

Theoretical Construction of a Fragmented Society: Fragmentations in Social System and in Interpersonal Relationships*

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In this paper, we construct a theory of fragmented society to highlight and clarify a new phase of social differentiation where social integration or recovery of balance is no longer possible to achieve by using conventional methods. We define social fragmentation as the state of institutional and interpersonal breakdown, and fragmented society as a society where social fragmentation is so severe that integration is almost impossible. We propose a pair of concepts, impersonal fragmentation (or fragmentation in the social system) and personal fragmentation (or fragmentation in interpersonal relationships) to be employed as a methodological and analytical frame to analyze complex social changes. The concepts are an adaptation of broadly used terms: system integration and social integration. This analytical distinction enables us to analyze facets of system contradictions and the breakdown of human relationships. Our theory of fragmented society suggests that social atomization, de-linkage, and systematic imbalance in a social system; and renders social isolation, identity crisis, and social conflicts in interpersonal relationships. By providing a comprehensive account of the complex intersection and fusion of fragmentations in system

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and in interpersonal relationships, the theory of paves the way for identifying the problems and solutions to the uncertainty and instability in contemporary society.

Keywords: *social differentiation, social fragmentation, fragmented society, social integration, system integration, impersonal and personal relationships, social system and interpersonal relationships*

Introduction

Human beings have progressed by developing their capacities for creative thinking and use of tools. These arose on the basis of social differentiation, especially social division of labor (see Eisenstadt 1964, 1970). Modern societies emerged in line with deconstructions of traditional power and social relations by new authorities, ways of living, thoughts and ideologies that were born out of various forms of social differentiation—developments in science and technology, the expansion of the division of labor, the growth of the trade and market economy, the prosperity of cities and associations, and the development of individuality and liberal thinking. The Industrial Revolution facilitated the rapid improvement of productivity, the rise of the bourgeoisie, and the transition from a feudal society to a capitalist society, thereby dividing and complicating political, social and cultural relations.

Social differentiation, however, is the result of the social division of labor. Classical sociologists such as Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, and Max Weber took interest in social differentiation, especially in the process of the social division of labor, to understand and explain the principle behind the emergence and transformation of modern society. At a time when people shared the belief that human society had evolved through the development of science and technology and rational institutions based on reason, classical sociologists were trying to provide a vision for human liberation by analyzing the nature of social differentiation in modern society and explaining the contradictions and conflicts that it led to. So, although they had different diagnoses and visions for the times, they shared the view that social development entails social differentiation and its complications.¹

¹ As an exception, the early Marx held on to the idea of whole man without a division of labor (see Marx 1992).

Marx analyzed that differentiation came out not only between different classes, but between manual and mental labor, contributing to the ideological hegemony of the ruling class (Marx and Engels 1998; Marx 1976, 1978, 1981). Weber has shown that while differentiation has led to the specialization of organizations by way of formal rationalization, it has at the same time given birth to the antinomic phenomenon of alienated humans in the iron cage of a rationalized organization (Weber 1978). Simmel paid attention to fragmentation in modern society as well. He analyzed the experiences of citizens in the metropolis, a place supposedly filled with social interaction and sociation of citizens, in terms of the fragmentation of affiliations (Simmel 1997, 1978). Further, Durkheim warned that social differentiation brings anomie, and at the same time suggested possibilities for achieving new ways of social solidarity. He held that social differentiation not only has material or economic effects, but would lead to moral effects such as social integration through organic solidarity formed within market relations (Durkheim 1984).

Classical sociologists tried to explain social change through biological inference and held that as organisms or living things go through differentiation and integration in order to evolve and survive, so too is social differentiation accompanied by integration. But, as Marx, Weber, Simmel, and Durkheim have shown us, in the division of labor, human relations do not always culminate in harmonious integration. Beliefs in the progress of history and the realization of a rational order through enlightenment and revolution have been shattered by class conflicts, inequality, poverty, alienation, hostility, war, totalitarian governance, and violence. Taking notice of the negative features of social differentiation such as separation, segmentation, alienation and conflicts, social scientists have frequently used the term "fragmentation." Instead of using it as a specific conceptual term, however, it has been used as a descriptive word to delineate differentiation in modern societies.

The debates on modernity at the end of the twentieth century can be understood as ones between frameworks of consciousness for explaining the phenomena of social differentiation and fragmentation. The establishment of a rational order based on scientific development and progress and emancipation thereof was the main principle and faith of modernity. And it was anticipated that this principle would further segment and be realized through rational modern institutions. But the onset of various conflicts and contradictions created suspicions about whether reason and rationality could bring historical progress and human emancipation, and scholars started to take notice of the double-sided nature of modernity and the limits of reason.

Anthony Giddens, who led the debates on modernity, differentiated the institutional aspects of modernity as (1) capitalism, (2) industrialism, (3) surveillance (operation of nation-states), and (4) military power (control of the means of violence), and suggested that the contradictions and conflicts arising out of the four institutional areas evolve into social movements such as labor movements, environmental movements, and movements for the freedom of speech and peace (Giddens 1990: 59, 159).

As a result, the use of “fragmented society” or similar concepts as a framework for analysis has increased within academic circles and journalism (Bodnár 2001; Wee 2002; Yee 2019, 2021; Blotta and Griff 2020; Brooks 2016; Hankookilbo 2019; *Le Parisien* 2020; MacFie 2021). Social fragmentation can be characterized as a state of institutional and interrelational breakdown (Wee 2002: 285). But there have been no further attempts to scrutinize the concept more rigorously. As social differentiation accelerates today and the negative effects of fragmentation increase, it is necessary to systematically reconstruct the social meaning of fragmentation.

In this paper, we therefore start out by redefining the concepts of “social fragmentation” and “fragmented society.” In order to systematically account for the many facets of modern society where differentiation accelerates, we will attempt to construct a theory of the “fragmented society” by developing fragmentation into a socio-diagnostic concept rather than a phenomenon-descriptive term. This is an attempt to understand the patterns of social differentiation and social change and thereby establish fragmentation as a theoretical concept that diagnoses and explains characteristics of social differentiation.

Accordingly, we aim to critically analyze the meaning of fragmentation as a particular phase of social differentiation. In modern society, social differentiation has multiple levels—differentiation of various phases and differentiation within each sphere. There are also various other aspects such as material differentiation and mental differentiation, institutional differentiation and interpersonal differentiation. On the other hand, sometimes there are phenomena that go against differentiation, such as de-differentiation, reunion, and simplification. So, in order to explain the aspects of social differentiation comprehensively, it is necessary to distinguish between the different dimensions in social relationships and to see how they interact. We will therefore reconstruct the traditional distinction between *system integration* and *social integration* (see Archer 1996), and construct an analytical one between the *impersonal* and *personal* dimensions in social relationships. To show that the process of social differentiation is neither

linear nor unilateral, we will clarify the interrelation between differentiation and dedifferentiation and further account for features and complex meanings of fragmentation. This will help us look for solutions to the characteristic problems of social differentiation and fragmentation.

Social fragmentation often involves a hierarchical relationship between differentiated elements and individuals. This results in a hierarchy among social groups that are considered horizontal, such as citizenship and nationhood (see Seol and Skrentny 2009; Seol 2014, 2020; Seol and Seo 2014; Lim and Seol 2018; Seol and Moon 2020; Kim 2019). When the hierarchy is accompanied by domination, discrimination, exclusion, and neglect, it may facilitate social conflicts. As Giddens (1990) pointed out, the operation of modern social institutions is accompanied by antagonism or conflicts among members and social protest due to various reasons. So, our conceptual, theoretical construction of fragmentation and fragmented society aims to provide a diagnosis of current social phenomena and to devise reasonable solutions to various social problems. It considers both differentiation and dedifferentiation and in particular focuses on the negative features of differentiation. We will also explain how inequality or discrimination experienced by individuals as members of a society are related to fragmentation.

From Social Differentiation to Social Fragmentation

Social differentiation takes place and intensifies in various phases and aspects, having both positive and negative effects on society. On one hand, differentiation may increase efficiency or autonomy; on the other hand, it may generate contradiction, imbalance, conflicts, disconnection, or even the reverse: dedifferentiation.² Social integration and balance may be achieved through social differentiation, although their political or practical definition is contestable. Historically, social differentiation has developed in various ways. However, today, social differentiation is developing in a new phase. We use fragmentation as a concept that focuses on the particular phases of differentiation. We pay attention to the following characteristics of the concepts of social fragmentation and a fragmented society.

² Differentiation and dedifferentiation are sociological terms, adopted from biology. It refers to a temporary process where cells become less specialized and return to an earlier cell state (see Cai, Fu and Sheng 2007).

First, social fragmentation refers to the deepening of social differentiation and entails negative meanings of cleavage or disconnection. We define *social fragmentation* as a phenomenon where personal and impersonal social relationships among people are shattered. Fragmentation is similar to segmentation; it refers to a society divided into small pieces. However, the concept of fragmentation focuses on the fact that social relationships, especially personal relationships between subdivided pieces or individuals, are estranged, or the linkage is weakened and disconnected.

Social fragmentation has the negative connotations of social differentiation. In this line of reasoning, the meaning of fragmentation encompasses a state of so-called fractures or cracks (Lukes 1977; Form 1995; Hobsbawm 2013; Levin 2016; Bradley 2016; Fraser 2016; Scambler 2018). Although an increase in segmentation and diversity sometimes leads to negative outcomes, it has positive effects as well. For example, in industrial organizations, more fragmented labor processes increase productivity and efficiency. At the same time, however, they exacerbate the alienation of workers. If the former is the technical and impersonal effects of fragmentation, the latter is a human and personal effects.

In the case of individualization in the family, it can increase individual autonomy from family members, and this autonomy helps individuals adapt to society through mobility for jobs or education. On the other hand, it can weaken collectivity and intimacy between family members thereby leading to the social isolation of individuals (Adams 2008; Chambers 2006, 2013). Here, we can also confirm that individualization in the family has functional/impersonal effects as well as human/personal effects. As such, social fragmentation can be developed at both impersonal and personal dimensions, and the negativity of personal fragmentation tends to intensify in the relational dynamics with the nature of impersonal fragmentation.

Second, social fragmentation differs from the general term of social differentiation in the sense that it makes integration more difficult. As can be seen in the debates on modernity (see Best and Kellner 1991), the increase in segmentation and diversity makes it more and more difficult to achieve balance through integration (see Pham, Kondor, Hanel and Thurner 2020; Pham, Alexander, Korbel, Hanel and Thurner 2021). So, the fragmented society can be seen as a particular phase of society where new phases of fragmentation inhibits integration and the pursuit of unity as a result of intense social differentiation.

Today, social differentiation in interests and values is further subdivided according to class, gender, race, generation, religion, educational background,

occupation, employment status, homeownership, ecological orientation, community orientation, leisure activities, and so on. Social fragmentation reduces shared experiences by segmenting individual areas of experience. As a result, the impossibility of commensuration or communication between individual perceptions increases. In particular, with the confusing distribution of biased information—i.e., fake news that is not based on truth on the internet—society tends to be fragmented, and citizens' polarized opinions in cyber space prevail. This gradually shrinks the areas of thinking or emotion that people share and sympathize with each other. The dispersion of work in different spaces also makes it difficult to form solidarity among workers. This shows a new phase of social differentiation that breaks away from the existing concepts of social differentiation.

From System Integration vs. Social Integration to Impersonal Relationships vs. Personal Relationships

In sociology, analytical concepts that distinguish between institutions and interactions have been used to understand the social phenomena that differentiation causes in various social phases. However, finding Talcott Parsons's social system theory inadequate to explain the autonomy of individual actions (see Parsons 1951), Lockwood criticized it and raised a debate over the dichotomy between *system integration* and *social integration* (see Lockwood 1964; Archer 1996; Perkmann 1998; Domingues 2000). Lockwood (1964) emphasizes that there are two dimensions in social relationships that are difficult to restore. He argues that in the debates between functionalism and conflicts theory in the 1960s, the discussion of social change is tilted toward a certain dimension, and suggests that we should make a distinction between social integration and system integration when accounting for the patterns of social change. Lockwood (1964: 244) wrote that "whereas the problem of social integration focuses attention upon the orderly of conflictful relationships between the actors, the problem of system integration focuses upon the orderly of conflictful relationships between the parts, of social system."

However, the dichotomy prevents us from understanding the complex aspects of social fragmentation by making us understand system and society as separate phases. For example, Habermas (1985) conceptualizes the market (economy) and administration (state) as a self-regulating system that is differentiated from the lifeworld while dividing society into system and

lifeworld. In this case, the system is treated as an impersonal relationship that excludes personal interactions and its interpersonal effects. So, the market system and the administrative system are drawn as phases where the principle of rationality or efficiency operates. However, as Marx (1976, 1978, 1981) and Althusser (1998) said, capitalist market relations are not only impersonal monetary relations, but also contain personal relationships such as exploitation, alienation, and class conflicts.

Mouzelis (1997: 116) criticized that Habermas (1984, 1985) adopted Lockwood's (1964) perspective on actor/system to differentiate between system and lifeworld and "it may lead to the false impression that one cannot study economic and political institutions from the point of view of the lifeworld of economic, political subjects. In other words, it gives the false impression that there are no economic or political lifeworlds."

Mouzelis's (1997) critique points out that the dichotomy of system integration and social integration needs to be improved in order to properly explain the complex aspects of social relations caused by social differentiation. The introduction of the distinction between impersonal and personal relationships makes it clear that both system and society include both impersonal and personal relationships. And it makes it possible for people to understand the aspects of social differentiation and fragmentation in various social phases in a complex way.

The social relationship is physical, logical and formally devoid of personal characteristics. Society, in contrast to a system, can be seen as human relations based on emotions and values. Therefore, a system provides the framework for social interaction where individual behavior unfolds according to certain functional rules, and rational calculation of efficiency and effect becomes a significant standard for judgment. On the other hand, society is based on personal and interactive relationships that are based on the will, intentions, emotions, influences, power, and value orientations of individuals. Important criteria for judgment become emotional, moral integration and symbiosis based on love, cooperation, solidarity, tension, conflicts, hatred, and hostility. Of course, in reality system and society are fused and interact with each other, and depending on the pattern of the interaction social change occurs in various form, either slowly or with speed.

Referring to the distinction between *system integration* and *social integration*, Lockwood (1964) tried to show how in Marx's theory (1933, 1976, 1978, 1981) the operation of *relations of production* is connected to the two types of integration. In terms of system integration, capitalist relations of production are a system where money and products circulate between

productivity and the contradiction in the production relations. But seen from the perspective of social integration, capitalist relations of production facilitate the creation of a society where human conflicts and hostility between the capitalist class and working class occur due to class relations. In *Capital*, Marx analyzed the contradictions of the capitalist economic system such as periodic recession and depression, tendency of the rate of profit to fall which is created by the paradox between private ownership of capital and social production, exploitation of surplus value and overproduction and lack of effective demand due to exploitation (Marx 1976, 1978, 1981). However, it is important to note that the contradictions in such a system directly facilitate personal conflicts and hostility between capitalists and workers due to wage decrease, increase in working hours and unemployment. Althusser (1998) also took note of the problems and criticized that to understand Marx's *Capital* as an accounting, arithmetic account of capital circulation makes it impossible to understand the fusion of capitalist relations of production and class struggle.

As such, understanding social structure and social relationships from the viewpoint of system integration and social integration is to focus on their different dimensions. Likewise, capitalist relations of production encompass both impersonal dimensions of system and the personal dimensions of society, each of which is relatively autonomous and at the same time fused with each other. It is in the same context that Durkheim (1984) focused on the distinction and connection between the technical and industrial dimensions (functional integration of system) and the moral dimensions (organic solidarity in a society) in the division of labor. It is therefore that dimensions of contradiction/integration of systems and dimensions of conflicts/integration of society belong to different mechanisms or rules. Understanding society based on the dichotomy is helpful in explaining the various and complex features of social change.

But if one defines a *system* as the relationships between parts of a social system as Lockwood (1964) does, and considers it as material and non-normative, it is difficult to account for social change that is caused by system contradictions. It is only possible to account for social change when one is able to explain how system contradictions facilitate the behavior of actors. So, Mouzelis (1997), in contrast to Lockwood (1964), reinterprets the distinction of society and system as the distinction between relationships, and the interaction between actors and (the logic of) institutions. Mouzelis (1997) points out the difficulty of defining certain systemic parts as non-normative, and argues that system contradictions "always reflect incompatibilities

between institutions, i.e., incompatibilities between the various kinds of logic of different institutionalized complexes of norms/roles.” Additionally, system contradictions do not result automatically in social change, “in order to assess whether or not systemic incompatibilities lead to social change, and/or to see what type of change, one has to focus on how actors handle contradictions” (Mouzelis 1997: 112-113). Mouzelis (1997: 113-114) therefore says that “social integration refers to co-operative/conflictual relationships between actors, whereas system integration refers to compatibilities/incompatibilities between ‘parts’ that are always viewed as institutionalized complexes portraying different degrees of durability/malleability.”

Mouzelis (1997) redefines systems as institutionalized complexes of norms/roles in order to show that institutional complexes in themselves include problems of social integration. He stresses that while it is valid to emphasize that system contradiction does not automatically bring about social change, systems should not be described as reified entities. In order to explain social change via internal contradictions of institutional complexes, it is necessary to clarify that actors are part of institutions and that, in the process of social change, system integration and social integration are correlated.

As a result, Mouzelis (1997) is trying to show us that reconstructing the distinction between social integration and system integration is an analytical one that allows us to see the same social phenomena from two different angles. If social integration operates at the level of concrete interaction, system integration lies at the level of possibility/impossibility for logical coexistence (Mouzelis 1997: 114). Here, Mouzelis’s distinction between system integration and social integration coincides with the one between impersonalized and personalized dimensions, and the distinction between the two dimensions depends on the difference in the way the actors are related to social relationships. If system integration is related to the impersonal dimension, social integration is related to the personal dimension in social relationships.

While it is impossible to ontologically assume any kind of social relationship without actors, it is possible to distinguish between system integration and social integration methodologically and analytically. If system integration treats individuals in social relationships or institutional complex as an impersonalized being, and focuses on the impersonal relationships, social integration focuses on the personal relationships between individuals who comprise interpersonal relationships. The perspective allows us to define relationships between actors, systems, and institutions as the “whole of

relational actors” or the “relational whole of actors” (Jeong 2002: 96-102). So, it is necessary to replace the system/social integration dichotomy with the impersonal/personal dimension dichotomy in order to break away from the perspective of reifying systems or institutions, and to explain that system contradictions accompany personal and human effects on actors. For example, as in Marx’s (1933, 1976, 1978, 1981) approach to the relations of production and Durkheim’s (1984) approach to the division of labor, impersonal and personal social relationships are intertwined, and various types of social change occur in the process of fusion of the two dimensions in social relationships.

Differentiation-Dedifferentiation and Social Change

The process of social differentiation should be understood in relation to the process of dedifferentiation. There is a tendency in evolutionary biology to explain the retrogression of the differentiation of cells or organs; on the other hand, it tends to demonstrate the process of dedifferentiation or recombination as degeneration. In labor market analysis, however, dedifferentiation is not necessarily regarded as degeneration (see Piore and Sabel 1984; Form 1995). This is because dedifferentiation can be seen as a response to the technical inefficiencies caused by the excessive division of labor or a change in production organization due to workers’ resistance. In this regard, differentiation and dedifferentiation are not linear, unilateral processes, but rather a multilinear, bilateral ones. Here it is difficult to view dedifferentiation as a plain process for functional and technical adaptation, rather it is a contradictory and conflictual process.

First, we will look at Luhmann’s (1989, 1996) systems theory and Bourdieu’s (1993) field theory that shed light on the dynamic facets of social change as a result of differentiation and dedifferentiation. Luhmann (1989), a system theorist, takes note of the difference between system and environment and claimed that “a system defines borders and dedifferentiates by itself thereby constructing the environment within.” This means that social systems build their own self-production system by forming borders with the environment through the choices of the actors who try to reduce complexity (Jeong 2003: 20). As such, Luhmann (1989, 1996) focuses on the process of reducing complexity through dedifferentiation, but at the same time underlines that the process of differentiation of function in modern society is accompanied by the differentiation of partial systems. Also, by emphasizing

that each partial system has internal reference points he pays attention to the fact that association or integration between systems becomes difficult.

Developing his field theory, Bourdieu (1984, 1993) takes note of the differentiation of fields as a result of the differentiation of particular capitals—economic capital, symbolic capital, cultural capital, education capital, literature/arts capital (acknowledgement), etc. In the case of the literature or arts field, “*the space of literary or artistic position-takings*, i.e. the structured set of the manifestations of the social agents involved in the field—literary or artistic works, of course, but also political acts or pronouncements, manifestos or polemics, etc.—is inseparable from the *literary or artistic position-takings* defined by possession of a determinate quantity of specific capital (recognition) and, at the same time, by occupation of a determinate position in the structure of the distribution of the specific capital. The literary or artistic field is a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggle* tending to transform or conserve the field of forces” (Bourdieu 1993: 30).

For Bourdieu (1984, 1993), social change is a process by which various fields are formed through the differentiation of certain capitals and where, at the same time, particular power relations are formed within each field. According to Luhmann’s systems theory, such a process of power relations is a process of dedifferentiation where the order within each field is simplified through a particular medium. Luhmann (1989) argues that “functional differentiation is possible by giving up on excess. Functional systems cannot help each other nor substitute or alleviate their burden,” and interprets the systems or partial system’s internal mutual dependence as proof for dedifferentiation (Luhmann 1989). But taking a different stance from Luhmann (1989, 1996), Bourdieu (1984, 1993) suggests that the class struggle in each field is accompanied by reconversion strategies among capitals, and emphasizes the importance of interconnection between fields, that is the partial systems. It shows that there is a difference from Luhmann’s perspective that emphasizes the formation of boundary and self-referential characteristics in a subsystem (Bourdieu 1984: 154). By focusing not only on the differentiation of fields and the formation of certain power relations in fields, but also on the interconnection (reconversion strategies) between fields, Bourdieu sheds light on the dynamics of differentiation and dedifferentiation in real social process.

When we take a closer look at the relations between social differentiation and fragmentation, if dedifferentiation is a particular phase that goes against the process of social differentiation, fragmentation is one that reveals the ongoing process of social differentiation. Just like social differentiation,

dedifferentiation can be both positive and negative. This also goes for fragmentation, which is a concept that expresses the intensity of social differentiation and does not always carry a negative meaning. For example, fragmentation in the division of labor can increase economic efficiency or productivity. But here we will mainly use fragmentation as a particular phase of social differentiation, that is a concept that focuses on the negative features.

We mentioned above that the fragmented society is a concept that tries to explain new particular phases of social differentiation. It is necessary to give a clear theoretical account of the points. Generally speaking, the fragmented society is one where social differentiation has proceeded to such a degree that society is divided into small parts. Additionally, the fragmented society as a particular phase of social differentiation is a term and theory that tries to give an account of reality where new patterns of social fragmentation spread that can no longer be addressed by existing pursuits for integration or unity.

The debates on modernity and post-modernity give us a starting point for clarification (see Best and Kellner 1991). In the debates, it is argued that in the social change that modern society is going through, the principles of modernity are being challenged, and it is necessary to critically reflect on this situation. The ideologies and institutions in modern society have been transformed from fixity to un-fixity (liquidity), organizations to post-organizations, center to de-center, mass to individual and vertical to horizontal (see Bauman 2000). Scholars who have focused on the deconstruction of modernity and post-modernity have been likely to argue for the impossibility of absolute truth or general integration (Jeong 2013).

Sociologists traditionally have been interested in the institutional characteristics of nation-state level capitalism, industrial society, democracy, civil society, and popular culture. But, as Wallerstein (2004) has pointed out, through the two world wars and the global expansion of capitalism, it has become necessary to broaden human horizons to global society. Through industrialization and commodification, modern society has clearly started to show its characteristics of postindustrial society (Bell 1976), consumer society (Baudrillard 1998), service society (Fuchs 1968; Castells 1976), and information society (Castells 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). In this process class differentiation and occupational differentiation has facilitated the division of organization and the individualization of the labor market (see Grusky 2014). Further, women have become more aware of their rights and entered society, leading to traditional patriarchal marriage and family relations having dissolved. As a result, individualization within family has occurred (Beck and

Beck-Gernsheim 2002). With the increase of material wealth and leisure time, daily cultural life as well has become more diverse and differentiated (Jenks 2005). Also, industrialization brought by many forms of social change, and as Simmel (1997) points out, individuals flocked to cities becoming part of secondary groups, leading to an increase in fragmentation. Further, the mass consumption of fossil fuel and resources facilitated a global environmental crisis. As such, institutional principles that were the backbone of modernity's development have faced crisis or dissolution. This means that system differentiation and individualization have negative features.

Along with Giddens, Ulrich Beck is a sociologist who argued for the need to profoundly reflect on modernity and lead the debates on reflexive modernity. In particular, Beck put forward the concepts of risk society and reflexive modernity, and tried to show that the institutional, cultural principles of modernity—the material growth of industrial society and the formation of collective identity in a capitalist class society—are radically at risk today (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1994, 2002). He argues that modern society has transitioned from the first modern society (industrial society) to the second one (risk society), accompanying what he calls reflexive modernity. An industrial society faces the results that are produced in the process of developing itself—that is, the ecological, scientific and technological risks and such a reality inhibits the practices that the industrial society has pursued in the past. We encounter a kind of self-confronting reality, as the pursuit of modernity leads to risk and challenges the principles of reflexive modernity. Beck emphasizes that we must engage in plans for a new life beyond modernity.

Of course, Beck does not limit his debates on risk society to ecological, scientific, and technological risks (Beck 1992). He also mentions risks in daily life, for example risks in the labor market and in love (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 2002.) He says that according to the transformation of the industrial structure and employment status, traditional class society declines, and individual choices become more important than the influence of social groups such as family/kin, local communities, labor unions, political parties, etc. The continuing individualization of the labor market/jobs gave birth to a “underemployment society,” and the individualization of sexual relations (equality, free choice) deepened the “confusion of love.” Individualization, here, does not mean an increase of free individuals who are emancipated from the restraints of social structure or social groups, but it rather suggests that the individual has to survive on his own in times of social risk such as social change and economic uncertainty among others (Beck and Beck-

Gernsheim 2002: xxi-xxii). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) suggest that as individual choices and responsibilities thereof become more substantial with the individualization of daily life, the individual has no choice but to manage the sense of liberation as well as the uncertainties and confusion that come from leaving traditional social relations.

The transition from industrial society to risk society, from the first modern to the second modern society (or reflexive modernity) reveals the discontinuous and segmented features of social change. In terms of social differentiation, it can be said that it means a transition from industrial social differentiation to postindustrial social differentiation. It exhibits a new phase of social differentiation. Of course, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) use concepts such as the “individualization of the labor market” or the “individualization of sexual relations” and we can say that such kinds of individualization go hand in hand with negative features of social fragmentation.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) understand individualization to be the central principle of transformation in a risk society and it goes for impersonal and personal social relationship at the same time. When we look at the family as a social institution, the increase of nuclear families and separated families points to impersonal social relationship that braces up individual independence and autonomy. But the encouragement of independence and autonomy can bring by a sense of liberation from community restraints, but also undermine love between spouses or intimacy between family members, and thereby lead to social isolation, alienation and existential anxiety, all aspects of personal relationships attributable to changes in the family institution (Adams 2008; Chambers 2006, 2013). Here, in response to the negative features of social fragmentation, families can display new patterns of retrogressive dedifferentiation against individualization such as new forms of family or intimate communities.

The Dual Process of Social Fragmentation

We argue that the dichotomy of system and society needs to be reconstructed taking into account of impersonal and personal dimensions of social relationships. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) suggest in their “individualized society of employees” and “insecure employment system,” features of differentiation in the dimension of social system such as the occupational differentiation are caused by changes in the industrial and

occupational structure. At the same time, it may entail features in the dimension of interpersonal relationships such as anxiety, alienation, and social isolation of employees, all attributable to individualization. They can be examples of negative features of social fragmentation. To clarify the multiple and complex patterns of social fragmentation, it is necessary to categorize them into system and interpersonal relationships.

Table 1 shows the two types of social fragmentation: the fragmentations in social system and in interpersonal relationships. As mentioned above, social structure and social relationships include two dimensions. In terms of social system dimension, we look at the relationships between the system and its parts including technological, functional, logical, reasonable, and official perspective. In terms of interpersonal relationships, on the other hand, it consists of human, emotional, moral, value-oriented, unreasonable, and unofficial perspective. So, fragmentation usually appears in two different types.

TABLE 1
TWO TYPES OF SOCIAL FRAGMENTATION

	Fragmentation in Social System	Fragmentation in Interpersonal Relationships
Meaning	<i>System contradictions</i> due to the lack or absence of links between social system and its parts	<i>Breakdown of human relationships</i> between people and social groups
Aspects	<i>Social atomization</i> : segmentation of social institutions or groups into smaller parts or sections <i>De-linkage</i> : disconnectedness between nodes in social system, or lack of contact with others <i>System imbalance</i> : malfunctioning due to disintegration or <i>discordance in the harmony of a social system</i>	<i>Social isolation</i> : increase of loneliness; anxiety due to decline in sociability and communication <i>Identity crisis</i> : confrontations among multiple identities; mental, emotional anxiety due to loss of self-esteem <i>Social conflicts</i> : competition, resistance, and struggle due to social domination, discrimination, exclusion, hate, neglect
Overcoming	<i>Recovery of system balance or rationality</i>	<i>Restoration of social solidarity or coexistence</i>

Fragmentation in social system refers to a state in which *system contradictions* arise due to the lack or absence of links between social system and its parts. On the other hand, fragmentation in interpersonal relationships refers to the *breakdown of human relationships* among people and social groups.

Today, *fragmentation in social system* usually takes three aspects: (1) social atomization, (2) de-linkage, and (3) system imbalance. *Social atomization* is segmentation of social institutions or groups into smaller parts or sections (see Smith 1979; Granovetter 1985; Granovetter and Swedberg 1992; Witte and Lahmann 1988; Chambers 2006; Kim 2015; Bae and Park 2015). *De-linkage* is disconnectedness between nodes in the social system, or lack of contact with others (see Putnam 2000; Wresch 1996; Portes 1998; James 2014; Adams 2008; NHK Special Interview Team 2012; Lew, Park, Shin and Lee 2015). *System imbalance* is malfunctioning due to disintegration or discordance in the harmony of a social system (see Parsons 1951; Luhmann 1996; Mouzelis 2008). Fragmentation in a social system is accompanied by the fragmentation of individuals acting as functional and technological components in the system.

This simultaneously leads to personal effects, namely, the *fragmentation in interpersonal relationships*: (1) social isolation, (2) identity crisis, and (3) social conflicts. *Social isolation* refers to the increase of loneliness or anxiety due to decline in sociability and communication (see Arendt 1951; Riesman, Glazer and Denney 1961; Sennet 1977; Adams 2008; Engel 2016; Choi 2013; Kim 2015; Russell 1996; Klinenberg 2016; Bae and Park 2015; Hertz 2021). *Identity crisis* is confrontations among multiple identities, mental, emotional anxiety due to loss of self-esteem of individuals (see Simmel 1978, 1997; Rosenberg 1965; Giddens 1991; Orbell, Zeng and Mulford 1996; Castells 2010b; Chambers 2006; Hayward 2007; Guibernau 2013; Bradley 2016). *Social conflicts* are competition, resistance, and struggle due to social domination, discrimination, exclusion, hate, neglect of individuals or social groups (see Dahrendorf 1959; Touraine 1971; Bourdieu 1984; Honneth 1995, 1996; Grusky 2014; Piketty 2014; Wasmer and Koch 2003; Schwartz 2008; Denton and Voth 2017; Michener 2018; Higaki and Nasu 2021).

The solutions to social problems resulting from the two dimensions of social fragmentation are also different. Overcoming fragmentation in a social system is to recover system balance or rationality; resolving fragmentation in interpersonal relationships is to restore social solidarity and coexistence (see Beck 1992; Giddens 1991; Putnam with Garrett 2020; Derrida 2000; Levinas 1969; Seol 2020; Hoskins and Mascherini 2009; Dominelli and Moosa-Mitha

2014; Blotta and Griff 2020; Hertz 2021; Bayer, Schwarz and Stark 2021; Shachar, Bauböck, Bloemraad and Vink 2017; Kim, Cho, Yoon, Kwon, Cha and Seol 2019). The distinction of the two dimensions, however, is solely analytical. Indeed, fragmentations in a social system and in interpersonal relationships are interconnected and closely interwoven. Hereinafter, the two dimensions of social fragmentation will be examined in detail.

Fragmentation in Social System

A typical feature of *social atomization* is the individualization of economic and social institutions. As an example of a social system, the family is in dissolution due to the increases of the never-married, the formerly married, and the older population (see Witte and Lahmann 1988; Sweet and Bumpass 1990). The proportion of single-person households is rapidly increasing. Kinship groups and local communities are also constantly being divided into smaller units. As economic institutions such as industry, occupation, and labor are technologically and radically differentiated, the tendency to segment economic activities into individual units increases (see Granovetter 1985). It makes society dependent on the abilities and responsibilities of individuals rather than social groups or organizations.

The individualization of the labor market has created an individualized employee society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). As a result, economic institutions, both in the production process and in the consumption process, are increasingly dependent on the choices of individuals. In the individualized market consumption and network society, the development of information technology is diversifying individual needs and interests and further consolidating the tendency of individualization. Due to this, social atomization intensifies and competition between individuals grows fiercer, while linkage and integration between them is becoming more difficult.

As social atomization usually undermines—and occasionally severs—both direct and indirect links between social system and its parts, *de-linkage* is also deepening (see Putnam 2000). As the internet is dispersed over the living space of individuals, making the communication space non-face-to-face, the disconnection between them is intensified (see Chambers 2006, 2013). In particular, as non-face-to-face contact reinforces the separation into small groups, the phenomenon of gathering of close people is spreading. It leads to a tendency to polarize the thoughts and attitudes of small groups. It can be said to be interpersonal effects of system fragmentation.

System imbalance has long been the focus of functionalist systems theory

(see Parsons 1951). With regards to social system, social differentiation such as specialization, segmentation and so on can achieve stable balance and organic unity with the functional integration between parts of social system. It is called system integration or balance. So, system imbalance as negative features of fragmentation can develop in two ways. One is system contradiction or the crisis of system maintenance, the other is the damage to (lack of) system rationality.

The system strives for stable integration and balance in the process of differentiation, but system contradiction/crisis hinders its integration and balance. Marx (1976, 1978, 1981) argues that the periodic occurrence of depressions in capitalist society facilitates a crisis in the system reproduction. In accounting for the social division of labor, Durkheim (1984) holds that the system fails to work properly because of the lack of mediation between divided parts. Parsons (1951) who established a system theory of structural functionalism, developed Durkheim's ideas and conceptualized the situation where the relations between subsystems no longer worked as system contradiction. Durkheim (1984) and Parsons (1951) argued that the system contradiction could be resolved through the restructuring process. Marx (1976, 1978, 1981), however, thought that in a capitalist society, the system could not solve the fundamental contradictions because of labor exploitation, so he did not see that the stable reproduction of the system was a good thing in itself.

In capitalist society, system fragmentation such as social atomization and de-linkage in factories and markets makes system balance or integration difficult. It also intensifies structural inequality and discrimination, leading to social conflicts. This is because the system itself forms and reproduces unequal, hierarchical, discriminatory human relations. Marx's perspective shows that it is necessary to understand characteristics of system (system contradiction) in connection with interpersonal relationships (social conflicts).

Weber (1978) points out that the pursuit of system rationality through social differentiation or specialization sometimes inhibits the effective, efficient achievement of the system's goal. In discussing bureaucracy, he warned about possibly facing situations where purpose and means are reversed, or where *practical rationality* and *formal rationality* run counter each other. Rationality is locked up in an iron cage. Habermas (1976) also pointed out that the pursuit of instrumental rationality has the danger of becoming a tool that suppresses human creativity and personality. The expansion of bureaucracy's role and its monopoly on power may hurt

democratic values. So, state bureaucracy in a post-capitalist society faces a crisis of legitimacy. Damage to or lack of system rationality is also the cases of system imbalance. In the end, Weber (1978) points out the antinomy of rationality, and Habermas (1976, 1984, 1985) suggests “communicative rationality” as an alternative to system rationality. This takes them away from the functionalist view of system rationality.

Responses to the Fragmentation in the Social System

The various expressions defining contemporary society such as post-industrial society, service society, consumer society, individualized employee society, techno-scientific society, information and network society, platform capitalism, illustrate complex aspects of system fragmentation. As we mentioned above, since the aspects and meanings of system fragmentation appear in various ways, their responses must also be different.

In contemporary society, which is becoming increasingly differentiated and complex, social atomization, de-linkage, and system imbalance are inevitable social trends. They are aspects of system fragmentation, but they are not necessarily negative. If appropriate linkages are made between parts, they may increase system rationality and efficiency. The important question here is how the system fragmentations affect interpersonal relationships.

Limited to the system itself, if social atomization and de-linkage make it difficult to achieve the integration or balance of the system, system fragmentation will cause *system imbalance* or system irrationality. As the system fragmentation expands, disintegration or *discordance* of the social system is more likely to occur and intensify the system imbalance. Therefore, in order to overcome the imbalance or discordance of the system, it is necessary to actively seek ways to restore rationality or efficiency of the system (see Mouzelis 2008). This may require de-differentiation.

Fragmentation in Interpersonal Relationships

Fragmentation in interpersonal relationships is directly or indirectly related to system fragmentation. This is because interpersonal relationships are ones between the individuals constituting the system. Social fragmentation in the labor process changes the lives of workers, which results in changes in their emotions and attitudes. Emotions of alienation or discrimination in the labor process led to feelings of social isolation, identity crisis, and social conflicts. The same processes can be in various spheres such as industry, occupation,

labor, consumption, family, media, network and everyday life where individualization is prevailing (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

Here, we will look at three main aspects of fragmentation in interpersonal relationships: social isolation, identity crisis, and social conflicts. First, there are the problems of *social isolation*, an emotional state by which fragmentation in personal social relationship is well revealed. Social isolation is a case of personal fragmentation in interactive relations. It occurs as social differentiation leads to an increase in individualization. Differentiation of the system leads to the individualization of labor market and sexual (or family) relations. It carries the meaning of liberation from collective traditions as it strengthens individual autonomy and independence. But since it also leads to discrepancies in human relations, it can also cause social isolation by weakening intimacy and sociability, and social conflicts in daily life due to decline of communicative competence (see Menjívar 2000; Adams 2008; Chambers 2006, 2013; Engel 2016; Hertz 2021; Park and Bae 2016; Park, Kim, Liu and Yoon 2020; Lee 2013; Choi 2013; Im 2021; Ha 2021).

Since the nineteenth century, sociologists have taken notice of the social division of labor and raised questions about interpersonal fragmentation. Here the division of labor not only refers to the differentiation in the impersonal social relationship dimension such as instrumental and technical relations, but also to the differentiation in interpersonal social relationships. Weber (1978) understood the social division of labor as a rational process of the expansion of specialization, but also criticized the antinomy of rationality such as the human locked up in the iron cage or rational division of labor organization as a bureaucracy. Durkheim (1984) as well stressed that the social division of labor does not only have system functions of economic efficiency, but interpersonal functions of moral solidarity. He also thought that the social division of labor impaired traditional morals due to the spread of individualism thereby causing anomie and value/norms conflicts. Durkheim (1984) focused on the effects of personal integration through the formation of organic solidarity within the social division of labor. Marx (1976, 1978, 1981), however, took notice of the divisive effects of the division of labor system on personal social relationships such as alienation and exploitation.

The iron cage, anomie, and alienation/exploitation may cause social conflicts in interactions and a feeling of social isolation. The increase of social division of labor today leads to individualization in the labor market (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002), and we can say that it is a case of severance in interpersonal relations that occurs in new phases of social change. So, the

social isolation, and decline in sociability/communication competence that individuals feel in mutual interaction are significant aspects of fragmentation in interpersonal relationships.

Second, there are problems of *identity crisis* (see Simmel 1978, 1997; Rosenberg 1965; Giddens 1991; Castells 2010b; Orbell, Zeng and Mulford 1996; Chambers 2006; Hayward 2007; Guibernau 2013; Bradley 2016). The process of social differentiation and pluralization has unsettled the legitimacy of traditional value or norm standards in personal social relationships. The social legitimacy or meaning of some identities especially has been controversial or even become the object of discrimination, neglect, and hate. Women, gender minorities, women marriage-based immigrants and their children usually show loss of self-esteem due to identity crisis that may cause mental, emotional anxiety. Also, individuals who live with multiple identities in multiple positions (status-role) experience identity confusion and existential anxiety due to internal clashes between attitudes and emotions according to their identities. They are cases of fragmentation in interpersonal relationships on the individual or interactive level.

Third, there are also *social conflicts* (see Dahrendorf 1959; Touraine 1971; Honneth 1995, 1996; Grusky 2014; Michener 2018; Denton and Voth 2017; Bryant 2010; Wasmer and Koch 2003; Schwartz 2008; Higaki and Nasu 2021). While many social conflicts arise from the hierarchal fragmentation of the distribution of resources or power, some social conflicts are caused by feelings of discrimination and disregard in human relationships. They are related to identity or recognition issues (Honneth 1995, 1996). There are various social standards that categorize identity such as gender, generation, geography, educational background, ethnicity, majority-minority, etc.

System fragmentation results in pluralization or multiplication of human relationships. In everyday life individuals live in various social relationships, taking multiple social positions. It means the multiplication of individual social positions/roles and identities within multiple social relationships. Multiple social relations and identities also mean the diversification and intersection of interests and values. Here, social relationships are complexly formed according to classes, political ideologies, tribes, nations, ethnicities, regions, genders, generations, dominant groups and social minority groups, language, and cultures and so on. So, individuals who exist in the combination of multiple positions within such multiple systems confront different conflicts of interests or values and experience different and complex identity crises. This restricts the formation of empathy and solidarity.

Responses to the Fragmentation in Interpersonal Relationships

Today, people live in a fragmented social environment. As *hierarchically fragmented social systems* create inequality and discrimination among people, various differentiation of interests and values occurs (see Seol and Skrentny 2009; Seol 2014, 2020; Seol and Seo 2014). Ethnic or cultural diversity coexists with the increase of global exchanges. Individuals are living through social isolation, identity crisis, and social conflicts in multiple and dispersed experiences. Therefore, it is inevitable to seek different solutions in response to social changes in a diversified society.

First, in order to solve the problems of inequality and discrimination caused by the *hierarchically fragmented social system*, we must find ways to solve structural inequality and discrimination in social institutions. Second, *hierarchically fragmented interpersonal relationships* such as personal discrimination and neglect that have roots in social systems or institutions must be reformed into equal interpersonal relations. Third, in order to reduce social conflicts in interpersonal relationships due to fragmentation in daily interactive relationships at the individual (emotional) level, citizens should restore interpersonal relations by enhancing communicative skills, intimacy and a sense of community. Especially in a world where socially or individually diverse identities and values coexist, the pursuit of coexistence and solidarity with others through recognition of different identities and values may be a realistic alternative to solving discrimination, isolation, anxiety etc. caused by fragmentation.

Beck (1992) paid attention to sub-politics where various agents of civil society participate in response to ecological, technoscientific risks and the self-reflexive project as a way of countering the confusion and anxiety of everyday life due to individualization. Further, Giddens (1991) focused on self-disclosure to others as a way for individuals forming diverse self-identities in different “trajectory of the self” to restore intimacy, contemplating coexistence, emphasizing life politics that resists inequality and discrimination in civic society and life words, and pursuing a free and equal life. Therefore, we need to seek various political and practical strategies in fragmented societies.

Of course, it is not adequate to regard the multiplexing of identities or the fragmentation of life as entirely negative. Today’s media environment of the information society, that is, fragmented spatiality, is a significant factor in the fragmentation of the lifeworld. It largely causes the fragmentation of the

daily experiences and the awareness of individuals. Kim (2011: 153) argues “the fragmentation phenomenon of experiences is in itself neither positive nor negative, but is a form of objective change that the human actor experiences due to the development of technology.” It can be understood as an aspect of impersonal relations because of informatization, and it should be noted at the point that the segmented, fragmented perceptions/emotions may bring by a decline in cognitive thinking or overall capacity. Kim (2011), however, refers to the aspects of change as “mobile introspection” and affirms it as a new type of introspection in which the dissolution of the traditional introspector or the formation of a post-introspective agent is ongoing. It is similar to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s (1995) acceptance of love in a risk society as “completely normal chaos.” In this context, the formation of open attitudes that does not necessarily view the dissolution of traditional safety negatively might be one solution to respond to personal or interpersonal fragmentation.

Conclusion: Towards a Theory of Fragmented Society

In Korean society, capitalism and democracy have unevenly developed since the mid-twentieth century. During its rapid modernization, along with economic development, social differentiation and the spread of individualism have taken place, traditional culture has been dismantled, and social values have come into confrontation and competition. The process has resulted in a diversified and fragmented society. Nowadays, the confrontations between the interests and values of social groups or individuals tend to be extreme, accompanied by violent social conflicts. In that respect, the fragmented society theory can help understand the characteristics not only in Korean society but also in contemporary society in the world.

In our attempt to construct a theory of the fragmented society, which is a new phase of social differentiation, we have distinguished between fragmentations in social system and in interpersonal relationships. We have also elucidated new features of social conflicts in a fragmented society in terms of *hierarchal fragmentation*. Although the concept of the fragmented society alone is not sufficient to construct a general social theory explaining all social structures and changes, this concept still helps to clarify multiple aspects of today’s significant social phenomena of fragmentation.

The process of social differentiation in modern society can be explained in terms of social fragmentation encompassing pluralization, specialization,

segmentation, etc. A feature of *hierarchical fragmentation* is that even through institutional reform of the system or even revolution, it is difficult to achieve singular unity, harmony, balance or integration between the social system and its parts. This is because fragmentation such as segmentation, individualization, pluralization of the identity in the social system and in impersonal relationships creates diversity and difference by which diverse interests, values, and identities of social agents are intersected and interwoven. So, this observation tells us that different people in fragmented society need to seek ways to coexist amidst conflicts and communication.

In general, integration and balance accompany social differentiation and bring by social development. But social differentiation is also accompanied by dedifferentiation and in new situations breeds new phenomena of fragmentation. In order to comprehensively elucidate today's new development of social fragmentation, sociology needs to develop the theory of the fragmented society. Our study laid the first stone in developing the theory. From now on, continuous theoretical efforts should be made to clearly understand the characteristics of fragmented society and to find solutions to its problems.

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