Misrecognition and ethno-religious diversity

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Introduction

In the twenty years since the publication of Charles Taylor's essay on 'The Politics of Recognition' and Axel Honneth's book *Kampf um Anerkennung*, there has been an incremental proliferation in literature tackling the concept of recognition. While sometimes conflated with related issues, especially concerning the politics of identity and difference, the politics of recognition has provided a distinctive and valuable perspective on the implications of a broad repertoire of sociological and political 'differences'. This is because the idea of recognition has been employed not only as a normative concept of justice, but also as a means of understanding a range of phenomena, including the formation of individual psyches, the dynamics of political struggles, and the nature of moral progress (Seymour, 2010).

As such the politics of recognition has become a cornerstone in debates about the best way to respond to people's desire to have their cultural particularities acknowledged, and has traversed a number of important issues: from the tension between individual freedom and group equality in multicultural societies, through the intersections between the multiple inequalities which permeate such societies, and the effects of recognition on individual psyche, to the nature of global justice. In short, the politics of recognition is an area of social and political theory which is characterized by lively debate about a range of important and topical issues (Thompson, 2006).

While such accounts have yielded significant theoretical insights relatively little attention has been paid to its sister concept of misrecognition. More precisely, there is a profound dearth in the literature on the ways in which misrecognition might motivate political struggle, whether it is necessarily unjust, if it must inflict 'psychic harm', and more broadly how misrecognition might impact upon things such as religion and citizenship, cultural dialogue and gender relations. The international conference 'The Politics of Misrecognition', convened in Bristol in 2010 was one of the biggest events to focus on this topic, and it was there that the following articles were first presented.

Taken as a whole the collection shows how at this embryonic stage there is an opportunity to learn from certain intellectual weaknesses found in some of the early theorisations of recognition. Two issues are of particular relevance here. The first was a general dismissal of minority religions as providing morally (or indeed politically or sociologically) valid categories of identity-related claims-making, certainly when compared with ethnic and cultural minority identities (Modood, 1998). One illustration of this can be seen in how Charles Taylor drew the boundary of legitimate recognition politics to exclude Muslim identity claims-making, on the grounds that in Islam there is 'no question of separating politics and religion in the way we have come to expect in Western liberal society' (Taylor, 1992: 62). Further examples present themselves in the political

philosophies of otherwise multiculturalist theorists who either ignored religion (Young, 1990), or relegated it to a matter of personal conscience in a way that precluded it from forming the basis of public identity-related claims (Kymlicka, 1995). These shortcomings proved to be especially unfortunate with the subsequent salience that ethno-religious (particularly Muslim) identities would come to assume in divergent (and divergently responding) social and political contexts across Western Europe and beyond (see Laegaard, and Meer, this issue). It is our view that a direct concern with the concept of *mis*recognition can bring the importance of theorising ethno-religious diversity into view in a way that a concern with recognition has frequently not. It can throw light on the types of injustices faced by ethno-religious groups that are not answered within the framework of liberal-democratic procedures of fairness and indeed can be exacerbated by them. Thus several of the articles in this special issue are aimed at redressing this oversight by elaborating how both normative political liberalism (Pinto, this issue; and Seymour, this issue) and critical social and interpretivist theory (Thompson, this issue; and Martineau, this issue) can dialogue with contemporary ethno-religious identity claims-making. Other contributions chart competing characterizations of where religious, especially Muslim, minorities presently rest with the church-state relations in different European contexts (Laegaard, this issue), and especially how we should conceptualize contemporary Muslim identities in Europe so as not to misrecognise their dynamic components (Martineau, this issue; Meer, this issue).

The last point relates to the second intellectual tendency permeating some of the early theorisations of recognition towards an over-reliance upon abstraction. That is to say that these accounts were insufficiently concerned with more 'context sensitive' arguments capable of making theoretical formulations work in a manner that did not oversimplify or distort the ambiguities of lived social and political life (Favell and Modood, 2003; see also Martineau; Pinto; and Thompson, this issue). This gave rise in particular to a range of critiques concerning the unintended consequences of recognition. Many theorists have drawn attention for example to the ways in which making 'cultural identities' a significant category in the normative theorization of justice can involve a drastic oversimplification of individual and group identities. Since cultures and thus cultural identities are not fixed but are sites of contestation and change, many theorists (notably feminists) have elaborated on the ways in which recognition of cultural identities can privilege one version of those cultural identities, so reinforcing unequal power structures *within* groups (Phillips and Saharso, 2008). Our suggestion in this introduction is that focusing on misrecognition rather than the effects of a lack of recognition may help to provide a more nuanced and contextual picture of what is at issue. Taking the concept of misrecognition as the point of departure focuses attention squarely on to the objects of, and processes of, misrecognition; by its nature it mitigates the excesses of abstraction and makes a more contextual approach both more likely and more appropriate.

The overarching aim of this special issue is to develop debates by considering how the idea of misrecognition can help us to understand the interaction and political orientations of different cultures and state policies, especially with respect to the issue of religion in general and ethno-religious minorities in particular. To this end, it draws upon interdisciplinary perspectives of

social and political theory, sociology and philosophy, and takes in cases from Britain, Canada, Denmark, Israel, and Western Europe more broadly. In the remainder of this introduction, we first situate the concept of misrecognition in relation to broader theories of recognition. We then move on to describe how the articles in this special issue attempt to gain a more subtle foothold on some of the most pressing 'problems of recognition' through their various focuses on aspects of misrecognition.

Situating recognition

The literature on recognition is vast and overlapping; hence it does not lend itself easily to categorization into distinct bodies of thought. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify at least four 'traditions', albeit containing significant internal diversity and overlap.

The first can be traced to a Hegelian phenomenology which continues to compete with Kantian ethics in numerous areas of contemporary political philosophy. This is most obviously found in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (especially in his allegory of the master and the slave) where Hegel outlines a series of conflicts and their dialectical relationship to different kinds of recognition. In examining reciprocal relations of power, he attempts to 'lift the veil' and reveal the processes mediating the transformation of a consciousness from dependence to one of self-consciousness and independence. Through this exercise, Hegel draws our attention to the manner in which a Hobbesian war of 'all against all' is unable to maintain the very individuality or independence upon which it is premised. This, indeed, stems from a question Hegel posed to himself, namely: how does a person come to conceive herself as an independent being and/or when do they become conscious of themselves as such? In his answer, Hegel describes a process of objectification which suggests that we must first identify – outside of ourselves – some 'purposive intelligence' from which it follows that others are required to establish our own independent selfhood or identity. This is perhaps best captured in Binder's (1989: 1435) suggestion that Hegel attempted to show that 'freedom [has] to be conceived as some form of association rather than independence; and that it [has] to be mediated by politics rather than defended from politics.'

Besides stressing the primacy of the political, and through his 'devastating critique of the ideal of independence' (ibid: 1437), Binder's account traces back to Hegel the intellectual foundations of modern communitarian conceptions of freedom. This appropriation is observable in a number of places, including Michael Sandel's seminal critique of John Rawls and the work of Michael Walzer more broadly, but perhaps most obviously bears fruit in Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* where he states:

> I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to their conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to continuing grasp of languages of

self-understanding – and of course these classes overlap. A self exists only within what I call 'webs of interlocution' (Taylor, 1989: 36).

Taylor's caution against a kind of modernist individualism re-emerges in a second tradition of recognition. While this is also informed by Hegel, it harnesses in addition a tradition of critical theory that is strongly oriented by vectors of emancipation and alienation. Here the issue of recognition comes to rest 'as a common denominator among many different struggles in which individuals and groups are engaged' (Seymour, 2010: 2). More precisely, it prioritises the notion of an 'original intersubjectivity of humankind' understood as communicative relations between embodied subjects, something that it fears is lost in a time when individualism or atomism has dominated the domain of ethics (Honneth 1995: 29).

It would be uncontroversial to state that the chief exponent of this tradition has been Axel Honneth (1995), who anchors an account of recognition in a particular social ontology. This he partly retrieves from the early Hegel, to emphasise psychological features of recognition in the terms of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem – each of which he regards as a necessary condition of self-realization. In other words, these three features jointly constitute the 'process of realizing…one's self-chosen life-goals' (ibid. 174). This freedom from coercion facilitates the pursuit of a flourishing human life in a manner that forges links between the psychological, social and political realms (see Thompson, this issue). In this tradition we might also include certain approaches to social theories of race and racism, characterised in very different ways by Franz Fanon's *Black Skins White Masks* (1967) and bell hooks' *Ain't I A Woman?* (1981). The kinds of recognition and misrecognition being referred to here were arguably first elaborated by W. E. B. Du Bois' (1999 [1903]: 15) description in *The Souls of Black Folks* of the 'peculiar sensation' common to African Americans comprising

> [A] double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. […] [T]hat nameless prejudice that leaps beyond all this, he stands helpless, dismayed and well-nigh speechless; before that personal disrespect and mockery, the ridicule and systematic humiliation, the distortion of fact and wanton license of fancy, the cynical ignoring of the better and boisterous welcoming of the worse, the all pervading desire to inculcate disdain…

As Honneth (1995: 135) puts it, experiencing such a denial of rational autonomy may lead those who Du Bois is describing to experience 'social death'. In other words, such people may cease to be regarded – and may cease to regard themselves – as citizens who may rightly play an active part in the life of their political community (see Meer, 2011). In Du Bois' account, he is trying to reconcile the strivings for group recognition with more traditional accounts of the nation-state, in an effort to identify a multiculturalism in which cultural and/or moral diversity would be considered an asset. Thus it has been argued elsewhere that Du Bois bequeaths to us a normative concept that can be appropriated in debates over multiculturalism, beginning with a rebuttal of

narrow preferences for territorial and cultural congruencies (Meer, 2010 chapter 2). As such, Du Bois perhaps bridges the second and third tradition of recognition scholarship, relating to what May, Modood, and Squires, (2004) refer to as the 'multicultural turn' in social and political theory

The multicultural turn is responding to the view that citizenship achieved through individual rights alone, based upon blindness to difference, can satisfy principles of social justice. What multicultural theories share in common is that they seek to go beyond the protection of the basic civil and political rights guaranteed to all individuals in a liberal-democratic state, and to extend some level of public recognition and support for ethno-cultural and ethno-religious minorities in order that they may maintain and express their distinctive identities (Banting and Kymlicka, 2006: 1). There must therefore be some change in what minorities are being asked to adapt *to*; hence Modood, for example, insists that 'when new groups enter a society, there has to be some education and refinement of…sensitivities in the light of changing circumstances and the specific vulnerabilities of new entrants' (2006: 61).

This view was powerfully elaborated by Iris Marion Young (1990) in her landmark *Justice and the Politics of Difference.* For Young, the requirement to assimilate is unjust because it 'always implies coming to the game after it is already begun, after the rules and standards have been set, and having to prove oneself accordingly' (1990: 165; and see Martineau, this issue). Focusing upon individuals ignores how citizenship already fails to treat people equally, or where 'blindness to group difference disadvantages groups whose experience, culture and socialized capacities differ from those of privileged groups' (ibid. 165). Not being attentive to group differences can, therefore, lead to a form of oppression in itself and/or can contribute to further oppression because the injuries suffered from prejudice are not merely due to the overt hostility from the majority, but also arise from minority invisibility in not being recognised or represented as a legitimate constituent of society. On this view, the most important orientation of a democratic state is not about granting various group rights or accommodations but about providing the 'mechanisms for the effective recognition and representation of the distinct voices and perspectives of those of its constituent groups that are oppressed or disadvantaged' (Young 1990: 184).

In this way, Young can be seen also as a major exponent of the final 'tradition' that deserves note here, which allies questions of recognition with an approach of deliberative democracy. This 'democratic turn' represents a relatively new area of scholarship on recognition which has gained increasing prominence in recent years given the problems many have perceived with forms of group representation favoured by 'strong' versions of multiculturalism (see for instance, Tully, 2004; Benhabib 2002; Young 2000; Dallmayr 2001; Squires, 1999). While differing in their accounts, what these perspectives share in common is the view that 'which individuals, minorities, and nations are to be recognized as members of a political association is not to be determined by a pre-emptive theory of recognition of *any* kind, but, rather, on the grounds of

which claims for recognition can withstand the test of the exchange of public reasons' (Tully 2004: 858).

Thus these accounts are oriented not towards the *goals* of struggles for recognition (that is, the specific accommodations of minorities or forms of recognition), but rather to the avenues through which struggles over recognition are carried out. The aim is to reconfigure the public sphere in such a way as to enable marginalized individuals and groups to *themselves* be the agents of the norms they are subject to. The intellectual roots here are informed directly by the Critical Theorists' demand for the inter-subjective grounding of principles of justice in communicative reason, for instance found in Habermas' (1990) account. However while earlier models of deliberative politics have been open to criticism that they are overly concerned with consensus and 'impartiality', which inevitably comes at the expense of those who are marginalized within society, more recent accounts expand the scope of democratic expression and deliberation. These include forms of non-formal democratic expression such as forms of cultural resistance and reinvention and different logics of reason-giving, greeting, storytelling, and embedded speech (Martineau and Squires, forthcoming; Benhabib 2002; Deveaux 2003; Young 1997).

Conceptualizing misrecognition

The later theorizations of recognition found in the multicultural and democratic 'turns' have explicitly sought to combat some of the problems of abstraction and over-simplification encountered in earlier theorizations of recognition. If there is a common aim it is to work out how the cultural invisibility noted by Young is to be overcome, taking into account the multiple intersections of injustice, including those which occur *within* groups. Part of our goal within this special issue is to see what might be added by focusing on misrecognition. How might the notion of misrecognition provide the basis for a more contextual approach towards problems surrounding the absence of recognition?

Michel Seymour's contribution to this special issue sketches an account of political liberalism which is able to attend to misrecognition as a political stance toward *peoples* as well as persons. For him, 'the theory of recognition, as a theory of justice, must consider not only the rights of persons but also the rights of peoples' (Seymour, this issue). The account of a liberal political philosophy that Seymour outlines thus moves away from a moral individualism in order to treat persons and peoples as sources of legitimate moral claims. Focusing in particular on religious diversity, Seymour's concern is with the 'top-down' misrecognition manifested by those peoples that are organized into states, which affects stateless peoples, immigrant groups and individual citizens. Seymour details an account of reciprocal recognition between encompassing peoples and 'their' minorities in which persons and peoples have rights and obligations toward each other. A 'top-down' form of recognition of the collective rights of peoples on the part of the state must be matched by a 'bottom up' recognition on the part of individuals, immigrant groups and stateless peoples, and their compliance with the rules and regulations of the encompassing state as long as the people of that state also recognizes them.

For Seymour, misrecognition is understood as the failure to recognise the institutional identity of peoples and persons. Misrecognition is a political fact calling for political solutions, in which questions over the extent to which psychological attitudes shape political motivations are less relevant. For Wendy Martineau, by contrast, the solution may rest in a 'fusion of horizons', through which we may explore how the act of misrecognizing on the part of 'ordinary agents' can close down the space for cross-cultural interaction and can obscure the inequalities faced by non-powerful groups in their attempts to get their voice heard. Developing Gadamer's account, and focusing particularly on the context of 'immigrant' communities in the UK, Martineau argues that a significant form of misrecognition is that which takes place in the realm of meanings; or what she terms a 'misrecognition in the communication of meanings' (Martineau, this issue). The characterisation of misrecognition found in this account is thus as a feature of human relations in general, highlighting the way in which misrecognition occurs on all 'sides'. Where this becomes the subject of political justice however is when it is coupled with the unequal power structures in society in such a way as to allow some sets of norms to be normalized. Martineau suggests that, seen against this context, the attempt to overcome misrecognition through the affirmation of cultural identities may well be part of the problem. Thus while writing against the context of present worries over multiculturalism and social cohesion, Martineau does affirm the need for some account of multiculturalism, this is seen as one which must be contextually and dialogically informed, in which the focus is on encouraging conditions of 'multicultural openness' rather than policies aimed at affirming people's cultural identities.

Following Martineau, Meer focuses squarely upon how three predominant characterizations of Muslim identity in Europe misrecognise dynamic components of what he terms 'Muslim consciousness'. Misrecognition occurs, firstly, where characterizations assume that the properties of Muslim consciousness are more static than they are dynamic. Meer instead argues that the relationship between Islam and a Muslim identity might be better conceived as *instructive* but not *determining*, and that in contrast to purely theological interpretations, nuanced sociological descriptions are preferred as a less exclusive means of capturing the variety of opportunities for self-definition as 'Muslim'. Such an approach can take the multiple (overlapping or synthesised) and subjective elements into account independently of or intertwined with objective behavioural congruence with religious practices. Meer argues that misrecognition occurs, secondly, where leading formulations of Muslim identity place the burden of adaptation upon Muslim minorities. As such each displays a normative 'position' or *Weltanschauung* that ignores how components of Muslim consciousness contain compelling evidence that Muslims in Europe are meeting standards of reasonableness in their political claims-making, often from contexts in which they face profound social and political adversity. Meer argues that it is evident that there is a movement for some sort of synthesis by Muslims themselves. Europe boasts a rich public sphere and a series of dynamic civil societies that have historically included and incorporated other religious minorities. The question with which it is currently wrestling concerns the extent to which it can accommodate Muslims in a manner that will allow them to reconcile their faith and citizenship commitments.

This last point raises the issue of church-state relations, something that is forensically examined in a delineation of different scales of misrecognition in Laegaard's differentiation between 'formal', 'substantive', 'comparative' and 'moralised' misrecognition. For Laegaard, the first may denote the refusal to recognize some group as, in his example, a religious group, and thereby deny them the associated rights and privileges of a religion (as opposed to a cult or similar movement). The second refers to the imposition of an inappropriate category; an illustration of which may be subsuming South Asians under an overarching identity of political blackness in Britain (Modood, 1988). The point is that the 'substantive dimension of misrecognition is distinct from the formal, since the state can recognize a religious community formally while still misrecognising it substantially' (Laegaard, this issue). The third refers to inequalities in the way the state extends recognition to different groups, to which other forms of claims-making are pursued as a corrective measure, for example legislation addressing incitement to hatred against some minorities and not others (Thompson, this issue), or more 'positive preference, symbolic status, institutional security and practicalities' (Laegaard, this issue). His final scale, 'moralized misrecognition', points to *less* recognition than is entitled, which is consistent with recognitive *injustice*.

Turning to back to Honneth, Thompson follows Laegaard by elaborating a range of harms that may be caused by various forms of misrecognition. Following Honneth, he identifies three principal forms of recognition: care, respect and esteem. Corresponding to these are three forms of misrecognition: those which erode an individual's self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. In order to show precisely how these forms of misrecognition harm their targets, Thompson investigates hate speech, focusing in particular on legislation which criminalizes the incitement of religious hatred. Many commentators argue that such legislation is illegitimate since it harms citizens' significant interests in freedom of expression. By contrast, Thompson tries to show that the recognitive harms which may result from the incitement of religious hatred may in some cases be serious enough to justify prohibiting some such expressive acts. His conclusion is that offering such protection to religious groups is 'one important way in which the ethno-religious diversity characteristic of nearly every contemporary society can be fairly accommodated' (Thompson, this issue).

Taking the special issue back to the opening discussion of how normative political liberalism can dialogue with contemporary ethno-religious identity claims-making, Pinto sets out her compelling argument that some claims of offence to feelings deserve legal protection. Her account focuses on an Israeli legal doctrine that is unique in so far as it does acknowledge claims about offences to religious feelings. Since this is not based however on a comprehensive theoretical framework in political and moral philosophy, Pinto's aim as a legal scholar is to provide a theoretical framework through which this may be justified. She therefore argues against the problematic claim that an offence to feelings in itself provides sufficient grounds for legal intervention. Rather, when claims of offence to feelings are the proper subject of law is when the offence is mediated by values which constitute an important part of the offended person's personal identity. Thus Pinto argues that claims of offence against feelings have legal import in so far as they are claims for 'protecting the integrity of people's cultural identity'. Pinto suggests that these claims

to offence could be measured against what she terms 'the vulnerable cultural identity principle' (Pinto, this issue). According to this view, the more vulnerable the social and civic status of one's cultural identity is, the stronger one's claim is from the principle of the integrity of cultural identity.

What each of these contributions therefore shares in common is an attempt to develop the idea of misrecognition through a problem driven approach and to rectify the injustices faced by ethno-religious groups. As such the special issue as a whole seeks to eschew the kinds of over-abstraction and over-simplification that have plagued some of the earlier theorizations of recognition, and so provides a platform for the future development of the conceptual and empirical features of the idea of misrecognition.

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