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**Ahmed Ben Moussa Serir**

University of Ain Temouchent

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6967-8942>

ahmed.serir@univ-temouchent.edu

**Abdellah Abdellaoui**

University of Oran 2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed

<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2299-9088>

abdellaoui.abdellah@univ-oran2.dz

**Azzioui Assia**

The Centre of Mila of Abdelhafid Boussouf University

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3378-1232>

a.azzioui@centre-univ-mila.dz

## **Philosophy and Progress: The Challenges and Limitations of the Critical Theory Paradigms**

### **Abstract**

This research examines the relationship between philosophy and progress through the lens of the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory, exploring how its four generations criticized Western modernity's pathologies, including alienation, reification, and domination. The study reassesses key concepts such as rationality, freedom, and scientific progress, particularly criticizing the Enlightenment's emphasis on control through science and technology. By analyzing the paradigms of production, communication, recognition, and social acceleration, the research highlights the effectiveness of these cognitive models in diagnosing societal issues. A central question addressed is whether the insights of Critical Theory can be adapted to Arab societies to transform their socio-political realities. Through a critical analytical approach, the findings suggest that while the Frankfurt School's critique of Western modernity offers valuable tools, its frameworks must be adapted to local cultural and social contexts to address challenges specific to Arab societies, such as authoritarianism and social justice. Ultimately, the research concludes that Critical Theory, when localized, has the potential to contribute meaningfully to understanding and addressing the realities of Arab societies.

**Keywords:** *philosophy, progress, Critical Theory, paradigms, Enlightenment, Arab societies*

**Əhməd Ben Musa Serir**

Ain Temouchent Universiteti

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6967-8942>

ahmed.serir@univ-temouchent.edu

**Abdullah Abdullaoui**

Oran Universiteti 2 Məhəmməd Ben Əhməd

<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2299-9088>

abdellaoui.abdellah@univ-oran2.dz

**Azzioui Asiya**

Mila Abdelhafid Boussouf Universiteti Mərkəzi

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3378-1232>

a.azzioui@centre-univ-mila.dz

## Fəlsəfə və tərəqqi: kritik nəzəriyyə paradigmlarının çətinlikləri və məhdudiyyətləri

### Xülasə

Bu tədqiqat Frankfurt Məktəbinin tənqidi nəzəriyyəsinin obyektivindən fəlsəfə və tərəqqi arasındakı əlaqəni araşdırır, onun dörd nəslinin Qərb müasirliyinin patologiyalarını, o cümlədən özgəninkiləşdirmə, refikasiya və hökmranlığı necə tənqid etdiyini araşdırır. Tədqiqat rasionallıq, azadlıq və elmi tərəqqi kimi əsas anlayışları yenidən qiymətləndirir, xüsusən də maarifçiliyin elm və texnologiya vasitəsilə nəzarətə verdiyi vurğunu tənqid edir. İstehsal, ünsiyyət, tanınma və sosial akselerasiya paradigmlarını təhlil edərək, tədqiqat bu koqnitiv modellərin sosial problemlərin diaqnostikasında effektivliyini vurğulayır. Əsas sual tənqidi nəzəriyyənin anlayışlarının ərəb cəmiyyətlərinə onların sosial-siyasi reallıqlarını dəyişdirmək üçün uyğunlaşdırıla biləcəyidir. Tənqidi analitik yanaşma vasitəsilə tapıntılar göstərir ki, Frankfurt Məktəbinin Qərb müasirliyinə tənqidi dəyərli alətlər təqdim etsə də, onun çərçivələri avtoritarizm və sosial ədalət kimi ərəb cəmiyyətlərinə xas olan problemləri həll etmək üçün yerli mədəni və sosial kontekstlərə uyğunlaşdırılmalıdır. Nəhayət, tədqiqat bu nəticəyə gəlir ki, tənqidi nəzəriyyə lokallaşdırıldıqda, ərəb cəmiyyətlərinin reallıqlarını başa düşmək və onlara müraciət etmək üçün mənalı töhfə vermək potensialına malikdir.

*Açar sözlər: fəlsəfə, tərəqqi, tənqidi nəzəriyyə, paradigmlar, maarifçilik, ərəb cəmiyyətləri*

### Introduction

The Frankfurt School, or Critical Theory of Society, stands as one of the most prominent schools of contemporary Western philosophy. It is renowned for its openness to diverse intellectual traditions, drawing from Kantianism, Hegelianism, Marxism, and Freudian thought, while engaging with the political, social, and intellectual transformations of the modern world. The school employs critique as a methodological tool to examine and reassess the foundational principles and consequences of Western modernity, particularly since the Enlightenment. This approach has allowed the Frankfurt School to critique and deconstruct the intellectual and philosophical structures underpinning modernity and diagnose the social maladies of Western societies, such as alienation, reification, domination, and control. These critiques have, in turn, challenged key concepts like rationality, freedom, and scientific and technological progress, along with the positivist philosophies that often support these ideas.

Despite the apparent continuity in its intellectual trajectory, the Frankfurt School is not a monolithic entity, either in terms of its historical development (Frankfurt, New York, Frankfurt) or the views of its leading thinkers, such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth, and Hartmut Rosa. Over the course of its century-long history (1923–2023), the school has undergone significant transformations, with each phase marked by its own unique methodologies, intellectual markers, and influential philosophers.

This historical development justifies dividing the school's evolution into four distinct generations, each characterized by a unique cognitive paradigm. The first generation, led by the founding members of the Frankfurt School, initially focused on the "production paradigm," shaped by the Marxist ideological backdrop of the school's early years, starting in 1923 under the direction of Carl Grünberg. However, with Max Horkheimer's leadership beginning in 1931, the school entered a new phase of intellectual maturity, marked by a focus on the analysis of the social and economic structures of contemporary society, with a growing interest in philosophy and psychoanalysis, especially Freudian theory.

The second generation, represented by Jürgen Habermas, while continuing the critical philosophical approach of his predecessors, shifted the focus of the school's paradigm from production to linguistic and intersubjective communication. Habermas developed the theory of communicative action, which proposed a new understanding of modernity and rationality. The third generation, led by Axel Honneth, introduced the "recognition paradigm," seeking to move beyond

the limitations of the communicative model and address broader issues of social justice, such as recognition, injustice, and exclusion. Finally, Hartmut Rosa, representing the fourth generation, shifted the school's focus once again, introducing the "acceleration paradigm," which critiques the temporal conditions of modern life.

### **Research**

This research aims to trace the critical trajectory of the Frankfurt School in evaluating the achievements and shortcomings of Western modernity, particularly its concept of progress, through the lens of paradigms as both methodological tools and frameworks for understanding social phenomena. By examining the four cognitive models of Critical Theory—production, communication, recognition, and acceleration—this study addresses key questions: How has Critical Theory, across its four generations and paradigms, responded to the challenges posed by Western modernity, scientific and technological progress, and positivist tendencies? What are the critical stakes and limitations of each paradigm? What remains of the school's original intellectual program? Additionally, it explores whether the presence of Critical Theory in Arab thought serves merely as an introduction or if it can be adapted and applied to the task of analyzing and transforming Arab societies. This analysis seeks to situate Critical Theory within the broader principles of the Enlightenment project, which upholds the values of freedom, rationality, and progress, while also considering its relevance to the socio-political realities of the Arab world.

### **1-The Intellectual Foundations of the Critical Social Theory's Project**

The Institute for Social Research was founded in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1923 by scholars committed to socialist principles who aimed to reevaluate Marxist theory in the wake of the 1918 German revolution's failure. Although the initial project did not succeed, it inspired the establishment of the Institute in 1924.

Under Max Horkheimer's directorship starting in 1931, the Institute shifted its focus from political economy to a more synthetic approach that combined philosophy with social and human sciences. This shift led to the development of what is now known as "Critical Theory". During this period, the institute became associated with prominent scholars such as Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), Erich Fromm (1900-1980), Ernst Bloch (1885-1977), Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), Frederick Pollock (1894-1970), Andreas Sternheim, Karl Landro, Julian Gumperz, Karl Wittfogel, Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966), Leo Löwenthal (1900-1993), Franz Neumann (1900-1955), Otto Kirchheimer (1905-1954), and Franz Borkenau (1900-1957). Later, the second generation of scholars—including Jürgen Habermas (1929-), Albert Filmor, Klaus Offe, Alfred Schmidt, and Axel Honneth (1949-) – were united under the banner of 'the Frankfurt School' (Musaddik, 2005, p. 28-29).

This school developed a new vision rooted in critical social philosophy. Its early pioneers, particularly those who fled to the New World in the early 1930s due to increasing pressure in Germany, aimed to create a social philosophy that addressed the plight of individuals alienated from their historical ways of life in capitalist and totalitarian industrial societies. They recognized that the Western bourgeois civilization had deviated and was heading toward irrationality with severe consequences for humanity. Their goal was to advocate for a critical approach that sought to liberate individuals from oppression, resolve class conflict, and foster collective self-awareness. The critical theory aspires to integrate its role as a philosophy of knowledge with its social function, reflecting on historical and social conditions. It aims not merely to expand quantitative knowledge but to achieve human liberation. Many researchers suggest that the Jewish backgrounds of most first-generation philosophers of the school – such as Horkheimer, Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Marcuse – intensified their feelings of loneliness and intellectual and spiritual alienation, despite their ideological differences. They experienced profound torment over the loss of an authentic self amidst a group also oppressed and alienated, even though they came from bourgeois families that represented the pinnacle of material wealth in Germany (Omar, 2007, p. 112).

The founders of the critical theory school did not always maintain a uniform orientation. After World War II and the collapse of the socialist revolution, Horkheimer and Adorno lost faith in the

idea of linking philosophy with empirical research to create emancipatory knowledge. Consequently, the second generation of thinkers, including Habermas, Albert Filmer, Klaus Offe, and Axel Honneth, adopted more adaptive perspectives, evolving with changing subjects of inquiry rather than adhering to dogmatic principles. This shift led to discussions about a third-generation project combining the early pioneers' legacy with contributions from Habermas and Axel Honneth, and a fourth generation represented by Hartmut Rosa. The first generation's Critical Theory, grounded in linking philosophy with the humanities and social sciences, faced obstacles such as political fluctuations and the crisis of Marxism. Attempts to renew Marxism through Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* and Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* hindered their goals. Horkheimer's book *Traditional and Critical Theory* (1937) represents a historical turning point for critical theory, which defined its foundations as follows: "This critical approach is characterized by its absolute scepticism about the standards of behaviour that a social life offers to the individual" (Musaddik, 2005, p. 34). The Critical Theory has since embraced critique as its foundation, reflecting a tradition from Kant to Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Frankfurt School. It uses criticism as a tool for resistance, free from metaphysical and political constraints, focusing on rational thinking judged through the critical dimension of reason. Thus, the first generation (Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse) approached change from a critical perspective rather than a dogmatic Marxist stance, developing a new form of social theory (Afaya, 1998, p. 17).

What distinguishes the critical theory from other philosophical and sociological approaches is its refusal to confine itself to solely philosophical or sociological frameworks. Instead, it encompasses a wide range of disciplines within the humanities, including philosophy, sociology, psychology, and linguistics. In this context, our focus will be on the philosophical (especially German) and the sociological foundations.

### **1-1- Philosophical Foundations**

The perspectives and visions of critical theory thinkers intersect around several philosophical foundations, including opposition to metaphysics, engagement with historical movement, and adopting a critical stance toward the world, thereby linking theory with action and thought with history. Although the critical theory might seem aligned with the Marxist ideas of transforming capitalist class relations towards a classless society, it actually diverges from Marxist thought, which is seen as totalitarian and restrictive to freedom and critical thinking. The critical theory's approach to modern society's transformations and contradictions do not align with Marx's aspirations and predictions (Afaya, 1998, p. 21). While critique is fundamental to the critical theory, it rejects totalitarianism and authoritarianism, adopting an open-ended, materialist dialectical method. This approach conflicts with German idealism, both Kantian and Hegelian. Kant's critiques, including *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Critique of Practical Reason*, and *Critique of Judgment*, serve as fundamental references and some theorists have attempted to reconcile Kantian philosophy with dialectical materialism, as Marcuse suggests. The critical theory claims to be the legitimate heir of classical rationalism since Kant. Additionally, some thinkers drew from Hegelian dialectical logic, viewing Hegel as a pioneer of social philosophy for framing consciousness as a collective experience. This experience, which the spirit undergoes from the moment it separates from nature, finds its expression in art, religion, and philosophy, with the latter representing the highest form of reason (1). However, the critical theory breaks away from this idealist heritage, leading some scholars to argue that it separates from the epistemological structure of traditional science and the philosophical aims of German idealism. The critical theory seems to undertake a mission of "openness to everything that seeks to be independent and self-sufficient from a theoretical standpoint" (Afaya, 1998, p. 22). This approach, therefore, discusses a social theory that emerges from philosophy, emphasizing the dismantling of barriers and boundaries between various fields of knowledge.

### **1-2- Sociological Foundations**

The thinkers of the critical theory were notably influenced by Marxism, particularly given that the early pioneers of the Frankfurt School aimed to develop a critical theory that integrated its role as a philosophy of knowledge with its social function of reflecting on historical and social

conditions, with the goal of human liberation. However, most of these theorists did not fully embrace Marxist thought, which primarily focuses on critiquing the capitalist economic system and ideology. Instead, they concentrated on critiquing alienation and its causes in industrial societies characterized by totalitarianism, rationality, and technology. While the central question for bourgeois sociology concerns the problem of social order, for Marxist sociology it revolves around the issue of social disorder. Why did the proletarian revolution, contrary to Marx's predictions, not occur in advanced capitalist countries? In light of this question, the position of the Critical Theory underwent significant development. Throughout its development, which is intrinsically connected to the evolution of Western society (the rise of fascism in Europe and Stalinism in the Soviet Union) the Critical Theory gradually moved from a revolutionary critique of monopoly capitalism to a theoretical and radical critique of formal instrumental rationality. To comprehend this shift from a revolutionary Marxist stance to a more pessimistic Weberian perspective (Max Weber), focused primarily on the issue of reification (2), one must consider Georg Lukács' theory of class consciousness.

### **1-2-1. The Demolition of Class Consciousness**

While Georg Lukács, from a Hegelian logic perspective, believed that reification finds its limits in the proletariat's consciousness as a self-consciousness of the commodity, this is not the case for members of the Frankfurt School. They reject the idealist thesis that equates the proletariat with both the subject and the object, and instead treat it as an empirical hypothesis. Contrary to being revolutionary, the proletariat is fully integrated into society and, in fact, serves as one of the most stable pillars of late capitalism.

The first empirical field study conducted by the Institute for Social Research, focusing on the psychological formation of qualified workers and employees, revealed that industrial society was undergoing significant transformations. Siegfried Kracauer, a researcher closely associated with the institute at the time, explained these transformations by the salaried employees' susceptibility to bourgeois values due to the link between the precise specialization that allowed for the repetition of technical work processes and the magnetic allure of bourgeois life allure of the bourgeois lifestyle. Later, both Horkheimer and Adorno enriched these insights by linking the project of controlling nature with the practical enslavement of humans in all areas of their activities (Musaddik, 2005, p. 31).

With the dismantling of class consciousness, Lukács's intellectual framework teeters on the brink of collapse. If the proletariat is not replaced by an alternative — If it is no longer perceived as the agent of liberation but merely as a victim of control, domination, and repression, then the negation of reification becomes inherently indeterminate, making its critique abstract. However, instead of abandoning the principles of revolutionary philosophy, the members of the Frankfurt School adhered, in a negative sense, to the ontotheological concepts of reification and redemption, emphasizing the alienation of the proletariat and the postponement of revolution. This Marxist legacy elucidates why, after 1945, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse searched in vain for an alternative to the theory of class consciousness — whether in religion (Horkheimer), aesthetics (Adorno), or earlier philosophical, aesthetic, and biological traditions (Marcuse). Consequently, Critical Theory evolved into a theoretical critique of reification.

### **1-2-2- Criticism and Self-Criticism**

The book "Dialectic of Enlightenment" by Horkheimer and Adorno (3)<sup>1</sup> represents a critical turning point in the thought of the Frankfurt School. Through this work, they revisited the original theoretical foundations, dismantling the connection between reason and liberation, and critiquing the understanding of rationality as a historical progress. They assert that "The parts we have

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<sup>1</sup> Dialektik Der Aufklärung [Dialectic of Enlightenment]. This book was translated into French as La Dialectique de la raison. According to some researchers, the translation is incorrect as the German word Aufklärung means Enlightenment. Written during the war and collected for the occasion of Frederick Pollock's fiftieth birthday in 1944, it was first published in Amsterdam in 1947. The book consists of an essay, two digressions, and three appendices, and represents the peak of intellectual maturity reached by the Frankfurt School, having had a significant impact in Germany according to Habermas.

assembled here show that we have relinquished the confidence that guided the beginning of our work..." (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2006, p. 13). In their view, enlightenment is a project aimed at liberating reason from control and domination; however, this project failed to achieve its objectives, leading instead to a new form of barbarism and savagery rather than fulfilling human conditions. Nevertheless, reason remains valid, provided it is exercised through criticism and self-criticism.

"We had no doubt whatsoever that freedom in society is inseparable from enlightened thinking. This was our initial premise. But we had to clearly recognize that the very concept of this thinking, not to mention its concrete historical forms and the institutions of society in which it exists, contain the germ of the regression that it suffers everywhere today. And if enlightenment does not undertake a reflective effort that reaches this moment of regression, it is reinforcing its own fate" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2006, p. 16).

This transition from traditional theory and critical theory to the dialectic of enlightenment, moving from a social philosophy of liberation to a historical philosophy driven by the critique of reason, reflects the transcendence of the synthetic dialectic that the school initially promoted, which integrated sociology, psychology, and epistemology. The outcomes of the Enlightenment in modern times led Horkheimer to refer to what he called the "decline of reason," as articulated in his book *"Eclipse of Reason"*. While the Enlightenment sought to liberate humanity from myth by appealing to reason in the realms of things, relationships, nature, and history, it ultimately replaced myth with a new form of myth. Instrumental reason, which emerged as the dominant form of reasoning after the Enlightenment, generated myth through technical means—manifested in coercive control, uniformity over difference, regulation over freedom, and unity over diversity. It was as if reason had transformed into a radical expression of the terror of myth. Consequently, the rationality of reason devolved into irrationality, giving rise to a new barbarism rooted in technical knowledge, which evolved into a political rationality that restricts individual autonomy and regulates behaviour and desires (Afaya, 1998, p. 32).

The return of myth through the lens of reason, after modernity and intellectual maturity had marginalized it, became evident within German society, which had reached the peak of rationalization and regulation but ultimately fell victim to Nazism. Despite this society's advancements, it succumbed to the irrationality inherent in reason itself, exemplified by its mythical belief in the superiority of the Aryan race. The dialectic of enlightenment reveals the horrors of rationalization within the social system, stripping reason of its right to dissent and allowing it to be co-opted by authority—not for the sake of credibility, but for efficiency, ensuring the survival of that authority. With capitalism, the lethal rationalization against nature transitioned into the realm of society itself, and the dialectic of enlightenment warns of a transformation in the nature of the sciences, indicating that the social sciences, too, have not escaped being harnessed for purely instrumental experimental research by political and economic powers (Musaddik, 2005, p. 58). Thus, the critique of enlightenment reason emerges by exposing the negative aspects of rationality and the dominance of the modern state, serving as a necessary activity to invigorate critical thought and renew the critical efficacy of philosophy.

## **2- The Critical Theory of Society Paradigms**

The term "paradigm," in its etymological origin, refers to the Latin word "paradigma," derived from the Greek "paradeigma," meaning a model or an example. The word "paradeigma" is composed of "para," which conveys inclusiveness, and "deigma," which means example or model (Mucchielli, 1995, p. 11-14). A paradigm is a worldview specific to a certain time, within which scientific theories operate and are conceptualized. In philosophy, a paradigm refers to the set of elements that shape the interpretation of reality at a given moment. The American historian and philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996) employed the term in his work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, defining a scientific paradigm as those scientific achievements accepted at a specific time, which form a strong foundation for posing scientific problems and methods for solving them. It also encompasses the shared values that researchers accept and adhere to, represented in the methodologies and standards established accordingly. A single guiding scientific model serves as a starting point for numerous discoveries through selected and often

incomplete examples, making it a specific and coherent scientific tradition (Ali & Abdelkader, 1985, p. 85-86).

In general, a paradigm is a coherent model for understanding the world and interpreting widely accepted realities within a specific field. Every social theory is, consciously or unconsciously, linked to an anthropology—a human perspective that has replaced traditional theology. Each theory includes an implicit assumption that shapes the anthropological viewpoint on which its epistemological framework is built. The critical theory of the Frankfurt School is based on various perspectives, such as economic, linguistic, ethical, and temporal, developed by its four successive generations. These perspectives create paradigms and models that provide a critical interpretative horizon for analyzing social developments in Western society.

### **2-1- The First Generation: The Production Paradigm**

The first phase of the development of the critical theory concluded with Horkheimer taking over the management of the Institute for Social Research, succeeding Karl Grünberg. Horkheimer maintained the same materialist perspective adopted by his predecessor, emphasizing that the study of the economic foundation is essential for an accurate representation of social reality.

The new character of the Institute under Horkheimer's leadership, which positioned philosophy at the centre of the critical theory of society, did not imply an abrupt change in perspective; rather, it was a gradual evolution. Horkheimer asserted that it was a mistake to believe that the economy was the only true reality (Howe, 2010, p. 36). The transformation among the first-generation thinkers is evident in the conceptual apparatus they adopted, which was primarily based on the vocabulary of early Marx, transitioning to Hegelian terms such as the concept of humanity, the concept of reason, and the concept of consciousness, rather than focusing solely on the worker, praxis, and historical materialism as emphasized by later Marx. This shift reflects a growing interest in analyzing the cultural superstructures of the bourgeois society and moving beyond the narrow confines of orthodox Marxism (Bottomore, 1998, p. 17-18). They recognized that class conflict was no longer sufficient, or even possible, to explain the conditions of post-industrial societies, thus prioritizing the critique of the superstructure as represented in culture. With this new approach, the pioneers of the Frankfurt School—Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and Fromm—exposed the technocratic and positivist face of contemporary social systems, focusing on critiquing the culture of domination prevalent in such societies.

The rise of Nazism in Germany, the experience of exile, and the aftermath of World War II compelled the first-generation thinkers to question the Enlightenment project, which seemed to have transformed from dreams of the 18th century into mere illusions. They concluded that progress had devolved into barbarism and that reason had developed only instrumentally and technically, significantly regressing on the moral level. This is clearly illustrated in Horkheimer and Adorno's *"Dialectic of Enlightenment"*, where they revealed that reason, intended to liberate humanity from myth, has itself become a myth. The instrumental reason that dominated Enlightenment thought produced myth through technical means—manifested in coercive control, uniformity over difference, regulation over freedom, and unity over diversity. Thus, reason became a radical expression of the terror of myth, leading to a new barbarism rooted in technical knowledge and evolving into a political rationality that restricts individual autonomy and regulates behaviour and desires (Afaya, 1998, p. 32).

The first generation of critical theorists analyzed and critiqued the social reality from a materialist perspective, theorizing society through the production paradigm. They criticized reason's subservience to utility and industry in capitalist societies, where it became a tool of control rather than liberation, stripped of its moral and human elements by alienation and reification. The philosophers of this generation stressed the importance of reviving true enlightenment by reconstructing human consciousness, allowing it to transcend the bleak reality through a self-renewing, rational critical theory aimed at creating a communicative social environment.

### **2-2- The Second Generation: The Communication Paradigm**

The analysis of the second model begins with the Hungarian philosopher György Markus (1934-2016), who in 1982 categorized theories in the humanities and social sciences into two

paradigms: the production paradigm and the language paradigm. The production paradigm, rooted in Marxism, framed the analyses of the first-generation critical theory philosophers, while the language paradigm, emerging after World War II, shifted the focus to viewing humans as interactive communicators rather than mere productive agents. This shift, driven by the second-generation Frankfurt School philosophers led by Jürgen Habermas, marks a significant rupture from the first generation's production paradigm, highlighting Habermas's role in evolving the critical theory (Markus, 1982).

Habermas sought to dismantle the philosophy of self and consciousness centred on reason and laid the theoretical foundations for a philosophy of communication through language. He argued that "The 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" (Habermas, 1995, p. 454) and advocated replacing "the paradigm of the knowledge of objects with the paradigm of mutual understanding between subjects capable of speech and action" (Habermas, 1995, p. 453). Habermas criticized previous philosophers, including Heidegger, Derrida, and Foucault, for failing to produce normative foundations for the critical theory. His response was the development of the theory of communicative action, emphasizing the necessity of transcending the destructive dialectical framework and revitalizing the critical theory with a focus on communication and rationality. What are the key features of this paradigm? What does communicative action actually mean? And what are the theoretical foundations of this communication?

Habermas followed the first-generation Frankfurt School thinkers, especially their critique of Enlightenment reason as presented by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. While he agreed with their critique of instrumental reason, he diverged from Adorno's negative dialectics, which saw the Enlightenment as hostile to truth and sincerity. Habermas instead stressed the need to move beyond this destructive dialectical framework. As a result, he critiqued the critical theory itself, arguing that the first generation lacked normative foundations and was limited to critiquing instrumental reason without developing a systematic theory (Abu al-Sa'ud, n.d., p. 99). He also claimed that their reliance on the Hegelian conception of truth was incompatible with the fallibility of scientific inquiry and failed to address democracy at the political level. This prompted Habermas to renew the critical theory by creating a theory of communicative action, advocating for reason and rationality while supporting the unfinished project of modernity.

Habermas sought to unleash the creative energy of the Enlightenment mind and restore reason as the fundamental starting point for any societal theory. He believed that the drawbacks of instrumental rationality do not justify abandoning the project of modernity. The instrumental reason is merely one aspect of rationality, and this instrumental concept should be complemented by incorporating the communicative dimension into the understanding of rationality. So, what is communicative rationality?

Habermas addressed this by identifying three dimensions that the concept of communicative rationality encompasses: the relationship of the knowing self to the world of events and facts, its relationship to a social world characterized by effectiveness and personal engagement in interactions with others, and the relationship of a suffering or emotional person to their inner nature and to the subjectivity of others. These are the three dimensions that emerge from the analysis of communication processes. Through communicative rationality, he intended to develop a critical theory of society grounded in rational foundations, rehabilitating philosophical discourse to engage with society by establishing cooperation and dialogue between it and the various sciences. He said:

The concept of communicative reason, rooted in linguistic practice and directed towards mutual understanding, requires philosophy to once again engage in systematic work. In this context, philosophy must establish a fully cooperative relationship with the social sciences, which undertake the responsibility of developing a rational theory together" (Habermas, 2002, p. 437).

Sociology also contributes to realizing this new concept of communicative rationality, as it is the science that examines the transformations occurring in social life and the social ailments resulting from modernization and rationalization. Therefore, as one researcher puts it, that the



notion of rational activity, as a significant discovery of Weberian sociology, finds in Habermas a new and unique fertility with the theory of communicative action (Afaya, 1998, p. 179).

Communicative rationality seeks to establish consensus that reflects equality in the public sphere, where individuals integrate their subjectivity into a collective effort based on understanding and communication, achieved through rational agreement. It transcends social relations rooted in coercion and domination, promoting healthy interactions founded on dialogue and discussion, with the aim of reaching consensus. The ethics of discussion, as an alternative to religious and traditional ethics, require that opinions and convictions be subjected to debate in order to achieve objectivity, integrity, and agreement, thereby avoiding verbal or physical violence, wars, and tyranny ('Alloush, 2013). Habermas's ethics of discussion are guided by principles from the ideal speech situation (sincerity, correctness, appropriateness, accuracy...), essential for rational communication. Politically, this communication must manifest in a democracy shaped by ideal collective dialogue, free from any domination except the best argument. Habermas proposed the concept of consultation, which he considered essential in his deliberative democracy, because in consultation, others are given the right to speak, criticize, raise validity claims, and make new proposals regarding the issues under discussion in the public sphere.

The communicative paradigm, with communicative reason as a legitimate alternative to self-centred reason, posits language as a comprehensive medium for understanding. However, this model faces practical challenges and dilemmas, as the concept of communicative rationality, which aims to establish standards for agreement and consensus, can appear somewhat utopian. Language is not solely oriented toward understanding and consensus; it also includes disagreement and conflict. In this regard, the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, a proponent of postmodernism, criticized consensus as a product of a grand narrative from which we must liberate ourselves. He argued that consensus, tied to the concept of universal reason and linguistic unity, exerts violence on the diversity of language games, reducing discourse to a single impoverished form, as true creativity can only emerge through difference; "consensus takes on a terroristic character in the sense of the efficiency resulting from the exclusion of a partner from the language game we were playing" (Frank, 2003).

It is evident from the above that Habermas's replacement of the Marxist paradigm of production with the communicative paradigm has introduced a flawed perspective into the critical theory of society. This shift has led several thinkers, including Axel Honneth, to advocate for a re-examination of conflict in a context where Habermas focused solely on consensus. What, then, is Honneth's position, and what alternative paradigm does he propose?.

### **2-3 The Third Generation: The Paradigm of Recognition**

Axel Honneth (born 1949), a prominent representative of the third generation of the Frankfurt School, is deeply connected to the critical philosophical tradition of this school. He introduced the paradigm of recognition as the foundation for building a normative theory of society, aiming to renew the starting points of the original critical theory as developed by the first generation. Honneth drew on the achievements and successes of Habermas's communicative turn in realizing actual human emancipation through understanding and rational public discourse. However, despite acknowledging in many of his writings—particularly in *"The Society of Contempt: Toward a New Critical Theory"* that his philosophical project is a continuation and deepening of Habermas's communicative paradigm, Honneth adopted a critical stance toward many of the ideas and theses within this project (Boumnir, 2012, p. 89).

While Honneth praised the communicative paradigm for revitalizing the critical theory, he was cautious about reducing social life to the linguistic dimension, as the focus on language might obscure the social conflicts between subjects, which are linked to forms of injustice, disrespect, and lack of recognition of individuals and groups. The communicative paradigm of rational consensus, as conceived by Habermas, does not align with the moral experiences of individuals. Only the paradigm of mutual recognition can effectively address these social conflicts rooted in domination, oppression, and social injustice. Honneth stated that "The primary lived world of human existence is a world of recognition, not a world of linguistic understanding; priority is given to recognition

over understanding, which can be easily demonstrated, as emotional recognition always precedes the process of acquiring language" (Boumnir, 2012, p. 90).

Axel Honneth drew on the paradigm of mutual recognition from Hegel's model (the struggle for recognition) and deepened it through the works of Herbert Mead. He posited that individuals can achieve their identities through three distinct normative forms of recognition: love, rights, and solidarity.

\_Love: This form is emotional and represents the primary image of recognition, connecting the individual to a specific community, particularly the family, which enables the individual to develop self-trust.

\_Rights: This form is legal and political, recognizing individuals as bearers of certain rights, which in turn fosters self-respect.

\_Solidarity: This is the most complete form of the practical relationship between individuals, allowing for the acknowledgment of individual achievements, thereby facilitating self-esteem.

Through this triad of recognition, an individual's identity is fully realized, leading to their integration into society emotionally, legally, and ethically (Honneth, 2015, p. 169). However, achieving recognition in reality is not easy. Individuals often find themselves facing situations of denial of recognition, which, according to Honneth, results in social contempt that manifests in three forms:

\_Physical and Psychological: Such as torture and psychological or physical harm, leading to a loss of self-trust.

\_Legal: Marginalization of individuals and denial of their rights for ethnic, gender, class, or religious reasons, resulting in a loss of self-respect (loss of dignity).

\_Social: When individuals do not receive recognition for their abilities and competencies, they fail to attain the social status they deserve, leading to a loss of self-esteem (Boumnir, 2022).

The recognition paradigm explained the role of the critical theory in advancing individuals' emancipatory interests against the capitalist system. We sought recognition as persons in the private sphere, acknowledgment of our rights in the legal sphere, and validation of our achievements in the workplace. Politically, recognition can serve as a foundational concept in liberalism, particularly in versions based on the principle of tolerance-respect, which itself represents a form of recognition. It functions both as a policy of equality and as a policy of difference, with cultural and social dimensions. The policy of cultural diversity and the principle of socio-cultural difference rely on recognizing actors who legally demand their interests be met or their rights respected. In this way, individuals experience injustice not just as communicative distortions but as expressions of disdain, contempt, and non-recognition. The normative nature of communicative reason is not immediately evident in consciousness, and argumentation can be unjust, as it is not equally accessible to all segments of society. Furthermore, recognition precedes knowledge, emotionally at least, as infants interpret facial expressions and infer values before they can understand their environment objectively. Thus, the initial relationship with the world is mediated through recognition.

Honneth's paradigm of recognition is more socially grounded than Habermas's communicative paradigm but shares a similar flaw—not in detaching individuals from their social positions, but in its conception of the inherent normativity of the ethics of recognition. This normativity seeks to organize social conflicts through a consensual lens, deepening intersubjectivity by replacing argumentation with recognition. Original recognition provides a standard for judging experiences of injustice and the moral value of conflicts. The fact that the primary recognition is pre-moral does not contradict its fundamentally moral nature; the challenge lies in developing and updating its normativity.

Furthermore, neutrality or objectivity, for Honneth, is linked to constructing a formal ethics that imposes its normativity on social conflicts without actually taking them as a starting point for its construction. The ethics of recognition claims universality by being contingent on the ethos of societies concerning the level of its application, asserting that what it establishes is applicable to all cultures. However, this ethical homogeneity, which it claims to be capable of establishing, is a source of suspicion or doubt.

## 2-4-The Fourth Generation: The Paradigm of Acceleration

Hartmut Rosa (b. 1965) is regarded by some scholars as part of the third generation of the Frankfurt School, alongside his mentor Axel Honneth. However, the prevailing view, which we also support, positions Rosa as a leading figure of a fourth generation within the school. Hartmut Rosa diverged from his mentor Axel Honneth in constructing his theoretical framework. While Honneth began with a theory of recognition and later addressed its pathological dimension—reification—Rosa initiated his work by focusing on pathological symptoms, specifically social acceleration, before developing his theory of resonance, as evidenced by the progression of his publications. From the standpoint of the fourth generation of the Frankfurt School, reconfiguring critical social theory necessitates a deep and dynamic understanding of Western modernity. This involves centring on time and the phenomenon of extreme social acceleration across three key dimensions:

\_Technological acceleration: Refers to the increasing pace of innovation in areas such as transportation, massive communication technologies, and new forms of production.

\_Acceleration of social change: Concerns the rapid pace at which social practices evolve, along with the accelerated transformations of life conditions, institutions, and relationships, including family and work environments.

\_Acceleration of life pace: Relates to the existential experience of contemporary individuals who increasingly feel an acute need for time and more of it, as time itself has become a consumable resource, like other commodities (Boumnir, 2014, pp. 9-24). These observations, presented in Rosa's book *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, are revisited in a more synthesized form in his work *Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality*.

The fundamental assumption of the theory of social acceleration is the widespread affliction of "time scarcity," a condition that leads contemporary societies—those of late modernity—to experience a form of temporal famine. This occurs despite the significant technological acceleration that ostensibly provides unprecedented freedom at a superficial level. This presents a remarkable paradox and a contradiction that characterizes modernity. Rosa stated that "modern subjects can be described as minimally restricted by ethical rules and sanctions, and therefore as 'free', while they are tightly regulated, dominated, and suppressed by a largely invisible, de-politicized, undiscussed, under-theorized and unarticulated time regime. This time-regime can in fact be analyzed under a single, unifying concept: The logic of social acceleration" (Rosa, 2011, p. 08).

Hartmut Rosa incorporated the normative concepts of his predecessors, acknowledging that the good life can be distorted or deformed by the structures of recognition (Honneth) and/or communication (Habermas). However, his analysis of social acceleration provides a deeper understanding of the nature of these distortions. Technological acceleration, which Rosa defined as the "intentional speeding up of goal-oriented processes," (Rosa, 2011, p. 98) encompasses the acceleration of transport, information exchange, and production. It also includes the speeding up of administrative organization and control processes. This form of acceleration, easily observable in everyday life, leads to an acceleration of social change, marked by an "increase in the decay - rates of the reliability of experiences and expectations and by the contraction of the time - spans" (Rosa, 2011, p. 101).

Given the challenges of empirically proving the acceleration of social change, Rosa illustrated his argument by examining shifts in family and work contexts. Historically, these changes followed an intergenerational pattern, evolving into a transitional pattern during classical modernity, and eventually into a cross-generational pattern in late modernity. Previously, individuals would maintain a profession across several generations or throughout their entire lives; however, today, people frequently change professions multiple times.

Family structures have similarly undergone transformations, as evidenced by the increasing divorce rates in late modernity. Additionally, personal experiences of accelerated life are reflected in individuals' perceptions of time passing rapidly and their struggles to meet social demands. Objectively, this acceleration can be measured by the frequency of daily activities such as eating, sleeping, playing, and communicating. There is a noticeable trend towards fast food, reduced sleep,

and limited communication, resulting in actions being compressed and filled with multiple activities and experiences. This acceleration in the pace of life is further confirmed by the following paradox: why do we not have more leisure time despite technological acceleration? Theoretically, each action should take less time due to technology—such as washing clothes, commuting, and communicating—yet leisure time has become a rare commodity.

The social acceleration experienced by contemporary modern societies has given rise to new forms of alienation related to time, space, objects, actions, and relationships with oneself and others. These forms of alienation all possess a temporal dimension. Rosa proposed that the solution to this pathological state does not involve reverting to a pre-modern era or adopting a slower pace. Instead, he advocated for an interactive approach between the self and the world, termed resonance (Rosa, 2020, p. 27), which facilitates the establishment of a new relationship between the self and the social world, nature, work, and surrounding objects. This relationship encompasses not only cognitive aspects but also physical, emotional, and existential dimensions.

The cultural force driving modern life, from Hartmut Rosa's perspective, is the desire to make the world accessible. However, true vitality, connection, and authentic experiences emerge from encounters with what is unavailable and inaccessible. He argued that

My thesis is that this program of making the world available and accessible, imposed institutionally and promoted culturally as a promise, not only fails to work but, in fact, turns into its opposite. The world, which has become accessible on scientific, technical, economic, and political levels, seems to slip out of our hands, becoming alienated, closing itself off to us in a mysterious way, withdrawing, becoming illegible and mute. Moreover, it reveals itself as being both threatened and broken, ultimately rendering it fundamentally unavailable.

The basic human pattern of existence in the world is not merely about possessing and having things available, but rather about entering into a resonance with them, which involves being able to provoke their response and engage in that response. The resonance relationship is characterized by four key moments: contact, personal effectiveness or response, comprehension or transformation, and unavailability, which distances it from instrumentality and makes it inaccessible. Thus, Rosa turned the physical phenomenon of resonance into a sociological category for understanding the relationship with the world. This marks a shift in the mission of the critical theory from diagnosing reification and alienation to envisioning a non-reified mode of existence. However, the theory of resonance has faced several criticisms, the most significant being that it does not depart from the Habermasian linguistic model. The presentation of the relational turn in the social sciences, central to this theory, is conditional upon linguistic competence, establishing a living relationship with the world, listening to it, and conversing with it rather than attempting to control it.

In light of the development, diversity, and variation in the network of the criteria proposed by the critical theory philosophers to interpret and evaluate contemporary societies, one can conclude that the modernity project is persistently marked by the concept of crisis. Although a crisis signifies a form of imbalance or instability, it does not imply collapse or failure. Instead, it acts as a signal, urging society to reconsider its understanding of the world and to search for alternative modes of existence. The crises that permeate the social fabric serve to awaken society from its dogmatic slumber and stimulate renewal.

A crisis is a fundamental aspect of an age that encourages critical self-reflection, and modernity is characterized as a crisis that constantly renews itself through this critical thinking. This is the first lesson we derived from the contrast of paradigms in this theory. The second lesson concerns the value and importance of a temporal approach to the crises of modernity and progress, particularly as we live in an era shaped by globalization and the prominence of the speed paradigm in various civilization domains: communications, transportation, information, and financial exchanges. This necessitates considering the crisis (krisis) not through the lens of sequential, linear time (chronos), but rather from the perspective of opportune time (kairos)—the moment ripe for action and change, the time of decision and crisis. It is this kairological time that allows for the restoration of the creative self's role in reorganizing and reshaping reality, and for viewing temporality as a mode of existence.

Overcoming the crises and ailments of contemporary societies does not come from rejecting the values of modernity and enlightenment—such as rationality, freedom, progress, and justice—in a regressive manner. Instead, it requires the revival and rejuvenation of these values after purging them of the distortions and imbalances that have attached themselves to them, so they can regain their lustre and emancipatory effectiveness. This can only be achieved by rethinking our relationship with existence through a specific awareness of the concept of time.

#### **4- Critical Theory of Society and the Arab Reality**

The critical movement of the Frankfurt School is characterized by a dynamic and evolving approach that aligns with the various transformations experienced by modern Western societies. This is evident through the four paradigms of the school's generations and their production of numerous theses in social philosophy, political theory, and cultural criticism. Given the humanistic dimensions with emancipatory goals inherent in the critical theory of this school, the spread of ideas and theories from its philosophers has not remained confined to Western societies alone; it has extended to various cultures and communities, including the Arab societies.

Despite the relatively modest engagement of the Arab world with the critical theory for various reasons, it has nonetheless influenced many Arab thinkers. This raises several key questions: how has this influence manifested? Was it explicit or implicit? In what ways does the critical theory appear in the writings and texts of Arab intellectuals? Is its presence passive, limited to a mere introduction to the theory, or does it play a more active and constructive role, harnessing its critical intellectual framework to address the specific realities, challenges, and crises of the Arab world?

Most of publications and efforts by the Arab thinkers largely align with the universal dimension of the Western philosophical thought, as they transcend the particularities of its origins to embrace its humanistic features and distil its critical elements and shared human values, particularly when these endeavours focus on the issue of individual and collective freedom (Ibrahim, 2012). In truth, the presence of the critical theory in the Arab thought can be discerned, either explicitly or implicitly, in its engagement with the Marxist epistemological background used to address various social and economic issues, as well as in its critique of the Western modernity, power structures, authority, capitalist society, and the pathological symptoms such as instrumentalization, reification, alienation, and consumerism.

At this point, the attempts of Abdel Wahab El-Messiri, Samir Amin, Edward Said, Hisham Ghosheh, Nasif Nassar, Nourredine Afaya, and others converge. One of the manifestations of their influence from the first generation of the Frankfurt School is Abdel Wahab El-Messiri's questioning of the Western civilization system in his book *"The Materialist Philosophy and Dismantling of Humans"*, where he critically examined the values and ethics of modern Western thought. He openly acknowledged his influence from the critical theory in his critique of the West and his utilization of its conceptual vocabulary. This influence is also evident in Samir Amin's book *"The Crisis of Arab Society"*, in which he criticised the Western centrism, focusing on the critique of domination and highlighting the cultural dimension underlying the justifications of the Western narrative that entrenches the project of hegemony and colonial expansion, drawing inspiration from the book *"Dialectic of Enlightenment"* (Amin, 1985). As for Edward Said, while he benefited from Michel Foucault in deconstructing the Western epistemological system in his book *"Orientalism"* through the analysis of the Western institutional discourse about the East, he was also influenced by the critical theory in his cultural criticism, which follows a similar trajectory, directly declaring his indebtedness to Adorno and his critical approach (Said, 2006).

The influence of the second, third, and even fourth generations of the Frankfurt School's critical theory on the Arab intellectual texts differs significantly from its impact during the first generation. This divergence stems from the global intellectual climate of the time, shaped by liberation movements inspired by Marxism and socialism, which motivated the Arab thinkers to engage in revolutionary efforts to free their societies from Western colonialism. Following the collapse of the communist movement, the aspirations of these thinkers to establish a strong presence in the Arab society diminished. Consequently, the Arab world's engagement with the later generations of the critical theory has largely been limited to cultural, intellectual, and academic circles, primarily

through individual initiatives and translations. One example is the Moroccan scholar Nourredine Afaya, who sought to analyze and interpret Habermas's philosophy, particularly his communicative paradigm. Afaya not only advocated for introducing contemporary philosophical debates into the Arab intellectual sphere but also stressed the need to address key issues related to individual and societal realities, such as identity, freedom, democracy, and citizenship. He highlighted the importance of refining political concepts and tackling the ideological challenges that hinder critical thinking within the framework of Arab intellectual and political institutions. His compatriot Hassan Musaddik shared this objective and has similarly written extensively on communicative critical theory.

The concepts introduced by the pioneers of the third and fourth generations of the critical theory—such as recognition, redistribution, tolerance, and acceleration—hold significant potential for addressing many of the crises facing the Arab societies, which are afflicted by contempt, oppression, violence, exclusion, and intolerance. However, these concepts remain in the early stages of recognition and are largely confined to academic and university circles. This is evident in efforts such as those by the Algerian scholar Kamal Bou Menir, who has translated works by Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser, and Hartmut Rosa.

The aim of translating the works and ideas of the Frankfurt School theorists is not to take satisfaction in the challenges faced by the Western individual under the dominance of capitalist instrumental rationality, but rather to integrate the value of criticism into the Arab culture. Our excessive sensitivity to critique stifles the possibility of modernization in our societies. Without the critical interventions of philosophers from this school and others toward modernity, Western societies might have been engulfed by unchecked materialism, reaching an irreversible decline. Therefore, any effort towards modernization or enlightenment must be paired with a clear understanding that certain values and concepts, once lost, are exceedingly difficult to restore. Today, the Arab culture is in urgent need of such values and concepts due to the deterioration of the political and social fabric, which remains dominated by irrational ideological discourses that reject communication, recognition, and tolerance (Suhail al-Tashm, 2022).

## Conclusion

This research highlights the significant contribution of the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory in offering a comprehensive framework for analyzing the social, economic, and philosophical structures of contemporary societies. Through its four paradigms—each addressing distinct societal challenges such as materialism, instrumental rationality, societal contempt, and social acceleration—Critical Theory demonstrates its adaptability and relevance in confronting modernity's dilemmas. The paradigms of production, communication, recognition, and resonance contribute to the broader goal of societal liberation from the constraints of alienation, domination, and unchecked progress.

A key insight from this study is the potential applicability of Critical Theory to the Arab context. Arab thinkers have drawn from this critique to analyze their own socio-political realities. However, adapting these critical tools requires careful consideration of the historical, intellectual, and cultural specificities of Arab societies. As emphasized by Al-Jabri, the critique of Western welfare societies, while valuable, must not be uncritically applied to other cultural contexts. The failures of Western rationality do not necessarily lead to skepticism toward reason, enlightenment, science, or technology in Arab history, where disruptions followed different trajectories. Ultimately, a nuanced, localized engagement with concepts of science, rationality, and enlightenment is vital to address the unique challenges faced by Arab societies—such as authoritarianism, social justice, and economic disparity—while maintaining the pursuit of a free, democratic life.

### Recommendations:

**1. Localization of Critical Theory:** Scholars and intellectuals in the Arab world should work towards localizing the concepts of Critical Theory to address specific socio-cultural and political issues relevant to the region. This includes reinterpreting key terms and frameworks to fit the realities of Arab societies.

**2. Interdisciplinary Approach:** Future research should adopt an interdisciplinary approach, combining insights from philosophy, sociology, and political science to further explore the relevance of the Frankfurt School in contemporary Arab thought.

**3. Engagement with New Paradigms:** Arab intellectuals should engage with the more recent paradigms of the Frankfurt School, such as the recognition and acceleration paradigms, to better understand and address emerging issues in Arab societies, including social justice, temporal conditions, and the pace of modern life.

**4. Critical Reappraisal of Modernity:** There should be a concerted effort to critically reassess the legacy of modernity and progress in the Arab world, drawing on the insights of the Frankfurt School to challenge dominant ideologies and propose alternative visions for social and political change.

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