate reflection in which the active collaboration between social groups, by linking themselves to the political will-formation, could serve as a bridge between state and society. In this respect, many of the recent theories concerning legitimacy strongly recall Hegel, whose political philosophy can be seen to contain a collective political life. Consequentially, political thinkers after Hegel tend to argue that the political realm is ideally “a location of universal will-formation which is not categorically bound to prior concerns” (Thornhill, 2000: 13). The significance of this development in relation to the discussion of civil society is twofold. On the one hand, Habermas’s assertion in *Between Facts and Norms* that the precondition for communicative power is the existence of undeformed public spheres contains a clear echo of Hegel’s refusal to concede to technical reason. Habermas shares with Hegel the conception of a political order that is characterised by the necessity of taking national solidarity into account. Hence the emergence of civil society. On the other hand, Hegel’s presupposition that the state is the embodiment of a higher general rationality comes to the erroneous conclusion, Habermas would contest, that the law-imposing sovereignty has ultimate say over the law-creating civil society. In fact, as Habermas’s model of circulation of power shows, the converse is the case. Self-determination of the people and the participation of citizens in decision-making processes are what are needed in genuine democracy.
For Habermas, the forms of association which characterise the technical aspect of human life are now expected to enter a sphere of action where state and society work together in the hope of achieving reconciliation, if any. This sphere of action that antedates and binds civil society into the discussion and examination of ideas is what Habermas expounds as deliberative politics.

References


