

Habermas and the Other Side of Modernity¹

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Abstract

This essay tries to critique the concept of modernity through a discussion of Jürgen Habermas' communicative rationality and modernity as an unfinished project. Habermas tried to defend modernity conceived as communicative rationality by strengthening everyday communicative action against the instrumental rationality of the economy and the state. After considering the insights of transmodernist, African, feminist and intercultural thinkers on modernity, I will try to show how the conventional understanding of modernity as progressive and reflective fails to fully address issues of otherness and domination.

Key words: Modernity, Communicative Action, Communicative Rationality

Introduction

“Modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; it has to create its normativity out of itself.”

Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*

The issue of the modern and modernity, continually surfaces behind contemporary discussions of meaning, validity, rationality, and generally truth across the disciplines. Interrogating the modern is seen as one pivotal direction in addressing the problems in human history, the contemporary world, and also humanity's future prospects. Issues ranging from slavery and colonialism, male domination, otherness, the place of institutions and scientific inquiries, all the way up to the

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emancipation of humanity from poverty, war and injustice, are all in one way or the other being connected with an analysis of the modern. But what's the modern and modernity.

Etymologically, there is an agreement that the word modern originates from the Latin terms 'modernus' and 'modo' when Christianity tried to distinguish itself from the "pagan Roman past" (Habermas2001: 131). Thus in this period Christianity depicts itself as the noble present. What's interesting in the development of the concept 'modern' is not just the ever historical process of the emergence of a present, but a now that radically tries to detach itself from the past. This is a present which tries to evolve its normative criteria and heralds its place in history as the beginning of a novelist age. Still, questions such as; when did modernity begin and has it ended, is it a project (Habermas), a historical time line or an attitude (Foucault); is modernity emancipatory or repressive and disciplinary, are we currently in a modern or postmodern age, is modernity universal or particular, does modernity need to be reformed or abandoned, are all highly debatable.

Generally, the issue of modernity is associated with the fate of reason in modern European history. Specifically modernity is related to how reason was conceived as a critical and emancipatory guide towards the ontological, social, political, technical and overall development of humanity. As Lawrence Cahoon, in his, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology* puts it, modernity sought to empower individual rationality towards mastering the mystery of humanity's existence. Thus modernity, "which places the highest premium on individual human life and freedom,... believes that such freedom and rationality will lead to social progress through virtuous, self-controlled work, creating a better material, political and intellectual life for all" (2003: 9). In the debate over modernity and the fate of human rationality, even though modernity espoused individualized, unrestrictive, reflective rationality as an emancipatory ideal; this optimism was accompanied along the way with pessimism about the destructive aspects of modern rationality. As Hoy and McCarthy put it in the context of twentieth century critical theory, while some firmly believed that the "sleep of reason produces monsters", others held that "the dream of reason produces monsters" (1994: 10). Thus, while some propagated the cultivation of human rationality to conquer the darkness of humanity's existence trapped in dogmatic traditions and authority; others pointed out what's lost in the triumph of subjectivity and the unlimited exercise of human rationality. For Steven Best, one could characterize the issue of modernity via the concept of progress. Best holds that, in modernity's progress "the structure of human time is unified and... the continuity of historical time is governed by a purpose" (2005: 4). History, is seen as a ground where humanity's existence is refined and qualitatively advanced

taking societies as a whole from ancient, to medieval, and finally to the novel modern period which manifests the highest stage in human development.

Habermas tried to approach modern society from an interdisciplinary angle, with an aim of exposing its foundations, underlying presuppositions, identifying its threats and potentials and building an emancipatory critical social theory. As James Gordon Finlayson puts it, Habermas' general project could be divided into five areas that are intrinsically related. Thus in Habermas one finds "pragmatic meaning program", "theory of communicative rationality", "the program of social theory", "the program of discourse ethics" and finally, Habermas' "program of political theory" all being related to the analysis of the modern (2005:139-142).

The success of Habermas' communicative paradigm in going beyond the objectivist/relativist dichotomy and the confines of metaphysical thinking were emphasized by Badillo and Cooke respectively. For Badillo, Habermas' communicative rationality goes beyond relativism which "carries the burden of self referential, pragmatic contradictions and paradoxes that violate our need for consistency", and objectivism that "is burdened with a foundationalism that conflicts with our consciousness of the fallibility of human knowledge" (1991: 11-12), and comes up with a rational ideal in language which has both particular and universalistic dimensions. For Cooke Habermas' concept of reason is "Postmetaphysical yet non defeatist" (1997: 37) in developing a "formal" "fallibilistic", "historical", "intersubjective", and "multi-dimensional" rationality which goes beyond mere relativism while simultaneously posing emancipatory ideals (1997: 43-44). Alongside these lines David S. Owen characterizes Habermas' discourse of modernity and communicative rationality as a new attempt to provide a firm foundation for critical social theory by appropriating linguistic ideals. Thus, for Owen, Habermas' theory of communicative action tries "to steer critical theory around the linguistic turn that has occurred in philosophy in the course of the twentieth century" (2002: 2).

The essay starts with introducing Habermas' thesis that modernity as a project of liberating oneself through the intersubjective exercise of reason is uncompleted. Habermas' attempt to situate modernity will also be discussed. After a discussion of Habermas' theory of communicative action and communicative rationality, the essay elaborates on Habermas' attempt to treat modernity as a discourse and identify two major crossroads within the discourse, one starting with Hegel, and the other with Nietzsche. In the second section, I will try to identify some of the limitations of Habermas' discourse of modernity by introducing various critics from transmodern, African, feminist and intercultural perspectives based on the conviction that modernity as a project has universal implications and that a universal dialogue on modern reason needs to be fostered. In the third section; I will try to point out the positive and negative aspects of

Habermas' discourse of modernity. Here, my aim is to come up with a discourse that is sensitive to the issues of otherness and asymmetrical power relations.

Modernity: an Unfinished Project

The central argument of Habermas' discourse of modernity is that modernity is an uncompleted project. Historically Habermas remarks "the word 'modern' in its Latin form 'modernus' was used for the first time in the late 5th century in order to distinguish the present, which had become officially Christian, from the Roman and pagan past" (1981:3). For Habermas, modernity signifies how humanity in modern European history found the space through which it could master its destiny through the exercise of its rationality. It signifies a project of consciously instituting one's destiny through the intersubjective exercise of reason. Modernity is also uncompleted since Habermas thinks that problems encountering modernity like the colonization of the lifeworld³ could be solved by appealing to and strengthening the lifeworld and its emancipatory potentials found in the three validity claims, from power, money and other forms of instrumental rationality. Thus Habermas adds "I think that instead of giving up modernity and its project as a lost cause, we should learn from the mistakes of those extravagant programs which have tried to negate modernity" (1981:11).

Habermas's discourse of modernity could generally be viewed as a process of secularization or the opening up of a space through which modern individuals could raise their claims to truth. Habermas begins his characterization of modernity by a discussion of the rationalization of the lifeworld found in Weber's sociology of religion. Thus in the transition from pre-modern to modern societies "the demythologization of worldviews means the desocialization of nature and the denaturalization of society" (Habermas, 1984, 48). In his sociology of religion, Max Weber talks of how the abandonment and distancing from religious accounts led to a process of rationalization in the West. Rationalization here is understood "as the separation of the substantive reason expressed in religion and metaphysics into three autonomous spheres. They are: science, morality and art. These came to be differentiated because the unified world conceptions of religion and metaphysics fell apart" (Habermas 1981: 8). Thus, in Habermas, we have an account of the emergence of three value spheres oriented towards solving specific issues and three validity claims where "In their interpretive accomplishments the members of a communication community demarcate the one objective world and

³ Habermas identifies by the colonization of the lifeworld, the process through which the instrumental rationality of the state and economy threatens every day communication.

their intersubjectively shared social world from the subjective worlds of individuals” (1984:70).

Habermas also tried to appropriate Kohlberg’s development psychology into the discourse of modernity. Kohlberg sketched three stages through which the moral development of children goes. Thus in Kohlberg one finds, “the preconventional level, on which only the consequences of action are judged, the conventional level, on which the orientation to norms and the intentional violation of them are already judged, and finally the postconventional level, on which norms themselves are judged in the light of principles” (Habermas, 1987, 174). When we come to Habermas’ discourse of modernity, Habermas using Kohlberg argues that in terms of their competence i.e. their ability to forward contestable claims to truth, modern societies have moved from ‘conventional’ to ‘postconventional’ morality. Habermas establishes the reason why the issue of modernity was articulated in philosophy by arguing that “as the custodian of reason, philosophy conceives modernity as a child of the Enlightenment” (2001: 133).

Modernity and Communicative Rationality

Habermas takes modernity to be a development of communicative rationality which is the result of everyday communicative action in modern societies. In connection to this, Habermas argues that all the major philosophical orientations that were developed in the modern period have failed. From Habermas’ point of view, the divisions between empirical and transcendental, Being and beings, noumenal and phenomenal, all point to the fact that, the reason of the modern project is ‘exhausted’. The solution is making the move to communicative rationality and intersubjectivity. Hence Habermas remarks that, “[t]he paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness is exhausted. If this is so, the symptoms of exhaustion should dissolve with the transition to the paradigm of mutual understanding” (1987: 296).

The essence of communicative rationality lies in how language coordinates actions; how actors in an intersubjective communicative process tend to respect some rules and in the process how understanding is to be achieved. In volume one of his well celebrated work: *The theory of communicative action*, Habermas heralds the threefold nature of his theory of communicative action. He conceives communicative action as the basis of everyday communication, part of a conception of the world which consists of a shared background of meaning and sphere of instrumental rationality, and finally as an attempt to explain and provide solutions to modern society’s problems. Thus he argues “the concept of Communicative action is developed in the first set [as] a concept of

communicative rationality that is sufficiently skeptical in its development but is nevertheless resistant to cognitive-instrumental abridgments of reason; second, a two-level concept of society that connects the 'lifeworld' and 'system' paradigms in more than a rhetorical fashion; and finally, a theory of modernity that explains the type of social pathologies that are today becoming increasingly visible" (1984: x1).

In the communicative paradigm, when a speech act is forwarded, the one to which it is directed, recognizes it and thereby offers a reply establishing an intersubjective communicative process. Thus in communicative rationality "participants overcome their merely subjective views and, owing to the mutuality of rationally motivated conviction, assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworld"(Habermas 1984:10). What makes this communicative process possible are the shared backgrounds of meanings and idealizing presuppositions that guide communicative processes, and also the fact that those in communication are, oriented towards consensus. This differs radically from the paradigm of consciousness where a relation is to be established to an objective possible state of affairs. Habermas thinks that in the communicative paradigm, the subject is no longer viewed as being divided between empirical and transcendental domains. Accordingly, Habermas claims that in communicative rationality, "no mediation is possible between the extramundane stance of the transcendental I and the intermundane stance of the empirical I" (1987:297). The ego finds itself in an intersubjective communicative arena and affirms itself by presenting its validity claims.

For Habermas, a speech act as the smallest unit of everyday communication, serves as a platform for raising validity claims, or the claims of individuals in asserting that what they are claiming is true and that they can provide reasons for it in relation to the objective, social and subjective worlds. Hence, the "ego stands within an interpersonal relationship that allows him to relate to himself as a participant in an interaction from the perspective of alter" (Habermas 1987: 297). This differs from subject-object metaphysics where everything becomes a possible state of affair to be known in the objective world. Instead in communicative rationality, the ego becomes the one which founds its claims in a world of other possible claims, oriented towards the objective, social and subjective dimensions. Thus in the communicative paradigm, "both ego, who raises a validity claim with his utterance, and alter, who recognizes or rejects it, base their decisions on potential grounds or reasons" (Habermas 1984: 287).

For Habermas, just as in everyday speech acts, there are three distinct claims to truth and reality, also the lifeworld as forming the context within which everyday communicative practice takes place has three major parts. First, there is what Habermas calls 'culture'. It is the "stock of knowledge from which

participants in communication supply themselves with interpretations as they come to an understanding about something in the world”(1987: 138). It’s the common knowledge that one draws on in such communicative practices. Secondly, there is ‘society’. It’s “the legitimate orders through which participants regulate their memberships in social groups and thereby secure solidarity” (1987: 138). This is the sense of common identity or oneness that those residing within a community share. Finally one finds ‘personality’ which is “the competences that make a subject capable of speaking and acting, that put him in a position to take part in processes of reaching understanding and thereby to assert his own identity”(1987: 138). This constitutes the kinds of assumptions that leave out a space for individuals to distance themselves from commonality. This is achieved by individuals spelling out their positions and hence, affirming themselves. Thus the lifeworld is continually modified by inputs from everyday practice. Habermas maintains that cultural reproduction’ guarantees that the lifeworld is continually renewed forming the horizon for the discussions of individuals in everyday communicative practice. Thus ‘social integration’, “[t]akes care of the coordination of action by means of legitimately regulated relationships and lends constancy to the identity of groups” (1987: 344). Finally, through socialization the actions of individuals are continually merged with that of the lifeworld. Habermas further asserts that there is another level of social integration in what he calls the ‘system’, which is a sphere of instrumental rationality found in the economy and the state. Thus “the fundamental problem of social theory is how to connect in a satisfactory way the two conceptual strategies indicated by the notions of ‘system’ and ‘lifeworld’ ”(1987:151).

Communicative rationality is a process through which individuals participate in a mutual search for the truth and are hence primal, and also one in which, it’s the communicative process that leads to the affirmation of individuality. Habermas remarks; “in the structurally differentiated lifeworld, we merely acknowledge a principle that was in operation from the beginning: to wit that socialization takes place in the same proportion as individuation just as inversely, individuals are constituted socially” (1987: 347). Hence, the role played by tradition in keeping society intact is replaced by an intersubjective process through which the lifeworld is continually being reflected upon. In the process individuals find themselves in an intersubjective communicative process that affirms both individuality and communality. Instead of subjecting individuals to different relations of production and envisaging their emancipation in a class struggle, Habermas asserts that the main task of a critical theory of society should be strengthening everyday communicative practices from the instrumental rationality. Hence for Habermas, social pathologies facing modern society like the “loss of meaning, conditions of anomie, and psychopathologies are... results ...of

economic and bureaucratic rationality, of cognitive instrumental forms of rationality generally” (1987: 348). Here, Habermas is speaking of the colonization of the lifeworld. But what is the colonization of the lifeworld? For Habermas “the thesis of internal colonization states that the subsystems of the economy and state become more and more complex as a consequence of capitalist growth, and penetrate ever deeper into the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld” (1987: 367).

For Habermas, as a way of providing solutions to modern societies, simply offering deconstructive readings on the philosophy of the subject is not enough, on the contrary a completely new paradigm must be proposed. Here, Habermas remarks, “a paradigm only loses its force, when it is negated in a determinate manner by a different paradigm, that is, when it is devalued in an insightful way; it is certainly resistant to any simple invocation of the extinction of the subject” (1987: 310). Habermas tries to introduce an alternative critique of logos in his communicative paradigm. As he sees it, this critique tries to put reason in touch with the historical and the finite, sees language as coordinating the actions of individuals and serving as a communicative platform and finally views the ‘logocentrism’ of the philosophical tradition as weakening the implicit communicative potentials already found in modern societies. The communicative paradigm strictly opposes the insistence of the philosophical tradition in being oriented towards only the objective world of possible states of affairs and thereby excluding the social and subjective ones. As Habermas sees it, in the previous paradigm, “ontologically the world is reduced to the world of entities as a whole ...epistemologically; our relationship to that world is reduced to the capacity to know existing states of affairs... Semantically, it is reduced to fact stating discourse in which assertoric sentences are used and no validity claim is admitted besides propositional truth” (1987:311). Habermas goes on to look at the consequences of the communicative paradigm he has just outlined to “(a) the theory of meaning (b) the ontological presuppositions of the theory of communication, and (c) the concept of rationality itself ... to a new orientation for the critique of instrumental reason” (1987: 312).

A. Consequences for the Theory of Meaning.

The truth condition semantics theory of meaning, tries to locate meaning in terms of specifying “conditions under which it is true” (Habermas 1987: 312). But this kind of analysis, limits meaning to that of propositional truth. Habermas accepts the claim of truth conditional semantics theory, that meaning needs to be situated and explicated in terms of its practical use in day to day life. But whereas truth condition semantics focuses on the relation to the objective world, Habermas purports to explain the three distinct validity claims that are found in a speech act.

Hence, according to Habermas, “it holds true not only for constative speech acts, but for any given speech act, that we understand its meaning when we know the conditions under which it can be accepted as valid” (1987: 313).

B. Consequences for the Theory of Communication.

If with the rejection of linguistic theories that restrict meaning to objective reality, we are to arrive at a conclusion that there are three distinct validity claims i.e. constative, regulative and expressive, then this also has consequences for the philosophy of consciousness. This philosophical orientation holds that the world is populated with possible objects and that in either communicating or cognizing the world, humans try to relate and raise claims to these possible states of affairs. But, if we are to accept that in every communication, in every speech act, one employs three distinct claims to truth, then the paradigm of philosophy of consciousness loses its value. Accordingly, as Habermas sees it, “with any speech act, the speaker takes up a relation to something in the objective world, something in the common social world, and something in his own subjective world” (1987: 313-314).

C. Consequences for Theories of Rationality

In the previous paradigm, rationality refers to orienting oneself to the possible world of objects and trying to cognize and expresses our truths in language. Habermas makes a plea for rejecting this understanding, and instead views rationality as a process of forwarding contestable and defensible claims to truth in language relating to the objective, social and subjective worlds. Habermas argues “as soon as we conceive of knowledge as communicatively mediated, rationality is assessed in terms of the capacity of responsible participants in interaction to orient themselves in relation to validity claims geared to intersubjective recognition” (1987: 314).

D. Consequences for a Critique of Instrumental Rationality

The orientation of the philosophical tradition towards a world of possible entities and the exaggerated role of the isolated subject are results of the undermining of the communicative paradigm. Hence “subject-centered reason is the product of division and usurpation, indeed of a social process in the course of which a subordinated moment assumes the place of the whole, without having the power to assimilate the structure of the whole” (Habermas 1987: 315). The critics of modern society failed to acknowledge that it was in the background of an intersubjective communicative process that instrumental rationality arose. Habermas claims, “[t]he communicative potential of reason has been simultaneously developed, and distorted in the course of capitalist modernization”

(1987: 315). Generally Habermas characterizes modern societies as the hosts of public spheres, and he sought to locate this in everyday centers of communication. Modern societies, are such that through,

technologies of communication such as book publishing and the press, first of all and then radio and television make utterances available for practically any context, and make possible a highly differentiated network of public spheres local and transregional, literary, scientific, could political within parties or associations, media dependent sub cultural (Habermas 1987: 359-60).

Habermas and the two Pathways in the Discourse of Modernity

In his famous work *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Habermas presented modernity as a set of conversations amongst the greatest philosophers and social theorists of the modern period. This was his way of giving an insight into what the modern world looks like and also identifying the shortcomings of the major thinkers. Starting from Hegel to Postmodernism the rational communicative potential found in modern societies was not fully developed.

For Habermas, Hegel was the first philosopher who tried to articulate the concept of modernity in his own philosophical system. Thus following Arnold Ruge Habermas maintains that Hegelian philosophy is distinct in “elevating contemporary history to the rank of philosophy, he put the eternal in touch with the transitory, the atemporal with what is actually going on” (1987: 51). Hegel developed the idea of modernity in two senses, “epochal and chronological”, and also as the arrival of the last stage in human history. Qualitatively, Hegel saw the present as the beginning of the process of progress and development. Thus Hegel remarks “‘Freedom,’ ... has never been more clearly known and felt than in modern times” (2001: 33). Again he adds that the current stage constitutes “the last stage in history” (Hegel 2001: 462). Also, historically speaking, Hegel standing at the beginning of the nineteenth century saw the last three centuries i.e. sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth and historical facts of the discoveries, the renaissance and the reformation as effecting a break with the medieval period. Thus, “the year 1500 constituted the epochal threshold between modern times and the middle ages” (Habermas 1987:5).

Furthermore Hegel raised the issue of modernity’s normativity or from where modernity derives its normative criteria. Hegel also expressed the principle of subjectivity or infinite worth of the individual which is established through the Reformation, Enlightenment and the French Revolution as the key characteristic feature of modernity. Hegel argues “the right of the subject’s particular being to

find himself satisfied, the right, in other words, of subjective freedom, constitutes the middle or turning-point between the ancient and the modern world” (2001: 107). Still, as Habermas sees it in Hegel, reason is depicted as an overarching and overwhelming force behind the contradictions in actual history. Thus the various stages in the development of consciousness are devalued. The current existing reality, which has a potential for critique is devalued, since it’s held to be part of a greater whole i.e. the progress of history towards absolute spirit.

Out of Hegel, two paths in modernity developed.

These were the right Hegelians who tried to demonstrate that a universal reason manifests itself objectively in the state, religion and other forms, and the left Hegelians who emphasized the concrete, finite and sensible as a crucial aspect of modernity. Hegel and the Hegelians still haven’t lost faith in reason’s capacity to increase our understanding of the world and our lives, both theoretically and practically. Thus in Hegel and Hegelianism “Enlightenment can only make good its deficits by radicalized enlightenment” (Habermas 1987: 84). For Habermas, the major significance of the young Hegelians, lies in further establishing the discourse of modernity by a way of freeing it from an oppressive, absolutist, omnipresent reason of Hegelian philosophy. Accordingly, for Habermas, “we remain contemporaries of the young Hegelians” in trying to free philosophy and its meditation of the actual from an absolutist metaphysical reason that supposedly manifests itself in thought’s and history’s contradictions (1987:53).

As Habermas sees it, until Nietzsche a radical break with modernity was not achieved. Nietzsche heralds the radical nature of his philosophy in his *Beyond Good and Evil* when he remarks “supposing truth is a woman. What then? Are there not grounds for the suspicion that all philosophers, in so far as they were dogmatists, have been very inexpert about women” (1989: 1)? Habermas understands Nietzsche’s starting point for an analysis of modern society, as a critique of a passive, contemplative, ascetic orientation towards life. As Nietzsche sees it in the *Genealogy of Morals* “the ascetic treats life as a wrong track along which one must retrace one’s steps to the point at which it begins ; or as a mistake which one rectifies through action”(2008: 96). Knowledge has been divorced from practical necessities and the needs of a society. Generally, modern thinking has lost its capacity to provide humanity with an ideal that can affirm this life. Thus as Habermas sees it for Nietzsche “from ourselves we moderns have nothing at all” (1987: 86).

In Nietzsche’s later philosophy the notion of the ‘will to power’ takes primary importance. This ‘will to power’ is the force of life that animates humanity’s urge to create meanings that affirm and guide its life. In speaking of

will to power Nietzsche remarks in his *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, “the river is not your danger and the end of your good and evil, you wisest ones; but this will itself, the will to power- the unexhausted begetting will of life” (2006: 88). Habermas claims that Nietzsche uses the ‘will to power’ to decipher the nature of our social organizations and arrangements, narratives and mythologies, our self image, the image of the world found in the greatest philosophical traditions, scientific inquiries, religions and so on. Thus Nietzsche maintains “wherever I found the living, there I found the will to power; and even in the will of the serving I found the will to be master” (2006: 89). Nietzsche called for a transcending of the ‘last’ or ‘modern man’ who is on the verge of Nihilism. The ‘overman’ is a creator of values and an ideal that transcends uncivilized, brutish and cruel ancient morality and also the current ‘last’ man who is rational but weak. Thus for Nietzsche “human being, however, is something that must be overcome” (2006: 216). The ‘overman’ affirms ‘Eternal Recurrence’ or recognizes that there is no final stage where dominance will be established in life once and for all. The problem of existence, continual struggle and trying to fit into the schema of nature is not something that’s going to be overcome once and for all. Thus for Nietzsche “the knot of causes in which I am entangled recurs-it will create me again” (2006: 178).

Habermas holds that, Nietzsche’s Dionysian motif or the attempt to seek an ideal in the enigmatic other of reason was further developed in Heidegger’s philosophy of Being and Derrida’s differance. Heidegger critiqued modernity through a Dionysian inspired issue of Being as such. Heidegger saw Being as the other of metaphysical reason. Habermas maintains “only Being, as distinguished from beings by way of hypostatization, can take over the role of Dionysus” (1987: 135). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger sought to reawaken Being in a being that has an onto-ontological significance i.e. *Dasein*. Heidegger was against conceiving Being as a “thing, substance or subject” (1985: 85). As Heidegger sees it, *Dasein* is the only being whose being is at issue and it inquires into Being by inquiring the Being of one’s being. As, Heidegger puts it in *Being and Time*, “*Dasein* is an entity which does not just occur among other entities rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its very being, that Being is an issue for it” (1987: 32). As Habermas sees it, the notion of a lifeworld in which communicative rationality could be built is not developed in Heidegger because “from the start he degrades the background structures of the lifeworld that reach beyond the isolated *Dasein* as structures of an average everyday existence, that is, of inauthentic *Dasein*” (Habermas 1987, 149).

Besides Heidegger, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida tried to develop Nietzsche’s Dionysus through his notion of differance. As Derrida puts it in his *Writing and Difference*, “to say that *différance* is originary is simultaneously to

erase the myth of a present origin. Which is why 'originary' must be understood as having been crossed out, without which *différance* would be derived from an original plenitude? It is a non-origin which is originary" (2005: 255). In his notion of *différance*, Derrida argued that meaning is established in a set of differences from other words, (so difference), and also one cannot get at absolute meaning since meaning is always delayed and transferred to another word that made the meaning of the word in analysis, possible. Thus, meaning is also deferred. Derrida's 'différance' can be further elaborated by what he calls 'arche-writing'. As Derrida put it in *of Grammatology* "this arche-writing would be at work not only in the form and substance of graphic expression but also in those of nongraphic expression. It would constitute not only the pattern uniting form to all substance, graphic or otherwise, but the movement of the sign-function linking a content to an expression, whether it be graphic or not"(1997: 122). Beyond claiming that, one can not isolate a sign from the system of other signs and claiming that one can never arrive at the absolute meaning of a sign, Derrida goes on to claim that its an infinite process of referring to other things in terms of space and time that makes things visible, that makes language, speaking and writing possible. What Derrida means by 'arche-writing' is not the idea of writing as we conceive it commonly e.g. writing on a paper. 'arche-writing' is the already existence of things in system of difference. It is the heterogeneity that makes possible the grasping of things in terms of their relation to each other. Derrida further maintains "this arche-writing, although its concept is invoked by the themes of 'the arbitrariness of the sign' and of difference, cannot and can never be recognized as the object of a science. It is that very thing which cannot let itself be reduced to the form of presence" (1997: 119).

Against Habermas, Derrida argued that every day communication is characterized by deferrals of meaning and artistic usages of language. Derrida further added that, the idea of a pure discourse is fictitious and that all discourses should be analyzed as literature. Derrida maintains "Criticism, if it is called upon to enter into explication and exchange. With literary writing, somebody will not have to wait for this resistance first to be organized into a 'philosophy' which would govern some methodology of aesthetics whose principles criticism would receive. For philosophy, during its history has been determined as the reflection of poetic inauguration" (2005: 33). Habermas against Derrida holds that (1) the fact that we are oriented towards understanding, the guide of idealizing presuppositions, the fact that speech acts are open to critique and artistic usages of language are parasitic⁴, prevents deferrals of meaning in every day

⁴ .By 'parasitic', Habermas develops his idea that the normal use of language in everyday communication is for reaching understanding. Other artistic, metaphorical

communication. (2) artistic elements of language are found in every form of discourse but are still subordinated to other forms of argumentation except in poetic discourse (3) Derrida's Notion of Arche-writing is metaphysical in being foundationalist (4) Derrida is trying to avoid performative contradiction⁵ in leveling the Genre distinction between philosophy and literature, and finally (5) Derrida failed to distinguish between the world disclosing and problem solving capacity of language. Thus in the final analysis, Habermas holds against Derrida that "[w]hoever transposes the radical critique of reason into the domain of rhetoric in order to blunt the paradox of self preferentiality, also dulls the sword of the critique of reason itself" (1987:210).

Nietzsche's "will to power" was further developed in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Bataille's Hetrogeneous and Foucault's critique of modernity as a disciplinary power. Horkheimer and Adorno followed Nietzsche in arguing that the development of the subjects is of the suppression of instincts. At the beginning of their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Horkheimer and Adorno hold "in the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant" (1982: 3).

Horkheimer and Adorno's concept of the Enlightenment, tries to show how there is an intrinsic relation between myth and Enlightenment, and that one could even 'relapse' into the other. In the development of the subject, myths and enlightenment provide two ways of relating to the world. Myths were seen as collective ways of being, tracing meaning to uncritical grounds. Enlightenment on the contrary represented an individualistic, rational and future oriented outlook towards the world. Hence, myth gains its identity standing in relation to Enlightenment, and vice versa. The Enlightenment's rise for Horkheimer and Adorno is related to a superseding and surpassing of mythic grounds. For Horkheimer and Adorno, humanity's attempts at survival led in the final stage to

and non-literal usages of language are derived from the normal usage. Further, even though 'parasitic' usages of language prevail in everyday communication; still actors are able to bypass these usages since they are oriented towards reaching understanding.

⁵ Habermas characterizes the wholesale rejection of the reason of the modern project in terms of what he calls, 'performative contradiction'. For instance, Heidegger used concepts, terms distinctions and categories of the metaphysical tradition as his tools of critique, while criticizing the tradition. Postmodernism tried to reject the reason of the modern project as being anarchistic and repressive amongst other things. But, this is to be contradicted in what these postmodernist critiques are doing in practice which is, making normative claims and employing rational tools of analysis.

an instrumental rationality that damaged other ways of relating to the world of objects and other subjects, and managed to establish instrumental rationality as the only way of relating to the world. Thus, “Enlightenment behaves toward things as a dictator toward men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them” (Horkheimer and Adorno 1982: 9). Habermas asserts that, in developing a critical theory of society that denounces reason while simultaneously utilizing it, Horkheimer and Adorno are left just like Nietzsche in an uncomfortable position i.e. what is the basis of critique. If all reason is exploitation then how could reason be used to emancipate society? Thus for Habermas “the dialectic of Enlightenment does not do justice to the rational content of cultural modernity that was captured in bourgeois ideals (and also instrumentalized along with them)” (1987:113).

Georges Bataille following Nietzsche argued that life is will to power and that the dominant will to power excludes by setting up conventions. In the *Accursed Share* Bataille maintains “the serious humanity of growth becomes civilized, more gentle, but it tends to confuse gentleness with the value of life, and life's tranquil duration with its poetic dynamism” (1988: 46). Bataille focused in a postmetaphysical world where worldly ideals suppress the heterogeneous experience by setting up conventions. Thus as Habermas sees it “Bataille does not delude himself about the fact that there is nothing left to profane in modernity” (1987: 215). Bataille analyzed modernity in terms of how a one sided focus on reason led to conventional norms, values and standards. Rather than trying to modify the modern project by criticizing its rationality, Bataille focused on going beyond the ethics of modernity by a violent force that goes beyond fixed boundaries. Hence; “Bataille seeks an economics of the total social ecology of drives” (Habermas 1987: 217). Bataille sought emancipation in his ‘heterology’ which constitutes the science of the heterogeneous experience. Thus for Bataille “in nature there is no artificial fattening of the –newborn- the excess energy provides for the growth or the turbulence of individuals” (1988:28). For Habermas, in the final analysis, Bataille like Nietzsche is faced with the problem of trying to go beyond reason, and the limits set by norms but still not being able to come up with a theory that can comprehend this.

Michel Foucault further developed Nietzsche’s will to power in trying to identify the power relations within which subjectivity is constituted. In comparing conceptions of power in the modern and pre-modern periods Foucault asserts that rather than having an external force which has immediate control over the life of individuals in classical age, one finds the emergence of a disciplinary power in modern societies. Thus for Foucault “since the classical age the West has undergone a very profound transformation of these mechanisms of power. ‘Deduction’ has tended to be no longer the major form of power but merely one

element among others, working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it” (1990: 136).

Foucault elaborated on his Archaeological method which tries to identify the underlying epistemic structures within which the subject is constituted. In speaking of the Archeological method Foucault maintains “what I am doing is neither formalization nor an exegesis. But an archeology: that is to say, as its name indicates only too obviously, the description of the record - the rules which at a given period and for a definite society defined” (1972: 234). In Foucault’s later works one finds Genealogy which views history as a directionless process which witnesses the rise and fall of diverse discursive formations. In trying to explore an alternative which goes beyond the metaphysical tradition Foucault argues “I have tried to get out from the philosophy of the subject through a genealogy of this subject, by studying the constitution of the subject across history which has led us up to the modern concept of the self” (1993: 202). Still for Habermas; Foucault’s approach is “presentistic, relativistic, cryptonormative” (1987:275-276). For Habermas Foucault’s whole project is presentistic since its starting point is that the various forms of knowledge are also immersed in power relationships. Furthermore upon a closer analysis Foucault’s genealogy only turns out to be relative power/knowledge nexus. Finally Foucault’s genealogy is not value free since it has sympathy for those who are abandoned and excluded by the dominant discourse.

Critics outside Habermas’s Discourse of Modernity

In this section, I will briefly introduce critics from transmodern, African, feminist and intercultural perspectives with an aim of highlighting some of the implications and negative aspects of the rationalization of the occident as discussed in Habermas’ discourse of modernity.

The transmodernist critique of modernity as espoused by Enrique Dussel basically charges modernity as being Eurocentric and thus failing to deconstruct Western hegemony. Dussel’s transmodernity constitutes first an exposition of a biased, oppressive, rationality that establishes itself in relation to a suppressed other, and secondly, new relations with citizens of the world that involves relations amongst equals (Dussel: 2008). Dussel charges prominent Western philosophers like Habermas and Taylor for assuming that modernity is “essentially or exclusively a European phenomenon” (1993: 65). Some Eurocentric philosophers asserted directly that modernity’s origin and development is limited to the West, while others try to show that the West, especially Europe, is the culmination of a process of world progress and refinement. Here Dussel remarks “[t]here is no liberation without rationality, but

there is no critical rationality without accepting the interpellation of the excluded, or this would inadvertently be only the rationality of domination” (1996: 36). Hence, with the inauguration of modernity, Dussel witnesses, both the coming to the scene of a Eurocentric rationality that tries to impose itself as the universal standard, and also the suppression of an ‘other’ which is conceived as the other of an enlightened modern Europe.

Dussel thinks that beyond failing to acknowledge the inauguration of modernity in relation to a utilized and suppressed other, the greatest threat of Eurocentric modernity lies in the fact that Europe still considers itself as the model to be imitated and the highest stage in the development of humanity towards progressive ways of being. Dussel calls this, the “fallacy of developmentalism” and it states that “the path of Europe’s modern development must be followed unilaterally by every other culture” (1993: 67-68). For Dussel, Eurocentrism passes all the way to Habermas’ communicative rationality. Habermas echoes Hegel in assuming that the modern age develops on the ground laid by movements like “Reformation, the Enlightenment and the French revolution,” and also ignoring the fact that modern Europe defined itself in relation to a degraded, exploited, manipulated other through its imperialism (Dussel, 1993: 74). Under “the myth of modernity” Dussel summarizes the seven assumptions behind Eurocentric modernity. These include; (1) Europe constitutes the most refined form of humanity and the most developed stage in human history. (2) Europe carries the burden of Enlightening the uncivilized. (3) Europe has gone through the movement from ancient, medieval to the modern period (from traditional authority to public reasoning) that it preaches to its other. (4) Europe has the right to modernize the backward world by any means necessary. (5) “[T]his violence which produces victims, takes on all most ritualistic character.” (6) The other of Europe is in a “state of guilt,” for it’s not yet modernized. Hence, modernity imposes itself on the primitive other. (7) This other may be the “immature, [Or the] weaker sex” (1993: 75).

The issue of whether African philosophy exists, what forms it takes and what its very existence means to the dominant philosophical paradigms is of great importance when discussing the fate of reason in the modern period. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze saw an intrinsic relation with the modern European concept of reason which contains within its tenets both the European notion of the self and the world, and the physical and ideological conquest of the African. Thus Eze maintains “the single most important factor that drives the field and the contemporary practice of African/a philosophy has to do with the brutal encounter of the African world with European modernity - an encounter optimized in the colonial phenomena” (1997: 4). For Eze, contemporary African philosophy needs to address the tragic history it shares with modern Europe. To this extent, Eze

argued that modernity and colonialism cannot be separated. In the modern period “calculative rationality” which fostered instrumental relations to the world was developed, and this was particularly destructive to the fate of the African (Eze 2008: 25).

Eze conceptualizes ‘colonization’ as the degradation of the African way of being which was established through physical coercion, philosophical conceptions of rationality and currently an indirect rule through ideas. Eze holds “by ‘colonialism’ we should understand the indescribable crisis disproportionately suffered and endured by the African peoples in their tragic encounter with the European world, from the beginning of the fifteenth century through the end of the nineteenth to the first half of the twentieth ” (1997: 4). Thus, the concept of ‘colonialism’ designates the historical context through which Europeans came to Africa in the name of commerce, started slavery, forcefully colonized the continent, and planted the ideas through which they continually manipulate the African.

For Eze, behind the greatest modern European philosophies and philosophers, was held an exclusivist assumption that Europe possessed the greatest achievements in human history, and that it should be imitated. For these views “Europe is the model of humanity, culture, and history in itself” (Eze 1997: 6). Eze holds that, African philosophy labors under a betrayal of modern reason which meant freedom and emancipation for the European, and exploitation for the other. Furthermore, the Eurocentric assumptions are being echoed in the dominant philosophical, artistic, literary and economic models these days which all posited Europe as the normative ideal. Thus for Eze, “the idea of the modern is a problem not only on account of its colonial roots or branches but also on account of conceptions of history in modern social thought” (2008: 187). In the final analysis, Eze maintains that the logical outcomes of the instrumental rationality of the modern period in the exploitation of the African as well as the ever emerging historical nature of rationality with human choices must continually be reaffirmed. Thus for Eze, “it is not only that modern humanity has forgotten the histories of its own reason; we have also forgotten the meaning of the forgetting” (2008: 49).

Following Eze an analogous critique of Eurocentric modernity was formulated by Mogobe Ramose. Ramose offered a profound critique of the Enlightenment and of modern reason in his attempt to situate the exclusion of the African within the larger context of how reason excludes by creating categories of the rational and non-rational. For Ramose, in the Enlightenment’s attempt to free rationality from the bonds of tradition and authority, one finds the ultimate realization of “Aristotle’s famous definition: ‘man is a rational animal’ ” (2007: 9). The celebrated rationality of the human being was predicated on the mind/matter dualism where thinking was only ascribed to the European, whereas

Africans were degraded to the status of corporeal entities devoid of any rational inclinations. Ramose inaugurates the “authentic liberation of Africa” as a “two-fold” task (2007: 36). Critique starts with a questioning of “European epistemological paradigm” implanted on the African through colonialism, developed in the Enlightenment and still functioning to yield the exploitation of the African. Secondly, there is a need to participate in the creation of a “common universe of discourse” which renders justice for the oppressed taking into account asymmetrical power relations which led to the impoverished condition of the African (2007: 36).

For another philosopher Peter Amato, Modernity provides the theoretical guidelines through which the colonization of the African was practically facilitated. Amato holds “Wrapped up in the question regarding African philosophy is a whole series of questions regarding African and European modernity, and the ways that conceptions of modernity have been employed to facilitate colonization” (Eze 1997: 72). Amato specifically tries to look at the modern-traditional dichotomy introduced by modern Europeans. Accordingly “in the modern era of European philosophy, modernity appropriated knowledge for itself along with science, and left only dogma, mysticism, and mythology (also excluded from knowledge) for culture and tradition to be concerned with” (Eze 1997: 74). Modernity degraded the status of religion and mythology as the irrational and non-Western societies were portrayed as following ritualistic, religious and mythological ways of being. On the contrary, modern Europe and its rationality were developed as reflectively individualistic and as representing the most refined forms of civilization in human history.

The modern/traditional dichotomy also emerges as one aspect of Mudimbe’s discussion of the ‘colonizing structure’. In *The invention of Africa* Mudimbe characterizes the ‘colonizing structure’ as the general body of theoretical and practical knowledge which facilitated the physical and mental conquest of the African. This consists of forceful conquest of the continent, penetration of ideological constructs in the African mind and finally radical adaptation of indigenous forms of life to alien ways of being. “Thus, three complementary hypotheses and actions emerge: the domination of physical space, the reformation of native minds, and the integration of local economic histories into the Western perspective” (Mudimbe 1988: 2). For Mudimbe the notion of the modern emerges as part of the body of knowledge which managed to negate the African. This structure developed a binary system where progress meant a movement from one part of the binary to the other. Mudimbe holds, “because of the colonizing structure, a dichotomizing system has emerged, and with it a great number of current paradigmatic oppositions have developed: traditional versus modern; oral versus written and printed; agrarian and customary communities versus highly

productive economies” (1988: 4). For Mudimbe the path of progress typified by a movement from one part of the dichotomy to the other is characterized by forceful mechanisms introduced by the ‘colonizing structure’ to annihilate African ways of being and accelerate transition into the advanced West. Thus, Mudimbe maintains, “marginality designates the intermediate space between the so called African tradition and the projected modernity of colonialism” (1988: 5). From Mudimbe’s discussions one could learn that transitions are not neutral and that on the contrary power relations are exhibited. Thus for the African, it is not just a matter of becoming modern but being forced into becoming one.

Another African philosopher who saw an inherent relation between modernity and degradation of the Africans is Tsenay Serequeberhan. For Serequeberhan, the underlying assumption behind modern European reason is the belief that Europe represents the highest stage in human history and that it should be followed. To this extent, Serequeberhan maintains that “Broadly speaking Eurocentrism is a pervasive bias located in modernity’s self consciousness of itself. It is grounded at its core in the metaphysical belief of idea (Idee) that European existence is qualitatively superior to other forms of human life” (Eze 1997: 142). Serequeberhan generally called for an interrogation of Western texts, with an aim of exposing their centric, biased understandings. This will lead to identifying what was imposed on others through Western supremacy. The other of Europe, in this case Africa needs to redefine itself by continually reflecting on inherited horizons. In the final analysis, Serequeberhan holds that one needs to “recognize and de-structure the speculative metaphysical underpinnings of the Eurocentric constraints that have held us – and still hold us- in bondage” (Eze 1997: 157).

Besides criticisms from transmodernist and African perspectives, Habermas’ discourse of modernity is usually criticized for not giving sufficient attention to feminist voices, and unmasking the bias of modernity in promoting male domination. Amongst others, Mary Dietz questions the relation that Habermas portrays between communicative action where actors organize and systematize their actions by seeking agreement, and strategic action in which actors try to achieve primarily their private ends. Habermas’ distinction fails to see how the two types of actions are intertwined in everyday life. Dietz also argues that Habermas’ concept of communication is abstract, ideal and divorced from everyday relations where actors try to further their own ends. Thus everyday communicative action is conceived “as a pure sphere” (Pajnic 2006: 387). Furthermore, James Bratten introduces ‘communicative thinking’ as an alternative to communicative rationality of Habermas. While communicative rationality supposedly rests on presenting distinct claims by assuming symmetry, communicative thinking seeks unity amongst those who are excluded.

Furthermore, in communicative thinking, what is emphasized are “the complexity of everyday life, and the multiple means of action and [the] diversity of contexts of action” (Pajnic 2006: 389). Generally as Mojca Pajnic summarizes it, what the feminist critics in general try to do is broaden the scope of Habermas’ theory of rationality by showing how communicative and strategic actions are intertwined in everyday life, bringing non-verbal, non-literal communication into the focus, addressing asymmetrical power relations, and reawakening the collective memory of a culture through which its struggles are witnessed. Thus Habermas’ communicative rationality needs to go beyond a mere formulation of a “thought experiment” (2006: 400).

Using intercultural philosophy’s approach to rationality and generally the existence of philosophy in different cultures, one could question how the ideas of otherness, difference and mutuality were developed in modernity and to what extent the modern universalistic claim to truth promote or devalue otherness. The ideas of those who advocate intercultural approaches are not usually focused on modernity. Still, one thing identified by most advocates of ‘interculturality’ is that, Euro-centrism persisted throughout human history. Furthermore, it is now time to question exclusive claims to philosophizing, rationality and truth. Here, I am going to give an insight into what intercultural thinking brings to claims of rationality in general.

For Ram Adhar Mall, the idea that a single culture represents and possesses all the greatest achievements in human history and hence should be imitated is being questioned by intercultural approaches. Intercultural approaches begin with the idea that no particular culture holds all the claims to truth and that in turn, diverse claims to truth and rationality should be entertained (Mall 2000: xii). For Mall, the time has come where received conceptions of reason, truth, otherness and difference are being questioned and examined. We are more or less aware of the existence of the other. Especially in philosophy, Mall holds that, the idea of a single origin of philosophy (Greece) or of three centers (Greece, India and china) from which philosophical wisdom spreads throughout the world, needs to be questioned (2000: 1-2). Mall calls the “hermeneutic situation”; the condition in which not only the Europeans who imposed their singular claims on the rest of the world, but also the excluded and distorted are also initiating a new process where exclusionary, hegemonic and absolutistic claims are being questioned.

For another proponent of intercultural philosophy, Franz Wimmer, the challenge introduced by intercultural thinking for philosophy is the fact that philosophy raises the fundamental issues about what it means to be a human being rooted in various socio-historical contexts. For Wimmer, embedded in the encounters between different cultures, are claims to rationality. Assuming different stances on the relation of one culture to the other, intercultural

encounters could take mainly four different forms. First of all, in what Wimmer calls “expansive centrism”, a given culture assumes total possession of wisdom and tries to spread it to the inferior other (2007: 3). Secondly, in “integrative centrism”, a culture assumes that its superior models and ways of being are attractive and good enough to be imitated by the inferior other which couldn’t make a significant contribution to human civilization. Thirdly, in “separative centrism” the existence of different grounds is recognized, but still each culture assumes that learning from the other is impossible. Finally, in “tentative centrism” for which Wimmer argues, each centre is willing to engage in a polylogue and to continually remodel its views (2007: 3-4).

Examining Modernity

The discussion so far was basically focused around two major areas. First of all I tried to introduce Habermas’s thesis of modernity as an unfinished project through a discussion of communicative rationality and the major thinkers within the discourse of modernity. Secondly I tried to generate a universal discussion into the issue of modernity by drawing key insights from transmodern, African, feminist and intercultural perspectives. In this section I will try to integrate my own insights into the debate through a discussion of the positive and negative aspects of Habermas’s discourse of modernity.

Amongst others, James Gordon Finlayson tries to show how Habermas’s discourse of modernity contains both descriptive and remedial elements (Finlayson: 2005). In line with the arguments of Finlayson I argue that one of the crucial elements of Habermas’ communicative rationality that makes it strong when compared with the ideals developed throughout modernity, and the postmodern critics is that the concepts of responsibility and emancipation are highly developed in it. It is also a kind of rationality that could be both a descriptive and emancipatory critical theory of modern societies.

In Habermas’ communicative paradigm, first of all, we are responsible for history, since we are active agents and participate in an intersubjective process that empowers us. We have control over our destinies insofar as we are capable of reflecting on the background we inhabit; being able to reflect on our social structures. Secondly, there is a space for discussing modern society’s problems like anomie, meaninglessness, the holocaust and so on, by appealing to everyday language. Everyday language and communicative rationality have provided a space for discussing modern society’s problems resulting from the continuing rift between the everyday world and value spheres, and also the colonization of the lifeworld. Thirdly, there is a space in communicative rationality for envisioning emancipatory ideals. This is through strengthening everyday communicative

action, strengthening the value spheres, empowering the institutions in which the positive universal ideals of modernity are concretized and strengthening the public spheres. Thus, Habermas has found a space for a communicative rationality and a critical social theory of modern societies which is both diagnostic and could also pose emancipatory ideals.

In my opinion, perhaps one of the most important arguments of Habermas is that modernity is the horizon through which our current understanding of our lives has been developed, and that the solution is working within and through modernity. One could see modernity as a platform for understanding the positive and negative aspects of our past, to address problems facing modern society and identify its positive aspects, and finally to pose emancipatory ideals in the future. In the present state, one could invoke a discussion of modern reason and modernity to shed light on issues like the ills of capitalism and unlimited growth, the environmental crisis and instrumental relations to the world. Furthermore, one could also raise, issues of globalization and the question of homogenization or true diversity, the idea of a cosmopolitan order and the place of the nation state, terrorism as a devaluation of modern reason or response to homogenization, the ideas of 'progress' and 'development', the rise of communication technology, intercultural communications and the exchange of ideas, and so on. Only when we have deconstructed, and worked through a critique of modernity could we argue for strengthening the ideals of modernity, identifying corrosive forces or the abandoning of the modern project as a whole.

Having pointed out some of the strengths of Habermas's discourse of modernity, I will proceed to identifying some of its shortcomings. Generally I think we can raise three points in relation to the extent to which Habermas's theory of modernity addresses the concrete and material aspect of life. Even if there is a space in Habermas' communicative paradigm for responsibility, addressing modern society's problems and also providing emancipatory ideals, should still be coupled with the following critical remarks. First, Habermas failed to see how asymmetrical power relations are embedded in the lifeworld. The materials to be reflected, the common sense knowledge we have of the world and the abiding moral rules that form a sense of belongingness to a community represent the interests of the dominant. Accordingly, biased structures and meanings pass down into every day communication. Furthermore the horizon of everyday communication is limited since even though the lifeworld is continually being reflected upon, still the dominant agendas are those of the powerful. Secondly, Habermas' explanations of modern society's problems are focused on the loss of meaning, since the explanation derives from system's intrusion into the meaning giving structure of the lifeworld. This prevented Habermas from providing a sufficient account of things like slavery and colonialism which signify

primarily conflicts in the material aspect of life. Thirdly, in his account of “autonomous public spheres,” Habermas failed to realize that the same problems that haunted his, *Structural transformation of the public sphere* i.e. asymmetrical power relations resulting from the superiority of the wealthy and educated, also exist in today’s public spheres. Usually, the agendas raised in such spheres are backed by the funding institutions that impose their own interests and what’s discussed is usually what’s considered as important by intellectuals.

Habermas’s discourse of modernity is ‘Postconventional’ in advocating the need to continually reflect on our inherited backgrounds, continually reflect on the lifeworld, finding a space for communication between different lifeworlds, and generally taking a critical stance whenever we are communicating with one another. Further, Habermas’s discourse of modernity is ‘Postmetaphysical’ in going beyond the metaphysical assumptions of Western philosophy (Habermas: 1998). In his *Religion and Rationality*, Habermas explicitly argues that “Postmetaphysical thought differs from religion in that it recovers the meaning of the unconditional without recourse to God or an absolute” (2002: 102). Habermas’ approach tries to situate reason in the normal usage of language of modern societies. This is a rationality having universal elements but still reducible to specific origins. Finally Habermas also tried to emphasize the ‘postnational’ aspects of his approach. As Habermas sees it, in an age where inter-state relations are being furthered mainly through economic relations, and the growing failure of the nation state as an agent for collective realization, one asks how could the effects of especially economic globalization prepare grounds for a new kind of constellation, the postnational constellation (Habermas: 2001). Here, we could ask, how does Habermas’ secular universalism express through its postconventional, postmetaphysical and postnational motifs affect non secular and mainly non-Western societies. I will use Messay’s discussions of the strict binary form of operation typical of Western hegemony to critique Habermas’ secular modernity. Further, I will try to look at what this move into secular universalism would mean interculturally, by using the ideas of Ram Adhar Mall and Franz Wimmer.

According to Messay, all or most attempts to carve out a place for Africa in the philosophical world, have ended up reaffirming Western colonial discourse. As a result, currently African philosophy is in a dilemma (2004: 205-208). As Messay sees it, Western thought ascribed reason and philosophy to itself and myth and irrationality for its other. Most attempts in early contemporary African philosophy tried to show that Africans are also rational and that they can philosophize. In this attempt to imitate the ‘superior other’, Africans are losing what they need to affirm their existence, i.e. African orientations towards the world, involving both myth and logos. For Messay, there are no such differences

originally in possessing rationality or essences. Still, every society out of 'choice' "assigns a specific task to rationality" (2004: 208). These choices shouldn't be seen hierarchically. After rejecting that myth is knowledge and arguing that there is an ability by a given community to produce myths, Messay claims that in the heart of any civilization, as Nietzsche says, lies the ability, to invent mythologies. Furthermore, myths make us enthusiastic and interested in life while reason gives us an ability to control it (Messay 2004: 212-16). Thus, mythological components are found at the heart of all great civilizations and the profound threat of the colonial discourse to Africa is the depriving of the "power to believe" (Messay 2004: 219).

In my opinion, from Messay's discussions of African philosophy's dilemma, we can learn the dangers of subjecting every thing to reflection in a secular discourse. First of all, in such a secular discourse (as the one envisaged by Habermas) the horizons of conventional, non secular societies will be disrupted in attempting to question everything and put the given into continual examination. The given horizons and conventional ways of being will lose their importance as they are undermined by the power of reason, and in turn replaced by a secular discourse. This will lead to, secondly, the failure of conventional societies to affirm their existence. The disrupted societies will lose their ideals which are integral parts of their lives. This could result in an inability to consolidate a society's place. Finally, the conventional society which has now entered into a secular discourse will possibly imitate the secular practices and ideals crystallized in the institutions and policies of the West. We need a medium through which different cultures could converse with one another. Still, this discourse should be seen as one way of facilitating cultural encounters. Cultures and conventional societies should be able to preserve their identities.

Ram Adhar Mall, introduces a distinction between a reductive and analogous hermeneutic; one trying to reduce the other into one's ways of being and frameworks and the other trying to understand the other by looking for "analogous structural patterns that make understanding possible beyond all centrism" (2000: 5). Secularism by itself is not neutral, and it has a danger of moving non-Western, non-secular communities into the secular domains of the West. Thus I believe that, one finds traits of a reductive hermeneutics in Habermas' discourse of modernity which is highly expressed in its post-metaphysical, post-conventional and post-national motifs. Furthermore, in terms of Wimmer's discussions of centrism, in such a move towards a secular culture, I think the outcome will not be a 'tentative' centrism where all centers equally contribute and learn from one another, but an 'integrative' one where the West and its practices and institutions are the highest expressions of a secular culture, and in reality only non secular communities will be expected to imitate the advanced West. Habermas did not

give a sufficient account of the contribution of non-Western civilizations to modern Europe, how scientific, religious and moral insights were being transferred through commerce starting from ancient Greece. Instead, he simply forwards the secular tradition of modern Europe as the universal model, under the guise of an open communication carried out between equal partners.

For Habermas, following Weber and Hegel, one could argue that modernity took shape by a universal process of secularization and rationalization, and through historical movements like the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution. This ignores the fact that, amongst other things, the age of discoveries for Europe was not only a search for material inputs and economic superiority, but also the construction of Europe's other, an inferior other, against whom Europe could consolidate itself. Habermas should have focused on how the French revolution only meant liberation for male whites, and that outside of Europe, the same exploitative relations dismantled by the revolution in Europe, were, still continuing. In my opinion, Habermas also failed in identifying what Dussel calls "the fallacy of developmentalism". Developed in the modern period, and still persisting today, Europe presents itself as the ideal model, in the developmental policies it formulates. Following the arguments of Eze, as I see it, one could identify two truths about modernity that were not addressed by Habermas. First, Eze rightly pointed out that colonialism and modernity cannot be separated. Modern Europe used the colonies as a way of extracting material inputs and strengthening its greatest achievements in science, morality, the state and arts. Secondly, it was the ideas that were found at the heart of modern Europe's understanding of itself and expressed by its giant philosophers like Hegel and Kant that the justifications for colonialism and imperialism have been provided. How could one separate Hegel's idea that Europe needs colonies to spread its wisdom and solve the contradictions of capitalism from his view that Europe constitutes the highest stage in human history, and the current age of Western supremacy is the highest stage in human history. Also how could we separate Kant's division of races based on a transcendent 'germ' or 'talent' from the colonization of those possessing inferior 'talent' in practice? Eze is right in saying, "Ideas do not have meaning in a historical vacuum" (Eze 1997: 13).

Conclusion

Jürgen Habermas tried to defend modernity conceived as a process of rationalization that led to the development of a secular culture based on three validity claims in every day communication and three corresponding value spheres, by identifying and strengthening what he saw as an implicit communicative potential that's found in modern societies. Habermas' discourse of

modernity should be acknowledged for providing an account of rationality that offers a critical theory of society that analyzes modern society's problems and also proposing emancipatory ideals. Still it also needs to be sensitive to hidden agendas and asymmetrical power relations.

A universal dialogue on modern reason that takes into accounts the insights of both Western and non-Western voices shows that the issue of the modern is highly problematic. Still its problematic aspect is one that presents a greater possibility for unveiling the human condition. As I see it, going beyond the aporias of the Frankfurt school critical social theory and the postmodern discourse, Habermas found a way through his communicative paradigm for procedural validation that emphasizes concepts of responsibility and emancipation in today's societies. It locates modern society's problems in the colonization of the lifeworld and seeks a solution in everyday communicative action. Still such an approach is fruitless without taking into account the history of exploitation and suffering that forms the other side of modernity. On such terms, modernity only succeeded in planting a rationality that excluded the non-European out of the mainstreams of human culture and domains. Furthermore, Habermas's attempt to generate a universal decentred discourse on the fate of mankind demonstrates how humanity is largely born out of the modern urge to govern one's life through reason and rationality. Currently, moral, political, social and diverse concerns of humanity are intrinsically being connected with the modern. Still, failing to deconstruct modernity's birth in the occident and the hierarchical relations modernity created at the heart of its self-consciousness, Habermas's modernity appears as a Western ideological discourse.

Thus, striving for universality without a critique of eurocentrism is a simple imposition of Western values on other cultures. Finally, Habermas's modernity, taking up the interdisciplinary and reflexive aspects of traditional critical theory is worthy of imitation by any organized intellectual efforts to address the human reality. Usually most essentialist positions in philosophy sacrifice analysis for emancipation, whereas relativist approaches dismantle the idea of change altogether. Habermas in principle advocates both analysis and emancipation through procedural validation. Still, as our discussion shows, this Habermasian venture must be coupled with a critical reception of Western universal modes of being and a historical analysis that situates modernity as an enigma of both freedom and inequality.

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