Recognition Theory, Solidarity, and Working-Class Liberation

The Potential of Recognition Theory as Mediator of Real Conflict in Working-Class Solidarity Groups

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Abstract

Despite fewer and fewer workers identifying as working class, class inequalities remain. While current working-class consciousness is low, it is argued that class analysis is productive and that an increase in working-class awareness is desirable. In this thesis, I present an original account that argues that recognition theory can play a key role in facilitating and strengthening working-class solidarity. Methodologically this project is of a conceptual and normative nature. This thesis consists of three main chapters. Chapter 1 presents a conceptualization of the working class that is based on materialist and cultural understandings while exploring the tension between the two. Chapter 2 provides an elaborate account of Axel Honneth's theory of recognition while simultaneously presenting some key critiques of his approach by Nancy Fraser, among others. Chapter 3 is dedicated to working-class solidarity. It presents Nathan DuFord's account of solidarity as the starting point and continues by proposing additions to his framework. Subsequently, I show that recognition theory can function as a conflict mediator for working-class solidarity groups.

Keywords: recognition theory, solidarity, working class, conflict, oppression

Introduction

Class distinctions do not die; they merely learn new ways of expressing themselves. Each decade we shiftily declare we have buried class; each decade the coffin stays empty? - Hoggart, 1989

The working class as a functional concept and movement has been declared obsolete and outdated countless times since the beginning of class theory (Bottero, 2004; Eidlin et al., 2014; Reagan, 2021). Karl Marx can be considered the founding father of class theory. He argued that capitalist exploitation is not the natural state of society and instead, it can be explained by past historical economic developments that have created the special reproduction of capitalism. Capitalism continuously forces the working class to sell their labor to the capitalist, with no possibility of escaping their faith. Laborers may be free legal persons, but they have no option but to sell their labor power on the "free" market. Said market conditions are structurally created with a power imbalance that allows capitalists to extract value from the workers while putting laborers in a position without other alternatives to make a living. The labor market is contingent on exploiting laborers to the maximum degree, ensuring that laborers keep working and simultaneously reproduce themselves, creating the next generation of laborers and thus guaranteeing future labor power to be exploited. The system of capitalism is designed in a way that continuously reproduces itself (Marx, 2010 [1887]).

While significant and ongoing changes have occurred to the nature of work and the composition of the working class since the days of Marx, the working class and its struggle are undoubtedly alive (Reagan, 2021). Macroeconomic studies suggest that the material basis of class politics, namely socio-economic inequality, has gained further importance. The level of inequality within industrialized countries is at a 40-year peak (Eidlin et al., 2014). Evidently, class is fundamental for individuals as it structures their lives and circumstances, yet the majority of working-class individuals do not recognize class as an impactful factor in their lives. The paradox of the working class arises in the mismatch between perceived identity and objective reality. Qualitative research has shown that people are averse to claiming a class identity, leading to a distant and ambiguous attitude towards the

concept of class more broadly. While one of the features of the class struggle, namely inequality, is often recognized as an issue, people tend to reject putting any class label on themselves. For many, class may have some space to be considered as a political issue but as something distinct from themselves (Bottero, 2004).

The potential advancement of working-class interests depends on whether the working class is able to foster power (Reagan, 2021). Said power can only be realized when the working class movement connects and comes together as a unified front. At the moment, working-class identification and union memberships are in a continuous decline. Nevertheless, the current lack of identification with class does not negate class theory since it arises as a consequence of class oppression (Bottero, 2004). However, the lack of identification with the working class does not need to be permanent. Hence, the question arises of how active identification with the working class can be fostered and used as a unifying force to further working-class interests.

While class-based self-identification is declining, political philosophy is experiencing a revival of the theory of recognition. Recognition has gained widespread attention as a theory heavily influenced by Hegel, Charles Taylor, and, most recently, Axel Honneth. Conceptually, recognition theory aims to shed light on the intuitive feeling that how others perceive us matters. In its most basic account, a theory of recognition illuminates the interconnection between self-perception and external perception. Recognition from others is then expressed by their beliefs, attitudes, and actions. According to proponents of recognition theory, the affirmation of the self by others is an essential part of human existence and well-being. Conversely, the denial of affirmation is generally categorized as misrecognition and is considered an injustice. In turn, misrecognition transforms the social environment into a violent space, prohibiting individuals from flourishing (Ikäheimo et al., 2021).

While there are many advocates for the theory of recognition, there are also many points of controversy. Generally speaking, there are three main debates within the field. Firstly, there is disagreement about the normative potential of recognition. Secondly, the connection between recognition and resistance and related oppression is heavily disputed. Lastly, there is a significant debate about the political relevance of the concept (Ikäheimo et al., 2021). Arguably, one of the strongest strains of criticism of recognition revolves around the relationship between recognition and subjectivity. While advocates of recognition claim that violence occurs when

recognition is withheld, critics like Judith Butler argue that the very act of recognition constitutes an act of violence because it forces subjects to make themselves into subjects to be recognizable to others. This process limits individuals' freedom and expression, inherently constraining people's options, and has the potential to change the self-image of individuals (Butler, 2005).

In this sense, there may be a tension between power and identity that emerges from the field of recognition theory. This link is of particular relevance in relation to the working-class struggle. Moreover, the connection between recognition and democracy and participatory movements more broadly is vastly understudied. Some authors argue that self-consciousness depends on recognition, making recognition political (Hirvonen & Laitinen, 2016). This insight is relevant in understanding the dynamics of recognition, which has the potential to make it suitable as a political strategy.

The lack of working-class individuals' readiness to identify as the working class is a symptom of missing class consciousness. In light of rising individualism in society and the overall complexity of identity, movements are struggling to organize as a collective force. Solidarity is essential to the broader collective action process and the development of a shared sense of identity (Isaac et al., 2022). Nathan Rochelle DuFord has advanced an innovative approach to the concept of solidarity in his book *Solidarity in Conflict*. For him, the defining feature of solidarity is conflict. Rather than perceiving solidarity as a mere expression of unity or togetherness, DuFord presents an intricate theory demonstrating how solidarity flourishes through conflict. In his account, conflict plays a vital role in forming and stabilizing solidarity movements (DuFord, 2022). Conceptualizing solidarity in a manner that not only makes room but lays importance on conflict allows for a new hope for working-class liberation. Thus, understanding the complexities of identity also means accepting the existence and role of conflict. By acknowledging the potential frictions within the working class, the movement may achieve a new sense of collectivity.

Class and labor issues are at the core of politics and philosophy in modern society (Reagan, 2021). The following thesis aims to answer the question of whether and how the theory of recognition could function as a productive mediator of real conflict within working-class solidarity groups. This will be investigated in three chapters. Chapter 1 provides an initial conceptualization of the working class and illuminates why it is a subject worth exploring. This includes the exploration of

intersectionality and the connectedness of oppressions. Also, the question of class reductionism will be addressed. Subsequently, Chapter 2 introduces Axel Honneth's theory of recognition and is followed by the discussion of three points of debate. Firstly, the philosophical exchange between Nancy Fraser and Honneth (2003) about redistribution or recognition will be presented. Secondly, Honneth's reliance on emotions within his theory will be challenged drawing on Rosie Worsdale (2017). In addition, a discussion on institutional recognition is included. Lastly, the ambivalent character of recognition will be made explicit building on Judith Butler (2021) and Amy Allen (2021). Afterwards, Chapter 3 critically explores Nathan DuFord's theory of solidarity and includes a comparative analysis between this theory and Axel Honneth's account of solidarity. This is followed by a twofold proposition. On the one hand, recognition theory will be presented as a fitting strategy to increase working-class identification. On the other hand, recognition theory will be posited as a potential mediator of real internal conflict of working-class solidarity groups. This work ultimately concludes with final reflections. Methodologically this thesis employs both normative and conceptual strategies. Overall, this thesis engages constructively within the debates of the field of recognition as well as solidarity. It presents an attempt to contribute to the debate by providing an original proposal for the intersection between the two fields.

Chapter 1: Conceptualizing the Working Class and Why It Matters

Regarding the working class, we are the ones who compose the class: our experiences and our relationships, we as teachers, as laborers, office workers, homemakers, parents, victims of police brutality, refugees, and migrants- us. Class structures our lives, and we are its living embodiment. When we speak of class, we are speaking of ourselves. - Reagan, 2021, p. 8

At the core of this thesis lies the premise that the working class is worthy of being theorized about. This chapter presents an account of the working class that builds upon a materialist as well as a cultural understanding. Taking as the context the current state of neoliberal capitalism, inequalities are soaring. While privatization and deregulation are on the rise, issues of income and wealth are becoming increasingly polarized. Just one example would be the attacks on social welfare programs in the West by mostly right-wing parties and coalitions[1] (Lafferty, 1996).

While Marx failed to provide one coherent definition of class (Reagan, 2021; Lafferty, 1996), he captured the class struggle like no thinker before him. The communist manifesto is a testament to the root of class conflict—namely, the inherent clash of interests of the working class and the capitalists (Lafferty, 1996). Moreover, throughout modern history, class has been at the center of identity, in particular in the 19th and 20th centuries, serving a vital role as the link between social structures and politics (Evans et al., 2022). In light of this, it follows that the organized workers' movement has been recognized as an essential motor for political and social change. Hence, the concept of class was for many years one of sociology's main focuses of study (Eidlin, 2014).

Despite the importance of class as a category for discourse and political analysis, it is one of the most misunderstood, misused, and dehistoricized concepts (Lafferty, 1996). While many scholars analyze class in some way, they frequently use different language and measures to talk about class (Eidlin, 2014). What adds to this

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[1] While welfare cuts are predominantly tied to right-wing parties, admittedly left-wing parties and coalitions have also resorted to such measures (Harris & Römer, 2022).

confusion is the contemporary situation of having two approaches to class theory more broadly. There is on one hand the approach that focuses solely on the socio-economic and working conditions, and on the other hand, the approach based on a broader conception, moving beyond the structural and focusing on the cultural. The latter is becoming increasingly popular (Bottero, 2004). The following section provides an account that aims to reconcile the two.

1.1. What's Meant by the Working Class?

In Marx and Engels' famous words, "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle" (p. 2, 2015 [1888]). While this statement has been challenged by many, including feminist anti-capitalist thinkers like Silvia Federici, the overall sentiment of capitalism's historic nature remains relevant. The mechanisms of class oppression also entail that the class structure reproduces itself. In this sense, without the historical dimension of class conflict, it is not possible to create an adequate class understanding. The historical essence of capitalism also means that class analysis is valuable independently of present class consciousness or active class struggle. Whether people identify as working class or not in present times, class and the development of capitalism are historical facts that shape the way class workings apply today. Class formation and understanding may transform over time, but it remains a historically contingent concept. Moreover, what is particularly striking about class is that it can only be understood collectively and politically. The historical element of capitalism explains why one has to look beyond the present moment for contemporary analysis, while the systematic nature explains why class analysis is also a political endeavor. (Lafferty, 1996).

While the workings of class can be more or less implicit and recognizable to individuals, the impacts of class are omnipresent in people's lives, regardless of whether they are part of the working class or not (Bottero, 2004). The one unifying feature of the working class is wage dependency. If someone is dependent on wages, that means someone else holds power over that person. Whether one receives their income predominantly from wage labor or capital ownership and returns is, therefore, a key class determinant (Reagan, 2021). One common misconception about the working class is that, in line with the past, it is only thought of as comprising manual workers. Indeed, manual workers have been at the heart of

the class struggle, but with the rise of other occupations, they are no longer the only ones who are working class. The rise of different professions has expanded the category of workers. For example, clerical and service sector wage laborers are structurally in the same position as manual workers and have a unified economic interest (Eidlin, 2014). What explains this is that wage laborers in a variety of occupations are dependent on the labor market, and this dependency, as such, can only be overcome via collective action. Broadening the understanding of who a worker is, is theoretically important because it means that the concept of class can adapt to historical changes in the labor market while retaining its core meaning and use. Understanding that the working class is defined not only by what workers do but by their structurally oppressed position and dependency on wage labor is fundamental in achieving and maintaining a functional concept of the working class. By focusing on the wage dynamic as a characteristic, the category of the worker remains inclusive and functional throughout time. It is crucial to focus on the dynamic because even in the absence of paid wages, the same dynamic can take place. This way, care work and reproductive labor, which are presently predominantly unpaid, are also included within the presented working-class paradigm (Cicerchia, 2021).

While this may seem like a neat definition, the purely materialist definition based on wage dependency shows an incomplete picture. Class is systematically entrenched in society and upheld by the social norms of capitalism. It is not merely an economic matter, it also exhibits a cultural component[2]. The capitalist system impacts all parts of life and directly shapes culture. Class is not only about income, it is also about the self-image of people and how they build and engage in social relationships (Reagan, 2021). One way to illustrate this is by focusing on hierarchy and status. Within society, one's "hierarchical position acts as a constraint on aspirations, tastes, networks and resources, and that hierarchy is therefore an important element shaping social identity - regardless of whether people are willing to talk about themselves, and others in explicitly 'class' terms" (Bottero, 2004, p. 993).

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[2] Culture here is to be understood as a broad concept, including among others language and social norms. Beyond culture, class is also associated with poorer physical health (Braveman & Gottlieb, 2014) as well as worse mental health (Muntaner et al., 2007) outcomes. There is also clear connection between working class, culture and education (Lynch & O'riordan, 1998). While neither discussions of education or (mental) health are included within this work, acknowledging the immense impact the class system has is essential.

Hierarchical positions within society are a clear expression of a classed system. Importantly, this is not only a formal organization of power, but it also takes place in the social and private spheres. This means that hierarchy is upheeld by individuals reproducing these positions, and the felt hierarchy encourages individuals to group among members of the same perceived status. In fact, research shows that individuals tend to associate most with those who share the same or similar social location as themselves. This can be partly explained by the social comfort experienced when being with someone similar to oneself. Thus, although most people fail to categorically recognize and identify with class, their choices in the social setting uphold class hierarchy and illustrate that there exists an implicit class awareness (Bottero, 2004). Admittedly, while social relationships are an important aspect of culture, there is much more to the picture. The working class is a multi-dimensional social phenomenon, composed, among other things, of language, social practice, ideology, education, and human behavior (Reagan, 2021).

Therefore, conceptualizing class combining cultural and material approaches is superior to a mere economic definition. On the one hand, it enables a more nuanced analysis of the working class. On the other hand, as Michael Reagan argues:

"Cultural and material factors shape and influence one another in particular historical 'articulations,' arrangements of forces and ideas that make social structure and cultural meaning possible in specific ways. One strength of the cultural emphasis is the focus on agency. If structure and culture are the result of human activity, they can be shaped and remade with concerted human effort. This understanding of class exposes the possibility of liberatory and transformative struggle for us all. We can see the synthesis of material and cultural factors of class in the lived experiences of working people [...] there need be no dichotomous tension between culture and materiality because people's experiences and identities are part and parcel of 'the totality of their capitalist lives.'" (2021, p. 164)

The above quote touches upon the potential tension between approaches of culture and materiality in relation to agency. Exploring the tension, therefore, is crucial in advocating credibly for a combined cultural and material understanding of the working class. Here, culture is characterized as constructivist in the sense that it is up to the agent what to make out of it. This is not to claim that an individual agent

can freely dictate a broader culture, but it highlights the perceived agency involved with the realm of culture and related cultural identification. In contrast to this, the materialist understanding of the working class expresses that being working class is very much imposed on an agent rather than chosen. From a materialist point of view, being working class is an obstacle that ought to be overcome.

Arguably, taking on either perspective fully proves to be problematic in relation to the goal of increased working-class identification. A mere materialist understanding presents a doom picture of powerlessness and the full absence of agency. In this sense, it can be seen as demoralizing to identify as working class, considering this outlook. Alternatively, a fully cultural understanding presents its own unique challenges. While the constructivist nature of this perspective is seemingly more empowering, the question arises if what is needed for a greater working-class identification is merely newer, more positively connotated names. One concrete example is the recent trend of referring to delivery personnel as entrepreneurs. Food and postal delivery companies alike have started to hire contractors rather than employees for their delivery work. This way, companies maintain the benefit of having the work done for them while the risks and responsibilities they usually carry are transferred to the individual contractors - to be clear, contractors are workers in their own right[3]. The working reality of these self-employed contractors is remarkably similar to wage work, also on a structural level. However, for the contractors, their working opportunities are marketed as a form of entrepreneurship, as a way to feel in charge. This promises a type of agency and self-esteem that exceeds the traditional image of a powerless delivery employee.

This, however, has impacts beyond a feeling of increased agency. Challenges of decreased job security and benefits[4] aside, this dynamic is associated with a psychological phenomenon that impacts the working-class struggle. By shifting the self-image from worker to entrepreneur/contractor, individuals perceive themselves as increasingly atomized. Conditioned by the neoliberal market, workers embrace the imagery of entrepreneurship while dismissing the structural forces that work against them. The individualized logic that is facilitated means that workers are

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[3] The shift to outsourcing and the gig economy more broadly is a far more complex dynamic than a mere change in terminology. The reason for changing from a fixed employment contract to contracting work has many reasons. However, within the context of this thesis, this example is meant to merely illustrate the difference semantics can have in terms of worker' self-preception.

[4] For example, one can consider the loss of vacation and sick pay, the increased job insecurity, the absence of a minimum wage, etc. (Tirapani & Willmott, 2023)

unable to see themselves as part of a workers' collective. This is illustrated by the fact that self-employed contractors generally "do not join unions, let alone participate in strike action, even though there is no legal barrier to doing so" (Tirapani & Willmott, 2023, p. 73). While delivery contractors may enjoy the self-description of entrepreneur, this language drowns out the structural understanding that underpins the motivation for the collective action of workers.

This shows that the purely constructivist understanding of the working class along cultural lines is unfit as a motivator for the organization of workers, as it obscures the structural reasons for working-class liberation. At the same time, a purely material understanding of class runs the risk of being perceived as overly negative and leaving workers feeling powerless. The feelings of powerlessness are arguably not the best starting point for striving for change since they are traditionally accompanied by feelings of defeat and resignation. In light of this, it has been argued that what is needed is a balanced conceptualization of the working class that does justice to both the structural component as well as the cultural. While there cannot be a definition of class without reference to the material conditions that give rise to classes, the cultural addition proposed in this section promises an extensive understanding of what the working class is made out of. In a way, the inclusion of a cultural dimension of class demystifies the abstract structure of class. Class becomes graspable as the culture the working class is living. This, in turn, has immense empowering, emancipatory, and unifying potential.

1.2. Why the Working-Class Discourse Matters

As the previous section illustrates, defining the working class is challenging partly due to the variety of working-class experiences. While many people are part of the working class, it is a large, heterogeneous group. Thus, understanding the working class must also mean understanding the intragroup differences. To a large degree, these differences can be traced back to workers holding many identities, which can also be marginalized ones. Notably, this includes identities based on race and gender, disability, and sexuality, among others[5]. Thus, for example, a black

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[5] Within the literature oppressions based on race and gender are most frequently written on when it comes to their connection to capitalism. This thesis will in line with this do the same. However, that does not diminish the importance or relation other oppressions have with capitalism.

working-class woman will have a fundamentally different experience than a white working-class man. The difference in experience includes different treatment in the labor market, on the job site and in society at large. For the working-class movement, the issue arises of how to facilitate group understanding and association. The rise of identity politics has been accommodated by the decline in identification along class lines and an increase in identification along other characteristics (Eidlin, 2014). This contributes to the felt divide within the working class. The differences in identities among the working class manifests itself in the current struggle of the working class of developing a feeling of group unity, as well as the failure to acknowledge the history they share as workers (Seccombe & Livingstone, 2000).

Despite the difficulty of fostering a feeling of unity, there exists a clear argument that speaks in favor of a focus on class oppression. Namely, that capitalism facilitates and reinforces other oppressions. To exemplify this, one can consider the connection between capitalism, racism, and the patriarchy. While analytically, capitalism, race, and gender could be conceptualized as separate entities, historical reality and lived experiences have been intertwined since the start (Reagan, 2021). Lillian Cicerchia rightfully notes that

> "racism and sexism have a class character in capitalist societies regardless of whether capitalism is their original cause. They are a developmental pattern of capitalist class formation, or a part of how people learn to make sense of the inequality of and within the working class, the problem of market dependency, and the historically bounded constraints inherited from previous attempts to resolve that problem" (2021, p. 616).

In turn, it follows that a focus on working-class liberation has the potential to elevate the way that oppressions along the lines of racism and sexism are addressed. Notably, capitalism incentivizes workers to pursue and uphold intergroup differentiation (Cicerchia, 2021). In other words, the divide within the working class along race and gender lines has been systematically instilled and encouraged by the capitalist class. This is done strategically, because it puts the worker identity in the background and disturbs working-class unity (Reagan, 2021). In essence, the claim being made here is that the capitalist class has instrumentalized differences among race and gender lines as a means to distract workers from the underlying class

conflict[6]. The mechanisms of this are beyond the scope of this work, but a clear example is found in sentiments like "the immigrants are taking our jobs", which are eaily recognizable at the heart of these strategies. Cicerchia also captures this dynamic by arguing that "essentialist ideas, whether biological or cultural, naturalize social differences by resolving a social contradiction between the normative expectations of the market and its differentiating reality, which is why racism and sexism have a class character under capitalism. Conversely, essentialist ideas defend one's position in the market as deserved, indeed as natural" (Cicerchia, 2021, p. 620).

Historically, one can find oppressions based on race and gender prior to capitalism. Hence, claiming that racism and sexism are mere manifestations of class oppression is misguided. However, this thesis does not provide a metaphysical or historical claim about the origins or causes of oppressions. Rather, it points out that other oppressions are facilitated and platformed by capitalism. Furthermore, it is argued that in any context pertaining to oppression, it is valuable to adopt an intersectional perspective. Intersectionality, as coined by Crenshaw in 1989, refers to an approach that highlights the intersecting nature of different oppressions. Crenshaw famously illustrates this by highlighting the struggles faced by black women. She credibly argues that black women can not be liberated from their oppression if one only focuses on the separate oppressions of racism and sexism. Black women face unique forms of discrimination based on gender and race because these oppressions overlap and reinforce one another. Evidently, traditional feminism is centered around white women, while anti-racism is centered around black men. Black women, however, do not only get oppressed as women and as black persons, but they get oppressed as black women. Black women, therefore, are pushed to the margins and have distinct experiences from those at center of the movements. Recognizing this is essential for achieving justice. By placing importance on the perspective of those who face oppression on numerous grounds, movements can gain a deeper understanding of how these oppressions function in particular. This, in turn, strengthens anti-oppression movements (Crenshaw, 1989).

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[6] It is important to acknowledge that this by no means tries to convey that the wedge driven into the working class along race and gender lines in particular is explained as simply as capitalists conspiring actively against the working class, trying to manipulate the media and distract workers. Social reality is far more complex than this. Rather, this statement aims to acknolwedge the wedge itself and some of the historical (and present) processes that have contributed to it (Reagan, 2021).

In this thesis, it is argued that an intersectional lens should be at the root of any attempt at meaningful class analysis. As illustrated, oppressions of race and gender undoubtedly have a class aspect. This also is important when we consider who the working class is made out of. Intersectionality hereby has two predominant functions. On the one hand, it allows for the analysis of the struggles of the working class in a much more sophisticated way. The working class clearly is more than white cis men, and while they are oppressed as workers, they are in a fundamentally different position as less privileged workers. On the other hand, intersectionality can be a guiding principle in illuminating how individuals make sense of holding multiple identities. Given the decline of self-identifying as working class, an intersectional approach towards class may help make the working class an appealing identity marker again. Intersectionality, understood in Crenshaw's terms, shows that there needs not to be a choice between identifying as a worker or as a black woman; in fact, the two go hand in hand.

Therefore, this is not a historical claim about the emergence of oppression but a distinct argument about how to best understand multifaceted oppression in the present stage of capitalism. More importantly, the classed nature of racism and sexism highlights why there should be an increased focus on the working class as a liberatory effort beyond class terms. The claim advanced here does not mean that anti-racist and feminist activism should be seen as secondary to working-class causes. Rather, the working-class struggle has been shown to be interconnected to various oppressions, and in this light, working-class activism includes anti-racism and feminism. Within the literature, racism, sexism, and class often are dealt with independently. The view presented here argues that a focus on the working class is valuable because contemporary sexism and racism cannot be made sense of independently of class. Making sense of oppression in a meaningful manner in the 21st century means engaging in class theory.

1.3. Addressing Class Reductionism

Some may charge this view as being class reductionist. "Class reductionism is the supposed view that inequalities apparently attributable to race, gender, or other categories of group identification are either secondary in importance or reducible to generic economic inequality" (Reed, 2019). The core question for class reductionism,

in a sense, is whether all social relations are material relations, meaning relations of production. In a weaker version, one can speak of a separatist thesis, which assumes that social relations like race are separate from the relations of production. In a strong formulation, all relations are, to some degree, relations of production, and hence, all relations can be understood through the framework of relations of production (Backer, 2018). While some authors occasionally get accused of holding a class-reductionist view, some dispute that this field actually exists (Reed, 2019). In fact, class reductionism is rarely published on, and when it is, it is a critique of the concept. In general, the charge of class reductionism seems to be employed when people have the feeling different forms of oppression are not recognized properly for their independent impact or if marginalizations based on race and gender are being subordinated casually and politically to class (Backer, 2018).

Addressing the potential issues of class reductionism is important. While this thesis calls for an explicit focus on the unifying class aspect, the approach by no means claims that other marginalizations are mere byproducts of capitalism nor that other oppressions are less important to focus on. Gender and race oppression are an integral and crucial feature of the relations of production (Backer, 2018; Cicerchia, 2021) Acknowledging different marginalizations and divisions within the working class is essential. This recognition can facilitate effective community building within the working resistance (Cox, 2020).

> "While this 'objective' aspect of class might create conditions for the formation of class identities, it in no way guarantees it, nor does it determine the content of those identities. Again, class does not just happen. The formation of class identities also requires that members of a class recognize themselves as members of that class. In other words, it also requires a subjective element." (Eidlin, 2014, p. 1048).

Thus, at the core of this thesis is the question of how one may be able to utilize an intersectional understanding of oppression in a systematic way to achieve an increased working-class identification. Understanding class as a common denominator among the oppressed shows why the working class matters in the here and now.

Chapter 2: Recognition Theory

Having conceptualized the working class and discussed its importance for social justice theory and practice, the following chapter introduces Axel Honneth's theory of recognition as well as three particularly relevant debates pertaining the intersection between recognition theory and the working class. Recognition as a concept has been increasingly gaining attention within the field of political and social philosophy. It aims to capture the experience of dependency on others in constructing and upholding one's self-image. One of the field's most relevant contemporary figures is Axel Honneth (Ikäheimo et al., 2021). Honneth's account of Recognition Theory is first developed in his book *The Struggle for Recognition* (1995). He

> "had set out to employ the young Hegel's model of recognition as the key to specifying the universal conditions under which human beings can form an identity; the underlying intention was basically to conceptualize the structures of mutual recognition analysed by Hegel not merely as preconditions for self-consciousness but as practical conditions for the development of a positive relation-to-self" (Honneth, 2002, p. 500).

He shares that the question of how to better understand the emotional impact of social inequality has influenced him since his youth and inspires his work to date. Indeed, it is important to contextualize his influences in order to understand his theory. He has been immensely influenced by sociology, particularly in relation to social inequality, as well as by Foucault, and the Frankfurt School (Honneth, 2023).

2.1. Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition

Honneth conceptualizes recognition as consisting of three interconnected spheres. The primary form of recognition comes in the shape of primary relationships, which also can be seen as *love* (or friendship). In particular, Honneth refers to the dependency relationship infants have with their caregivers and how that bond and dependency shape individuals from early on. Honneth classifies as love the care infants receive in the shape of their needs being met, which he classifies as a precondition for participation within a given community. While the starting point of this type of recognition is primary care relations, this level of recognition also includes other intimate relationships. Essentially, love pertains to the category

"constituted by strong emotional attachments among a small number of people" (Honneth, 1995, p. 95). By drawing on psychology, particularly the psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott, Honneth explores the initial connection an infant has to their caregiver. Accordingly, he argues that infants at birth are so deeply dependent on their caregiver that they are unable to perceive themselves as individual subjects. At the start, therefore, infants are unable to separate themselves (and their identity) from their caregivers. With further development, including positive experiences of being by themselves, infants get to know themselves as separate individuals while simultaneously learning that they can rely on others. The mode of recognition in the shape of love is essential for individuals as it builds the basis of *self-confidence* (Honneth, 1995).

The second level of recognition comes in the form of legal relations, known as *rights*, which are based on cognitive respect. According to Honneth, recognition based on love and recognition based on rights are fundamentally different in all their aspects, except for the fact that they require a form of interpersonal recognition. Recognition based on love is a particular mutual act since it requires strong positive feelings between the individuals involved. Since positive emotional attachment cannot be forced nor chosen, it also cannot be the basis for broader collaboration on a societal level. Conversely, the realm of rights-based recognition essentially means that an individual recognizes the other members of their community as bearers of rights while at the same time viewing themselves as holding the same rights. This type of recognition is crucial for the functioning of communities. Moreover, what is important is that the self-confidence achieved by recognition in terms of love facilitates the possibilities of subjects viewing themselves as rights bearers and rights granters. This understanding entails that one sees oneself as an equal member of a community who is able to influence rules and form one's own will. In this sense, legal recognition paths the way for the crucial self-relation and image of *self-respect* (Honneth, 1995).

While both emotional support and cognitive respect are essential features of human well-being, humans have a fundamental need to be in a positive relationship with themselves regarding their abilities and traits. According to Honneth, this type of self-relation is achieved via the final recognition mode of *social esteem* (community of value). This kind of interpersonal relation hinges on "the existence of an intersubjectively shared value-horizon" (1995, p. 121). Although recognition fostering

social esteem shares with legal recognition that it functions on the broader level of a community, the main difference is that the former functions based on particular qualities and hence is not universal. Essentially, the shared value-horizon allows for subjects to create and feel a sense of esteem from being acknowledged in their communities as individuals who are exhibiting desirable attributes or behaviors. This means that individuals are able to experience recognition in relation to what they do or represent, creating an active, affirmative instance of their merit. In this way, their self-image gets (re)affirmed by others. Like the legal sphere, this value-horizon is open to change and adaptable. Ultimately, social esteem translates to the specific self-relation of *self-esteem,* which in turn is integral for the development of solidarity in any given community (Honneth, 1995).

By acknowledging the intersubjective character of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem, one can see how vital recognition is for individual well-being and the functioning of society. Thus, recognition theory establishes the importance of others for the development and maintenance of the self-image. However, the mere title of Honneth's work (1995) implies that recognition does not simply come by, it is a struggle. This perspective, in part, speaks to his initial curiosity about the topic, rooted in the experience of inequality.

It is due to recognition's positive and integral impact on the self that its denial constitutes harm. Each form of recognition is related to a specific form of disrespect and injustice. Differentiating between the three types of (withheld) recognition hereby is helpful, as it reveals the concrete dynamics that lead to harm. At the level of basic self-confidence, the denial of recognition affects the physical integrity of an individual. Through the experience of love, subjects get to know themselves as individual subjects who have control over their own bodies. Disrespect based on the level of injury to physical integrity can take the shape of abuse and rape, but the harm goes beyond the physical. The inflicted pain creates feelings of defenselessness and loss of agency, which in turn permanently impact one's basic confidence. Moreover, this deterioration of confidence develops into a type of social shame that is accompanied by a loss of trust in oneself and society more broadly. This impact is long-lasting and prevents positive self-understanding (Honneth, 1995).

The harm inflicted in physical violations appears to be easily identifiable. Harms based on the other two forms of recognition may be less explicit. The second type of misrecognition is the deprivation or exclusion of specific rights. This type of

misrecognition reduces self-respect, as subjects are structurally excluded from rights that are granted to others in society. A subject's self-perception is greatly impacted if they are systematically portrayed as holding less moral responsibility in the sense that they are not thought of being worthy of the same legal status as other members of the society. The denial of rights thus threatens social integrity (Honneth, 1995).

The final type of harm associated with the withholding of recognition pertains to the self-relation of self-esteem. When a hierarchy of values is put in place that systematically devalues certain beliefs and forms of life, those who have those values are unable to receive recognition of their personal abilities. This type of misrecognition manifests itself partially in denigration and insults, while it also can be constituted out of the sheer denial of positive affirmation. The aforementioned dynamic means that achieving social esteem is out of reach for these subjects/members of specific groups. Effectively, this means that they suffer an injury to their honor, dignity, and status. In turn, this creates feelings of shame, hurt, and resentfulness. The negative emotional experiences accompanied by the denial of recognition are key in making subjects realize the mistreatment they are unjustly enduring. Honneth argues that said emotional responses are necessary for subjects to want to strive for recognition. He argues that the subjects are unable to feel neutral about suffering injustices. Instead, they cause feelings of shame, disrespect, and misrecognition, which are thus indispensable in the struggle for recognition (Honneth, 1995).

Importantly, Honneth associates recognition theory with constant progress, understood as the development towards a more just society. This means that the struggle for recognition does not have an end. This is why norms of recognition are defined by a 'normative surplus'. He argues that while there may not be an explicit difference between actual practice and their associated norms, "the ideals associated with the distinct forms of recognition always call for greater degrees of morally appropriate behaviour, than is ever practised in that particular reality" (Honneth, 2002, p. 517). Hence, the struggle for recognition is the motor of moral progress (Honneth, 2019, p. 700).

2.2. Redistribution or Recognition? Taking a look at the influential exchange between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth

Having established Honneth's conceptualization of recognition, the question arises of how his theory fits into the working-class discourse more concretely. While his motivation to work on recognition stems from witnessing inequality and its psychological impacts (Honneth, 2023), there are different ways to approach the subject of inequality. Fraser and Honneth dedicated a book to their exchange on the topic. Their debate illustrates two distinct ways of approaching the relationship between recognition and redistribution. They share their commitment to recognition theory as a pillar in critical theory and its potential for justice. But they do so in different ways. In order to make sense of class within the recognition framework, it is essential to understand the debate between the two.

Fraser begins by illustrating how with the rise of identity politics, which has been fueled by free-market ideologies, the calls for redistribution have become secondary, if not largely irrelevant, in the public sphere. She argues that calls for redistribution are categorically egalitarian and focused on individuals, while recognition is fundamentally a communitarian project since it is a reciprocal relation. Fraser strongly holds that while egalitarian and communitarian approaches may appear to not mix well, they can go together in the case of redistribution and recognition. In fact, she argues that they must, since in reality, the impacts are mixed. Simply put, Fraser associates redistribution with economic matters, while recognition deals with the social dimension related to difference. While the root cause of social inequality is fully dependent on the economic structure, class-based misrecognition has developed a life of its own. Furthermore, she argues that "class misrecognition can impede the capacity to mobilize against maldistribution" (Fraser, 2003b, p. 23). Misrecognition associated with maldistribution causes distinct harms that cannot simply be remedied by redistribution because they have acquired a social dimension. Fraser, therefore, establishes that class justice requires both redistribution as well as recognition, which substantiates the claim that they are not mutually exclusive alternatives (Fraser, 2003b).

Despite the interplay between inequality and misrecognition, Fraser cautions of a simplistic analysis in which the two are seen as mutually constitutive to the degree where it would be senseless to distinguish between the two. She argues that they still constitute distinct injustices. She advocates for a dualist perspective whereby "redistribution and recognition do not correspond to two substantive societal domains, economy and culture. Rather, they constitute two analytical perspectives that can be assumed with respect to any domain" (Fraser, 2003b, p. 63). Fundamentally, she argues that there can be no recognition without redistribution and vice versa, while refusing to reduce the one to the other (Fraser, 2003b).

Contrary to Fraser, Axel Honneth argues that recognition must present itself as a framework capable of including calls for redistribution for it to be suitable as a theory of social justice. He argues that "what is called 'injustice' in theoretical language is experienced by those affected as social injury to well-founded claims to recognition" (Honneth, 2003a, p. 114). Honneth argues that while it is important to understand economic injustice, it can be accounted for by an adequately differentiated account of recognition. Notably, he charges Fraser with undertheorizing the lack of legal recognition by insinuating that social groups struggle either for recognition of their cultural difference or for material resources, which he claims is predominantly achieved by means of legal recognition. To illustrate this, Honneth refers to the mobilization done by the working class to establish social rights via the legal dimension. He argues that "changes that take place in the capitalist recognition order with the emergence of the welfare state can perhaps best be understood as the penetration of the principle of equal legal treatment into the previously autonomous sphere of social esteem" (Honneth, 2003a, p. 149). More broadly, Honneth claims that most identity-political demands are to be understood as an expression of the struggle for legal recognition (Honneth, 2003a).

Essentially, Honneth maintains that self-understanding facilitated by recognition is the key to understanding how subjects can become aware of the unjust treatment they receive under capitalism. Hence, in line with his theory of recognition, the disrespect experienced by the working class, both material and social, gives rise to a moral experience that motivates the struggle for better treatment and change in society. Here, it is important to recall the normative significance of recognition. Honneth argues that recognition establishes the conception of the good life. According to him, then, such a normative understanding

is needed as the foundation to legitimately critique any social injustice, including maldistribution. Therefore, redistribution is a part of recognition rather than, as Fraser argues, a distinct approach. Honneth claims that part of their difference in approach also stems from a different understanding of the reasons for equality. He argues that for Fraser, the main purpose seems to consist of participation, while for him, equality facilitates personal identity formation, which is, in turn, dependent on mutual recognition (Honneth, 2003a).

Fraser, in turn, critiques Honneth's monistic approach. She argues that while they both value recognition, they conceptualize recognition in fundamentally different ways. One of the biggest points of contestation, Fraser argues, is Honneth's reliance on moral psychology in establishing his theory. She maintains that his "reading of pre-political experience is dubious. His appeals to social research notwithstanding. It is by no means clear that daily discontent is always a matter of denied recognition. In fact, the idea that one single motivation underlies all such discontent is prima facie implausible" (Fraser, 2003a, p. 203). While Fraser allows for the experience of suffering to partially influence critical theory, she emphasizes that the core of critical theory ought to be discourse rather than experience. According to her, moving beyond experience "decenters moral psychology, thus opening space for the study of political culture, which now joins social theory, moral philosophy, and political theory as a constitutive element of Critical Theory" (Fraser, 2003a, p. 209). Another major difference between the two is concerning the way they conceptualize recognition to begin with. Honneth, as described in the previous section, understands recognition on three levels, whereas Fraser refuses such clear-cut lines. She maintains that misrecognition is always a type of status injury, which in itself is too complicated and dynamic to be categorized into distinct levels. Beyond this, Fraser remains unconvinced by Honneth's insistence on struggles for distribution being mere instances of withheld recognition. She maintains that capitalism has created deeply entrenched and diverse types of status subordination and oppression. This is why she deems Honneth's approach insufficient (Fraser, 2003a).

Moreover, Fraser holds that her proposed perspective-dualism can cope with the challenges outlined above. At the core of her approach, rather than recognition, is the liberal commitment to equal autonomy and the moral worth of humans. She argues that justice hinges on the institutional condition of participatory parity, which means that subjects need to possess the economic resources to partake in society

and its discourses while also enjoying the social standing to do so. Fraser argues that "participatory parity constitutes a radical democratic interpretation of equal autonomy. Far more demanding than standard liberal interpretations, this principle is not only deontological but also substantive " (Fraser, 2003a, p. 229). While Fraser continues to see value in the theory of recognition, she argues that Honneth is too demanding of it in the sense that it is unable to provide a stand-alone account of social justice. According to her, equal autonomy is the path toward freedom (Fraser, 2003a).

Honneth, however, feels that his theory is not represented fully. He maintains that recognition on its own is able to cope with the issue of maldistribution, which shows that it is by far not as narrow as Fraser charges it to be. He conceptualizes recognition as historicized and shaped by discourse. Importantly, he clarifies that, in his perspective, the spheres of recognition can be empirically integrated. Therefore, he claims that despite conceptualizing three distinct spheres, his account acknowledges the intersections between the spheres in given contexts, meaning he is able to account for the messiness Fraser describes.

Moreover, at the core of his critique of Fraser lies their dispute on the origin of equality. Honneth claims that:

> "the point of recognition is the same as that of participatory parity: the development and realization of individual autonomy is in a certain sense only possible when all subjects have the social preconditions for realizing their life goals without unjustifiable disadvantages and with the greatest possible freedom. However, the equality principle, which plays a decisive role in the last sentence, for me only comes into play as the result of historical development. While Fraser evidently believes she can derive the principle of "participatory parity" deontologically from the concept of the person, I am content to observe that in modernity the social recognition order has shifted from hierarchy to equality, from exclusion to inclusion" (Honneth, 2003b, pp. 259-260)

Arguably, while both Fraser and Honneth hold onto recognition theory as at least a partial solution, they are unable to agree on a joint approach. Fraser's strongest point of critique is Honneth's dependency on moral psychology. While he has tried to defend himself in this regard by pointing at his way of historizing recognition, I would argue this move is unsuccessful. Additionally, I contend that he is able to show that

his account is capable of taking on redistribution solely from a recognition perspective, as it seems to lack the appropriate systematic understanding of capitalism. Fraser raises an additional issue when she points to the third sphere of recognition, which is founded on merit. Achievement of social esteem within a capitalist society is a vague concept. Albeit Honneth's attempt to address this, it remains unclear to some degree how this can be the foundation of the liberation of the working class. Honneth makes it clear that recognition is always a struggle and that while practice and moral norms may appear to coincide, there is always room for development. Fraser credibly paints the complicated image of the system of capitalism, while Honneth appears to be too stuck on the intersubjective dimension. However, Honneth has, since the publication of Redistribution or Recognition, presented a work that may solve this issue, focusing on ideology. The following sub-chapter investigates his work and the critique raised by Worsdale.

2.3. A Closer Look at Honneth's Reliance on (Invisible) Suffering

A primary concern for this thesis is the decline in active working-class identification among the working class despite the continuous rise in socio-economic inequality in society. As Fraser (2003a) points out, Honneth relies on emotional suffering as the trigger for individuals to want to combat the injustices they are subjected to. This leaves his account susceptible to a number of critiques. In addition to this, I also question his ability to take on the systematic account of capitalism in a meaningful manner. This is the case because taking the complexity of capitalism seriously means including the question of how to make sense of the institution of capitalism rather than purely focusing on intersubjective modes of recognition.

Regarding the present state of the working class, one of the most relevant analyses comes from Rosie Worsdale (2017). She highlights that Honneth, contrary to the tradition of the Frankfurt School, argues that the sheer socioeconomic conditions faced by the oppressed are not sufficient to unite them in the struggle for emancipation. Rather, Honneth maintains that the united struggle against unjust conditions is contingent on the recognition paradigm. Only via negative emotions and the associated shame of misrecognition are subjects driven to change their conditions (Worsdale, 2017). While Fraser takes issue with the categorical reliance on emotions, Worsdale focuses on the potential absence of negative feelings. She

asks the question of what it means for Honneth's recognition theory if oppressed subjects do not perceive themselves as suffering. Worsdale (2017) states that if:

> "a particular pattern of misrecognition must affect a whole social group or stratum of the population, rather than isolated persons only, such that a collective movement based on shared interests is possible [...] however, a social conflict also requires that the group of individuals who have shared experiences of withheld recognition and disrespect have what he calls a 'shared semantics,' which enables them to understand and express their personal experiences in terms as social phenomena. If such a language is missing, if individuals lack the means of articulating their experiences with respect to the experiences of others like them, the suffering caused by misrecognition will not be able to become the impetus for new social movements" (p. 617).

In her attempt to show Honneth's shortcomings, Worsdale explicitly focuses on Honneth's account of ideological recognition. She chooses to do so because, despite the centrality of emotional suffering in Honneth's theory of recognition, he does not consider emotional suffering in his account of ideological recognition. Worsdale rightly points out the counterintuitive nature of this move as one would expect "suffering would be high on the list of priorities when thinking about ideologically oppressive social orders; the nature of ideology being such that it elicits conformity with and consent to forms of social domination" (Worsdale, 2017, p. 618).

In his work *Recognition as Ideology* (2007), Honneth deals with the issues related to ideology. According to his theory, recognition is vital for achieving a positive understanding of the self. This process is always dependent on acts of recognition from others. However, this system runs into trouble particularly in the third sphere of recognition, namely social esteem. Social esteem is dependent on the values of society and the fulfillment of those presents a source of self-worth. Therefore, a situation can be presented in which individuals voluntarily conform to a dominant system, thereby willingly (but unawarely) upholding the system that oppresses them. Then, through perceived recognition, they are encouraged to continue doing this. "Once we conceive of the act of subjection indicated by this definition according to the model of public affirmation, that which we could call 'recognition' suddenly loses all of its positive connotations and becomes the central mechanism of ideology" (Honneth, 2007, p. 324). Faced with this dilemma, Honneth

argues that despite the similarities, ideological recognition is not genuine recognition. However, he does concede that they are extremely difficult to distinguish. On the one hand, in line with his notion of moral progress, he claims that historical distance allows us to see the difference between genuine and deceiving recognition. On the other hand, he argues that true recognition has to pave the way for individuals to pursue their own life goals in an autonomous manner.

There are two distinct claims that Honneth makes in his ideological recognition account. Firstly, (a) this type of recognition prompts subjects to accept and take up oppressive social positions. Secondly, (b) Honneth argues that ideological recognition constitute misrecognition as it is unable to secure the material dimension of legitimate recognition. While these two claims are not problematic in themselves, Worsdale maintains that based on his formulation of recognition theory, Honneth is also committed to the underlying condition that (c) misrecognition always causes individuals to suffer psychologically. This, after all, is the reason why subjects are able to cognitively grasp the injustices they are subject to. However, Worsdale credibly shows that these three claims (a, b, and c) are mutually exclusive in the sense that at most two of them can be true simultaneously[7]. Yet she argues that all three claims are too significant for Honneth's theory overall for him to abandon any of the three (Wordsdale, 2017, pp. 618-620).

Worsdale proceeds by considering the potential solution of arguing that while ideological recognition can be said to cause suffering, it does so in a delayed manner. However, she rules this potential solution out based on the fact that, per definition, ideology is dependent on maintaining what she calls a repression-free effect to sustain itself. Essentially, she argues that if the suffering is simply delayed, ideology would be unable to be upheld, including in the short-time dimension. Another suggestion Worsdale considers is the idea that while suffering may be present, subjects may feel like the positives from ideological recognition outweigh the negatives. This strategy proves to be problematic, since claiming that any benefit for the oppressed can outweigh their suffering from oppression is arguably dubious at best.

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[7] The precise mechanisms why this is the case is not relevant at this point. Sufficient for the present context is that Worsdale (2017) is successful in her reconstruction and therefore her argument is taken as valid. I therefore refer to her convincing reasoning on page 620.

After dismissing the above suggestions, Worsdale continues by developing her own solution to the problem drawing on insights from medical sociology. She highlights the differences between the medical uses of disease and illness. While the former designates a malfunction of the body, the latter pertains to individuals' subjective responses to their experiences. She illustrates this distinction by drawing on a study of working-class women from Aberdeen. The women who partook in the study were largely classified as having diseases, and yet when surveyed on their health, most stated they were in good health. This stemmed from their understanding of good health - the mere capacity to follow their (working) routines. Worsdale, therefore, draws a comparison between this case and the case of ideological misrecognition. Essentially, she argues that the structure of capitalism prevents the working-class women from perceiving themselves as ill, as the system of capitalism demands the workers to perform regardless. In the same vein, she shows how ideological mechanisms can prevent subjects from recognizing the injustices they are subjected to. Consequently, she argues that "the sense of painful injury-to-self that victims of ideological recognition feel by being denied true mutual recognition does not manifest itself as an awareness that things should be otherwise" (p. 624). This, in turn, means that oppressed subjects lack the motivation to change their conditions, which explains the longevity of ideological oppression.

In sum, Worsdale's intervention is a valuable contribution thus far as it aids in the understanding of the oppression of the working class. Based on Honneth's theory alone, it is difficult to understand why the lack of recognition of the oppressed working class is not motivating a more active struggle (and identification) of the working class. Worsdale manages to credibly introduce the distinction between disease and illness, which sequentially addresses one shortcoming of Honneth's conceptualization.

2.4. Recognition and Ambivalence

Thus far, recognition theory has been portrayed, while not without flaws, as overall desirable. Still, over time, recognition theory has been critiqued from many other angles. The following chapter aims to briefly introduce a selection of remarks by a variety of authors in order to paint a nuanced picture of the critiques.

Firstly, Judith Butler contests Honneth's conception of recognition by arguing that he mistakenly portrays recognition as capable of full recognition. She insists that recognition can only ever be partial in the sense that it can never capture a person's full complexity. More importantly, however, she disagrees with the way Honneth presents the dynamic of attributing recognition. Butler argues that a "subject who confers recognition depends upon the availability of terms, and those terms belong to a life of discourse and power [...] The very fact that recognition is reciprocal, or can be, presupposes a structural equality between subjects" (Butler, 2021b, pp. 46-47). Butler does agree that identity construction is situated in the social sphere and that without the intersubjective dimension, we are unable to achieve autonomy or an understanding of self. But generally speaking, she portrays a more pessimistic picture of the present conditions of the struggle for recognition, particularly concerning the power disparities in the social realm/political arena. For Butler, an important question hereby also concerns the distinction between recognition and recognizability. She argues that for the kind of recognition Honneth is advocating for "recognizability must first be established. To understand the epistemological conditions under which the differential production of the human takes place, or the differential production of the subject, we have to first understand that nexus of power and knowledge that constitutes various fields of recognizability" (Butler, 2021a, p. 63). This is also why, in line with Fraser, Butler argues that while recognition can be a part of a theory of justice, it is insufficient and is unable to provide an appropriate account of inequality and injustice.

Furthermore, Amy Allen, much like Butler, takes issue with Honneth's overtly positive account of recognition. She bases her critique on evaluating the first and most fundamental type of recognition, namely love. She argues that he uses the bond between infant and caregiver as the starting point of all recognition relations. Honneth initially argues that an infant and their caregiver exist in a fusion and that the breakup from this bond creates a loss of love that is unrecoverable, and the next best thing we can achieve is a strong bond with others. However, this does not speak of the asymmetry of power in the infant-caregiver bond. She goes as far as to argue that Honneth refuses to "acknowledge any primary, internal ambivalence in his paradigm case of love. Ambivalence and aggression are, for him, secondary; they are the inevitable result of the pain and anxiety generated by the loss and breakup of primary fusion experiences" (Allen, 2021, p.113). Allen does not object to recognition

theory in general, but she refutes the entirely positive picture painted by Honneth, as she does not think it is capable of accounting for domination. Importantly, she advocates for an ambivalent understanding of recognition.

Such an understanding would mean that while recognition is a condition for freedom, it also can be the origin of domination. The more radical formation of this claim states that "there are forms of recognition that are at the same time forms of domination since the subject that results from such recognition is necessarily unable to question or challenge others' interpretations of the normative standards of recognition in the relevant community" (Stahl, 2021, p.172). Essentially, this boils down to the question of who is considered a subject. Thus, this objection also focuses on the issue of power imbalances.

In conclusion, Honneth's theory of recognition can be said to hold potential for working-class liberation, and understanding his theory as an imminent critique solidifies this rendering. At the same time, the critiques introduced in this chapter show that Honneth's conception does not come without its drawbacks. In advancing the original account of this thesis, it is important to keep in mind the issues raised in this chapter. By acknowledging the limitations of recognition theory, one can maintain a critical perspective on the workings of recognition. The following chapter is dedicated to the explicit connection between recognition, the working class, and solidarity.

Chapter 3: Solidarity, Recognition, and the Working Class

[T]he solidarity practiced here and now in the battle for a just cause appears as a trial sample of what human beings are capable of when social obstacles hampering the development of their moral strengths are removed. The solidarity practiced within social movements thus acquires a dimension which is simultaneously "archaeological" and anticipative. It is archaeological insofar as it uncovers a disposition, buried under the established social conditions, towards cooperation, mutual aid, common feeling - in short: towards solidarity. It is anticipative insofar as it also draws a picture of the future human being, who will ultimately be free to develop its cooperative and common strengths unhindered. In this way, the concept of solidarity becomes multi-faceted (or ambiguous). It refers directly to a means of the battle: solidarity as a weapon. Yet at the same time it refers to an end of the battle: solidarity as an anticipation of future society, as a part of Utopia already lived.

- Bayertz, 1999, p. 20

Thus far, the thesis has examined the definition and importance of the working class as well as Axel Honneth's theory of recognition and its critiques. The question now arises of how these are connected with solidarity. At the onset, however, it is important to understand what makes solidarity special. Roughly speaking, solidarity can be viewed as a motivator for action that regards the beneficiary as more than just the self. Like Honneth's concept of recognition, solidarity is intersubjective. To act in solidarity, therefore, is not to act for one's own sake nor for the sake of the other, but for a shared sake, which leads to a distinct group being built. Solidarity, hence, is not a case of charity[8], it is partially rooted in self-interest. What is important hereby is that people usually belong to numerous groups, and no single group can ever mirror an individual's self-interest fully (Laitinen, 2023).

The subsequent chapter introduces Nathan Duford's framework of solidarity as well as a discussion on how Honneth describes solidarity in his work. This is followed by a comparison between the two accounts. After pointing out various benefits and drawbacks of each approach, the chapter concludes with an original

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[8] There may be a debate on the presence of self-interest in cases of charity. One may argue that donating to a charity may be instrumentalized to feel better about oneself or to assert a position of power. Within the literature, there is disagreement about this and exploring this is beyond the scope of this paper. Thus, for the sake of the argument it shall be assumed that acts of charity are done solely for the sake of the other.

proposal that claims recognition theory can be utilized to mitigate conflicts of solidarity groups. While building on DuFord's conflict-based conception of solidarity, I argue that Honneth's recognition theory can advance working-class solidarity in two concrete ways.

3.1. DuFord's Account of Solidarity

Commonly, solidarity groups are viewed as coherent groups that are free from conflict. This, however, is a misguided perspective according to Nathan DuFord. In his book "Solidarity in Conflict" (2022), DuFord puts forward his account of solidarity. He objects to solidarity definitions that are built on either the idea of shared identity, of communal tactics, or of mutual values. Instead, DuFord proposes a conceptualization that has conflict at its core. The following section explores his notion of solidarity.

DuFord proposes a definition of solidarity that is predominantly political and functional rather than moral. He argues that practicing solidarity is a type of democracy. While DuFord maintains that democracy is not the ideal way of living together as a society, he argues that within non-ideal circumstances, it is the best option. Moreover, he insists that the present non-ideal reality is one that is insurmountable, in the sense that an ideal world will always stay out of reach. It is this very reason that explains why conflict is a permanent feature of democracy. He theorizes that:

> "All solidaristic action is burdened action. It is conditioned by the social, economic, political, and legal context in which the action takes place. Solidarity is not a free-standing moral action or a free-standing moral relation. It is unlike other forms of moral community in the sense that it would not exist in an ideal, just, or free world" (p. 121).

DuFord does not claim that conflict is valuable as such but rather that non-ideal circumstances make it important. A society that seeks to end conflict can only do so by establishing a political and legal order that has no friction, but this is incompatible with the vision of an open and free society. Hereby, he distinguishes two types of conflict, namely realistic and unrealistic conflict. The former is of a substantial nature as it pertains to conflicts over power, resources, and norms. Because of their highly relevant nature, DuFord classifies realistic conflicts as creative, since the discussion

around them can have real and positive impacts. They are aimed at significant change. Unrealistic conflicts, on the other hand, are merely destructive as they pertain simply to clashing personalities and vanity. The type of conflict that is fundamental for solidarity groups, therefore, is the realistic one. The ultimate goal of this conflict must be unification, and in this sense, it also seeks to eliminate exclusions and domination. This is an essential feature of DuFord's account as he insists that not all organized groups can be said to be in solidarity. His account explicitly excludes, for instance, fascist groups because they are defined by permanent exclusion and are, therefore, undesirable. Groups that seek permanent exclusion are contradictory to the goal of solidarity. At the same time, the fact that solidarity groups have to engage in real conflict also allows DuFord to explain that groups need more at their core than the lack of domination. Without this condition, one may say that a sport fan club acts in solidarity as they have a common goal and assemble as a non-dominating group. Insisting on realistic conflict shows how conceptually, such groups are distinct from genuine solidarity groups.

DuFord posits that solidarity groups have two sets of relations. On the one hand, there is a relationship between the solidarity group and the outside world. As a group, they form as a response to unfair treatment. In an ideal world, there would hence be no solidarity needed, as there would be no domination. The group relates to society at large in an emancipatory fashion. On the other hand, the solidarity group is also characterized by the internal relationship between the group members. Conflict here functions on both levels. Internal conflict pertains to the issue of what a group wants to achieve, how they can do so, and who is considered a member of a group. According to DuFord, solidarity groups can exclude individuals from their group as long as the exclusion is temporary. As an example, he points to feminist solidarity groups that may temporarily exclude cis men from their organization for the sake of creating a safe space and furthering their agenda. Legitimate feminist groups, however, have the aim of an equal society, meaning that once this is reached, cis men would be no longer excluded. In this way, genuine solidarity groups set themselves apart from oppressive groups, whose exclusionary features are

permanent[9]. Being in solidarity together is as much of a negotiation and conflict as it is being in unity against an oppressor. In this sense, being in solidarity is defined as a dialectical process. One element of this is that solidarity groups come together to work on a shared language by building collective narratives and conceptual resources. These are aimed not only at facilitating in-group communication but also at creating a way in which the group can advocate for their claims as a united group. The element of discourse exchange also sets solidarity groups apart from interest groups. While interest groups may share goals just like solidarity groups, they attempt to influence by mere financial means without dialogue.

Moreover, DuFord argues that "solidarity organizations are attempting to undermine in some way the fixed hegemonic norms (or, as some would call them, ideologies) at work in the broader society, they cannot rely on agreed-upon background norms. As a result, the solidarity organization must bring the background into the foreground" (p. 67). This process, understandably, is conflict-ridden. Yet, it simultaneously supports the democratic nature of solidarity. To illustrate this, DuFord claims that within neoliberal societies, individuals are alienated from society and democratic norms. Capitalism has facilitated the decline in democratic capacities, and he argues that neoliberalism has abolished the very idea of society. However, despite capitalism dictating the current background conditions of society, it is important not to treat this structure as a complete given, as this would make critiquing it impossible. Only by acknowledging that things could be different does solidarity have a chance to emerge. This is therefore precisely why it is important for solidarity groups to implement the democratic practice of putting background assumptions to the foreground and challenging them in dialogue.

In this sense, being a member of a solidarity group is seen as transformative, since it changes people's relation to and experience with democracy while at the same time creating an opportunity to reflect on previously unquestioned beliefs. The internal relationship of solidarity groups, therefore, fosters the democratic capacities of their members. Moreover, DuFord acknowledges that internal conflict leads to the

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[9] One can compare the exclusionary feminist group to a fascist group. Feminist solidarity groups and fascist groups may both exclude some individuals from their group. However, fascist groups do not treat the exclusion of people from the group as something that is just temporary. Individuals who are not permitted membership of an oppressive group will never gain access to the group. Part of the very definition of fascist groups is therefore permanent exclusion of some people. Changes of conditions outside the group cannot change this, whereas in the feminist case, there are concrete changes that can end the exclusion and which are aimed for.

instability of a group. Nevertheless, he argues that this is an essential feature of solidarity. Contrary to oppressive groups, genuine solidarity movements are characterized by flat hierarchies, which enable conflict to flourish. Said conflict is a sign of the robust democratic character of the group. In fact, DuFord insists that the ultimate goal of a solidarity group is to achieve its goal of inclusion and freedom. In the long run, then, solidarity groups do not aim to continue to exist. As he puts it, "from the perspective of the excluded or dominated, stability is an obstacle, not a virtue " (p. 18). Thus, it is important for solidarity groups to remain open to conflict so they can continuously reevaluate their own practices and formation. Arguably, the most compelling example that DuFord provides for this point are the widespread wildcat teacher strikes in the USA in 2018[10]. Wildcat strikes, per definition, are strikes that have not been authorized by the union. This is a clear situation in which there is an internal conflict about what should be done to improve the group's situation. Disputes within the group, however, also speak to the democratic feature of solidarity groups. Although there is risk associated with openness to conflict, it is elemental for real solidarity to emerge.

To summarize, solidarity groups need realistic conflict on both the internal and external level. The external conflict's aim of solidarity constitutes the group's oppositional-emancipatory character, while the internal conflict reflects its unifying-democratic feature. Although the presented solidarity account may seem demanding, DuFord claims that it is an ideal worth striving for. Ultimately, DuFord argues that "solidarity organizations allow us to have, on a micro level, what it is that a good society could provide for us: access to democratic life, the nonexclusion of difference, and the sharing of goals, fates, and values" (p. 171).

3.2. Axel Honneth on Solidarity

DuFord's account of solidarity emerges out of necessity, as a response to oppressive circumstances and non-ideal conditions. It is formed "in the wreckage of society" (p. 26). His view is characterized overall by a type of negativity and urgency. In contrast

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[10] In the first quarter of 2018, over 15.000 teachers in the US state of West Virginia went on strike due to budget cuts and lack of pay rises. Not only are teachers in this US state legally prohibited from striking, they also had explicit orders from their own union leadership to not strike (Aronoff, 2018). In the end, workers went against both these rules and striked, managing to achieve a 5% pay rise (Karp & Sanchez, 2018).

to this, Honneth has an idealistic perspective on solidarity. According to him, solidarity functions as the driving force of social integration without relying on positive sentiments between agents. In this sense, it is characterized as impersonal. While he views solidarity as the act of acting for another, this has to be possible in a way that does not require knowing the other. This is grounded in an understanding of recognition. Honneth's theory of recognition is the backdrop for this in the sense that it establishes intersubjective dependency. Through this connection, one is able to grasp that acting with others in mind (even the ones not personally known to us) is an act that reaffirms a joint purpose (Honneth, 2019).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Honneth associates the foundation for solidarity to the development of self-esteem accomplished by recognition in terms of social esteem. However, it is vital to understand that all three types of recognition (and hence self-relations) are connected, since they build on each other. In this way, primary relationships (love) and legal relations (rights) pave the way for the existence of solidarity. The understanding of the self and its relation to others continues to expand in this line. In the beginning, one needs to understand oneself as a subject that stands in loving, mutuality constituting relationships. The created self-confidence allows a sense of security that makes it possible for subjects to respect others on a fundamental level, granting them the same rights as they see themselves entitled to. This mutual respect and the sense of moral responsibility creates the opportunity for the subject to strive for social esteem, which in turn cultivates solidarity (Honneth, 1995). Consequently, then, solidarity is achieved as the final step of a well functioning and just society. The struggle for solidarity, in this sense, is the final phase in the struggle for recognition. According to Honneth, solidarity takes place "everywhere, where freedoms are realisable together as a form of co-existence and socially being-for-another" (Raffnsøe-Møller, 2015, p. 277).

3.3. Investigating the Shortcomings of DuFord and Honneth

Both DuFord and Honneth share a commitment to the importance of solidarity, but their approaches are vastly different. The following subsection reflects on the differences and the shortcomings of both accounts. Evidently, DuFord and Honneth have different starting points, but they also have similarities. First and foremost, both recognize that solidarity is an intersubjective relation. More importantly, however,

they both agree in their own way that solidarity is a way to overcome oppression. While DuFord has this as the explicit goal when conceptualizing solidarity, Honneth's theory of recognition does strive for this as well, and solidarity in his notion is one aspect of achieving recognition. Strictly speaking, this may be where the similarities end.

A reading of Honneth's account seems to suggest that one does not choose to be in solidarity with others, and that this is a mere byproduct of involuntary communality and sharing and navigating a social space. DuFord, on the other hand, proposes that being in solidarity implies an active choice and a continuous commitment to remain within a solidarity group. While people who are part of a solidarity group may not choose the attributes or interests that make them part of the solidarity group in the first place, DuFord's conceptualization results in almost a quarreled organization. Being in solidarity, in this sense, is strenuous work. The point hereby is not that DuFord suggests that solidarity groups cannot be in harmony but rather that the reality of solidarity groups is far more conflict-ridden than Honneth seems to believe. In part, this is due to Honneth's perspective of solidarity forming at the late stages of recognition. At these stages, presumingly, there is broader agreement on background norms and morals. This difference between the two accounts is amplified by the fact that Honneth presents an explicitly normative account while DuFord proposes a functionalist one. Even more so, DuFord actually insists that there cannot be such a thing as a normative account of solidarity because solidarity as such only exists due to the non-ideal conditions of the world. It is, according to him, an inherently political concept.

This point brings back one of the main critiques presented in Chapter 2, namely that of Fraser accusing Honneth of not being able to take systematic conditions into account. She argues that Honneth's primary focus on the harms of misrecognition keep Honneth from adequately acknowledging the immense oppressive system that capitalism truly is. As demonstrated, Honneth relies on experiences of suffering and acknowledges that seeking recognition is a struggle. Yet, he provides little context as to how these challenges are to be overcome, particularly when it comes to solidarity. This is one of the strengths of DuFord's account, as it enables an understanding of solidarity that can be formed in the most dire conditions. Both authors agree that solidarity is desirable in oppressive situations, and solidarity has the potential to end oppressions. However, only

DuFord's account seems to be successful in credibly recognizing solidarity groups. Moreover, his framework allows for the reality of major disagreement between members. To be a member of a solidarity group means one has a shared aim with those in the group. At the same time, the identification with the group is limited to that specific aim. This means that while group members perceive themselves as part of the group, they do so under specific conditions and contexts. When these change, disagreements arise. This allows DuFord to claim that solidarity is present in spite of significant issues related to how solidarity group members view each other and themselves. Honneth, on the other hand, by pointing to solidarity as the final step of the recognition sphere, may be implicitly requiring an unrealistic level of societal recognition of the oppressed. Arguably, solidarity groups can form, for instance, even if a level of legal recognition is not given or if people lack the primary self-confidence. Some may even argue that this is partially what solidarity groups seek to advance.

Honneth may reply to this arguing that his conception of recognition entails that full recognition is never reachable. In fact, this is the strength of his concept, as it explains why humanity is able to make progress at all. Since misrecognition always harms individuals, they are always motivated to better their own conditions. Bettering one's own condition within the intersubject realm, however, also means granting others more recognition as well. The constant human need for more recognition, therefore, can explain continuous moral progress. Following this, Honneth may try to respond to the criticism by stating that solidarity relations take shape at all levels of recognition rather than in the final sphere. This, nonetheless, puts into question what solidarity really means for Honneth, and, more importantly, it makes solidarity difficult to operationalize.

I argue that Honneth's definition of solidarity is either limited to the last recognition sphere and hence unable to cope with situations in which the earlier recognition spheres are largely unmet, or otherwise, solidarity is not limited to the last recognition sphere but thus becomes too vague to describe situations of solidarity at all. In the former instance, this is an issue if one recalls that for Honneth, solidarity is about the community of value. This relates to social esteem, which is essential for individuals to develop self-esteem. According to his framework of recognition theory, the primary self-relations of self-confidence (via love) and self-respect (via rights) build the foundation on which one can develop self-esteem. While Honneth seems to suggest that full recognition is never possible, he argues

that the self-relations of self-confidence and self-respect have to be established to a certain degree for an individual to be able to develop self-esteem in the first place. In this light, one may argue that the requirements for something to be classified as solidarity are too demanding.

To illustrate this, one can consider the case of an individual who has been subjected to injuries to their physical integrity and has had emotional support withheld from them. These conditions, according to Honneth, impede the development of the most fundamental self-relation of self-confidence. It is conceivable that this person is fundamentally impacted in their self-image due to the absence of love and friendship. Not having their needs and emotions cared for by others significantly influences one's relation to the self and the community. However, it is also plausible that this person who has been prevented from developing a positive self-relation would choose to advocate for others in similar situations. Thus, on the one hand, they have had their primary form of recognition withheld from them. They may not see themselves as worthy recipients of love and friendship and lack self-confidence. But on the other hand, it does not follow that they are unable to grant and ascribe this recognition to others. While it may sound contradictory that individuals are unable to recognize themselves worthy of something that they would grant any other person within (and beyond) their community, this is a common reality[11]. While an individual may not see themselves as worthy of having their emotional and physical integrity protected, it is realistic to consider a situation in which they advocate for other individuals to be protected. Although the advocacy is centered on others, they are implicitly promoting a shared aim. In this sense, they can be said to be in solidarity with vulnerable persons. If in this case Honneth remains in his stance that solidarity requires a basic level of self-confidence and self-respect, he would need to argue that this in fact is not a case of solidarity.

In the latter instance a problem arises because, if Honneth maintains that his concept of solidarity occurs within all levels of recognition, solidarity would become difficult to distinguish from mere sociability. It would allow him to account for the example above but the notion of solidarity would simply become too broad. In this

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[11] This insight neatly relates to Worsdale (2017). One could argue that the conditioning of working-class women has deeply impacted their perception of health. Individuals who have had to endure great forms of disrespect may simply be used to it - it is their normal. Thus, it is possible that the women of the Aberdeen study would not grant themselves the same standard of health they would advocate for others, which can be explained by the systematic conditioning they have been subjected to.

light, it seems unclear how, in Honneth's account, the distinct concept of solidarity can avoid confusion. While Honneth attempts to operationalize solidarity, it has been shown that his success is limited. Regardless, I argue that while Honneth may get the concept of solidarity wrong, his theory of recognition more broadly is able to add to the solidarity discourse, albeit in different ways.

Arguably, Honneth's concept of solidarity runs into troubles when it comes to practice. This is where DuFord seemingly has the upper hand since he explicitly aims to provide a concept based on practiced solidarity rather than idealized notions. However, despite DuFord's insistence of conflict being at the core of solidarity, he only provides an account that helps distinguish between real solidarity and other forms of group affiliation, like fascism or sporting fans. DuFord claims to provide a functionalist understanding of conflict that results in a form of democratic theory. However, he predominantly establishes cut-off boundaries that allow for the assessment of whether a group is a genuine solidarity group or not. This in itself is a needed intervention that has its own value. Yet, DuFord falls short of accomplishing more than that. Consequently, I argue that DuFord undertheorizes the shape that conflict takes within solidarity groups. Although he provides an analytical tool that can be used in a limited way, it cannot be used to increase solidarity on a societal level. This is a shortcoming precisely because DuFord credibly claims that solidarity is desperately needed in present society to further the aims of justice.

In conclusion, neither approach fully captures the importance of solidarity or how it operates. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the valuable insights both authors provide. The next section suggests a way of integrating Honneth's theory of recognition with a conflict-based solidarity model. This will be done by actively conceptualizing the case of working-class solidarity.

3.4. Advancing Working-Class Solidarity

As established in Chapter 1, working-class solidarity deserves significant attention due to its liberatory potential. Efforts to strengthen genuine working-class solidarity have the ability to advance justice in a unique and expansive way. In his work, DuFord explicitly draws on working-class solidarity in the shape of labor organizing. In line with the presented conceptualization of class, he argues that working-class solidarity is unable to escape the social conditions present in society at large,

meaning racism and sexism are not beyond the labor movement. He rightfully argues that through organizing as workers, the working class is able to "recognize their shared fate not merely as workers but as citizens and political agents. For this reason, labor organizing also serves as the basis for building and maintaining robust democratic societies" (2022, pp. 21-22). In the following section, I provide revisions to DuFord's conception of solidarity by incorporating some elements of recognition theory. Based on previous chapters, I provide an account of working-class solidarity that utilizes recognition theory as a resource for conflict mitigation.

While DuFord prioritizes labor solidarity as being elementary, the labor solidarity he considers takes the strict shape of a labor union. Independently of the undertheorized conflict mitigation, there are two problems with this approach. Firstly, DuFord unintentionally seems to imply that workers are in solidarity relations predominantly with the members of their own union, not with all workers. Although I would argue that this is not what DuFord truly intends to claim, he does not address this concern. Depending on the national context, unions are founded on different approaches. While a country may only have one union for all workers, there can be alternative ways to structure union organizing. Some countries may have a handful of unions divided roughly among political party lines, while other countries model their union structure after specific professions[12]. This means that in practice, some unions are specific and exclusive to certain types of professions. As an example, a teachers union is exclusive to educators. Arguably, workers in solidarity all share the same interest in combating the oppressive wage labor structure, meaning that all workers are meant to be in solidarity with all workers, not teachers just with teachers. One union that addresses this explicitly is the Industrial Workers of the World union. They advocate for one big, global union that unites the whole workforce (IWW, n.d.). The different approaches to unionism matter because they illustrate the type of real-life labor solidarity DuFord refers to. The underlying question arises of how much workers would need to have in common to be part of the same solidarity group. This thesis advances claims for the rationale of one big union - as there is one common struggle that unites workers. Nevertheless, it is argued here that the account of solidarity advanced by DuFord is compatible with this perspective.

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[12] As an example, within the European Union there are a variety of union styles. The most common case is countries having different unions split along (former) political lines (European Trade Union Institute, n.d.). The USA on the other hand has more than 60 unions (Union Plus, 2018).

Important therefore is to make the union landscape explicit when discussing labor solidarity in the shape of unions.

Secondly, a related issue to the union focus is that DuFord does not consider the potential conflict between existing unions. If he does insist on the differentiation between internal and external conflict, it becomes hard to categorize conflicts between unions. Logically, it would seem that different unions should be thought of as being part of the same solidarity group, since they are part of the same labor solidarity umbrella. Yet, it is equally true that within a multi-union system, the relationship between different unions is characterized by an external feature. By being organized in distinct formal organizations and having separate discourse cultures and structures, it becomes hard to conceive real conflict between different unions as an internal conflict between one solidarity group.

Drawing on the previous example of teachers unions, let us imagine that in a same school district there is a union that represents school lunch personnel in addition to a teachers union. Between the unions a dispute arises surrounding the duration of the lunch time. Teachers may advocate for a longer lunch break because it gives them a longer break, which they argue is needed for their wellbeing and job performance. The lunch personnel, on the other hand, may object to longer lunch breaks because they are forced to take up a supervisory role of the students that increases their workload and time pressure. For a united labor front, this would simply mean that both teachers and lunch personnel collectively bargain for a solution that requires a potential new role of lunch supervision that is taken up by a new employee. This would solve the predicament for both teachers and lunch personnel. However, in a situation where the school administration refuses this possibility, the administration may install a wedge between the two groups. Of course, one could argue that they have the potential to combine forces. But this is not what is argued against here. The point made is that while both unions are working-class unions, they are distinct entities within a multi-union system. Hence, the line between internal and external group conflict of unions is blurry. While this thesis does not attempt to redefine these boundaries, it is important to highlight that there is a need for further specification regarding this.

Ultimately, it is argued that exclusively focusing on unions comes not without problems. Due to the systematic oppression all workers face, I argue that DuFord's strict union focus is not adequately justified. While unions are an essential part of

labor solidarity, DuFord fails to make an argument for why they are the only type of labor solidarity that he includes in his account. Conceptually, the working class can organize without the presence of a union. One may argue that if workers organize to some degree that would function as a union, and that it should not matter all too much whether it is called a union. However, there are also nuances that come with formalized unions. It thus follows that unionism is seen as an expression of working-class solidarity while not being interchangeable with it.

Analyzing working-class solidarity in a meaningful manner requires a focus beyond unions. Arguably, DuFord's key argument of the importance of conflict can be applied on a broader scale. An increased scope, however, does not solve the problem of his theory not adequately laying out parameters for productive conflict. DuFord rightfully maintains that in real solidarity movements, meaningful conflict arises because a dispute exists about how to achieve non-domination. There needs to be something objectively at stake for conflict to be productive and valuable. While this is an important insight, much is left to be desired in DuFord's account. If we are after a functionalist conception of solidarity, it is crucial to provide a strategy of how to utilize real conflict. After all, DuFord's ultimate goal is to provide a type of democratic theory, not a mere analytical tool.

Crucially, utilizing conflict has two primary meanings in this context. On the one hand, real conflict functions as a democratic feature of solidarity groups and keeps the group open to changes. Hence, it can function as an incentive for individuals to join a group even if they do not agree with all positions that the group represents at any given moment. It also can function as a way to ensure existing members of the group stay engaged within the organization. On the other hand, the process of internal conflict resolution is aimed at providing solidarity movements with a better position to combat their own oppression. Ideally, the result of internal conflict is the strengthening of the group due to new agreements being made within the organization. Real conflict, in this sense, is a means to progress. Indeed, the question then arises of how progress can be achieved through conflict.

The proposal of this thesis is to adopt a strategic approach to the recognition paradigm. This approach consists of two main building blocks. On the one hand, it will be argued that recognition theory can provide a basis for self-recognition of the working class. Put simply, the claim that will be advanced is that through an adequate working-class definition, more workers will begin to more actively identify

as workers. This means that recognition theory can be strategically employed to generate awareness. This is a necessary step to ensure the success of working-class solidarity since it hinges on affected members of the group becoming affiliated with the solidarity movement. On the other hand, it will be argued that real conflict within a solidarity group can be understood in part as claims for recognition. This means that recognition theory can guide conflict resolution, which in turn strengthens a solidarity organization on an internal and external level.

3.4.1. Increasing Working-Class Identification via the Strategic Application of Recognition Theory

It has been established that working-class identification has reached an all-time low. Nevertheless, it has also been argued that the concept is as relevant as ever. While it is conceptually relevant for analysis, it also has immense real-life impacts. It is posited that were more workers aware of their working-class identity, the working-class movement would become stronger and, in this sense, would gain more power to combat class oppression. Whether people view themselves as working class or not does not in itself change the number of working-class individuals. However, if people do not identify as working class, the capacity[13] for collective action is reduced.

A partial aim of this thesis has been to present an understanding of the working class that makes self-identification with the working class appealing to workers. One potential issue concerning working-class identity is the abstractness of the idea of selling one's labor as a key class determinant. This way of viewing work and themselves may simply not resonate with workers. This, indeed, is an important insight in relation to recognition theory because recognition is strongly based on communication. For an agent to recognize themselves and to make themselves recognizable, they have to make use of the existing language and categories[14]. In fact, this dynamic is categorized as violent by Butler (2005). They claim that the very

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[13] It is important to note that increased capacity does not equal actual power increase. The present argument does not claim that there is a clear causation between working-class power and the number of active working-class identifications. It suggests, however, that there is a potential correlation between the two.

[14] This statement does not intend to claim that it is impossible to come up with new terms in the quest for recognition. However, even if individuals find new terms that they associate with, the approval of these terms also depends on others. Like with recognition theory more broadly, this is based on intersubjectivity, meaning that it takes more than self-identification to be recognized along new terms.

act of making oneself recognizable means making oneself a subject, which in turn reduces freedom and individual expression. Arguably, Butler has a point when they caution against an overtly positive picture of recognition. Prevalent categories of recognition (meaning what and how one can be recognized) are overdetermined by those holding power within society. For the oppressed, this means that they have to make use of the oppressors' terms. This is a meaningful intervention and a reminder to engage critically with recognition theory in practice.

Furthermore, one can argue that within the parameters of recognition there is also potential for freedom. While making oneself into a subject, according to Butler, prohibits full achievement of freedom, it can arguably still be a way of improving actual conditions. The adoption of labels like working class not only holds negative potential. Within the working class, making oneself recognizable as working class to others has the potential to encourage others to do the same. As a fellow worker, one can identify another worker and affirm them in their value. This type of comradery may prompt them to attain a sense of dignity as a worker that was previously out of reach. In part, this relates back to the cultural dimension of the working class. As it has been argued in Chapter 1, a cultural understanding contributes to a more empowering definition of the working class which lays the foundation for the experience of affirmative recognition. This, following Honneth's theory, leads to the crucial development of newfound self-esteem. Keeping into account that it is conditional on the validity of recognition theory, one can see that self-esteem can be strategically employed by the working class to broaden its movement.

Yet, the critique of Honneth by Fraser in Chapter 2 has shown that reducing redistribution to mere recognition is not possible. However, those can be complementary. In this sense, recognition may add to working-class success, and in a way to redistribution, in two distinct ways. On the one hand, it has the potential to increase how many people (correctly) identify themselves as working class. On the other hand, Honneth's theory of recognition serves as an explanation of how progress can be achieved. His concept of recognition not only provides a framework to analyze historical progress but can also function as a route map as to how to achieve more recognition. To some degree, while the language of recognition may limit individuals, it can also become a tool.

3.4.2. Internal Conflict Mitigation Through the Recognition Paradigm

As argued previously, solidarity groups are characterized by conflict. This partly stems from the heterogeneity of members within the group. Moreover, solidarity always entails something being done for the sake of a shared goal. Consequently, no solidarity group can fully reflect all of one agent's goals. If the goals of a solidarity group were to be identical to the goals of an individual, the individual would not participate in solidarity but merely act in self-interest. Acting out of sheer self-interest is incompatible with the definition of solidarity since solidarity requires a conscious intersubjective component. Intersubjectivity hereby designates more than the mere fact that multiple agents are involved. The intersubjective relation is manifested by the collective group interest that emerges in the group. Because a shared aim cannot be identical to the complete interests of a particular agent, it follows that conflict within a given solidarity group is unavoidable. Indeed, this idea is supported by DuFord's claims on the inevitability of conflict within solidarity groups.

However, what remains to be addressed is how to make use of this conflict in a productive manner that furthers the interests of a given solidarity group. According to DuFord, the main interest of a genuine solidarity group has to be the end of the experienced oppression and injustice that the group is subjected to. Here, it is crucial to keep the difference in mind between the individually experienced oppression and the oppression the group seeks to overcome. This can be related back to the concept of intersectionality. If we take the working-class solidarity movement, the group's main objective is to overcome capitalist oppression. Much has been said already in this thesis about the connection between capitalism, racism, and sexism and the role of working-class collectives in combating different types of oppressions. It is part of the reason a focus on the working class provides a compelling case.

Let's revisit the example of the black working-class woman from Chapter 1 to illustrate a real internal conflict of a solidarity group. She and her white, male fellow worker are both oppressed as workers. For their shared sake and within their labor solidarity group, they seek to overcome the capitalist exploitation they are experiencing. However, as a black working-class woman, she has a distinct experience of capitalist oppression. As established, class is both racialist and gendered. While both agents are workers, their perspectives and experiences significantly differ. Under the label of working-class solidarity, the white male worker

may feel like he can speak on all topics related to class oppression with the same knowledge as his more marginalized coworker. However, as argued in Chapter 1, a black female worker does not only have insight into the specific oppression faced by black female workers, but, through the intersecting oppressions she is subject to, she has a unique insight into how class oppression functions more broadly. Taking this as the starting point, it is time to consider conflict more concretely. In the case of internal conflict in a solidarity group, an example can be regarding strategy. Both individuals may feel like they are in the right, considering their own experience. But how can recognition theory function as a mediator?

Drawing on Honneth's reliance on negative emotions, I argue that recognition theory enables new modes of dialogue. While both workers share capitalism as an oppressor, they do not experience the same type of capitalist oppression. However, for both, class structure constitutes a way of misrecognition. This, in turn, harms both workers. More importantly, however, by referring to misrecognition and the associated emotional component, solidarity group members can understand each other based on shared terms. At the onset, workers exclusively base their perspective on personal treatment at the workplace/labor market. While this is immensely powerful and a stepping-stone towards class consciousness, it can lead to conflict. Although class consciousness entails the acknowledgment of the systematic feature of solidarity, individual frustration and resentment may be hard to let go of. This means that for individuals it can be immensely difficult to empathize with others and to adopt a perspective that is strictly focused on the shared aim of the solidarity group.

To further illustrate this, one can imagine the two workers mentioned above discussing their personal experiences and debating on what strategy they should choose as a solidarity group. Their experiences will be very different, and since they are most familiar with their own experience, they will be encouraged to pursue strategies that promise to elevate their individual suffering. While they are focused on themselves to some degree, their class consciousness as demonstrated by their solidarity group membership shows that they are equally aiming at uplifting other members of the solidarity group. As argued, the pursuit of a shared aim is essential for the solidarity group. Nevertheless, individuals may genuinely believe that their approach is better because they universalize their own experience. The white male worker from the example can be honestly convinced, based on his own experiences,

that his approach is the best for all workers. However, as argued elsewhere, his perspective is limited. The underlying issue is that workers with different backgrounds use the same terms to talk about their experience with class oppression. This means that when the black woman reports her encounters with oppression, the white man may think he experiences the same thing (when that is not the case). The fact that their experiences do not match is not itself the problem. Rather, the problem is that it can be difficult to grasp that not everyone experiences oppression in the same way.

This is precisely the role that recognition theory can take up. By articulating one's experience in recognition terms, one can see differences in achieved recognition more concretely. In essence, recognition theory enables the workers in conflict to take a step back. By moving from the specific experiences about the workplace to the language of misrecognition, solidarity group members achieve some distance from the actual disagreement at hand. This distance enables them to focus on the dynamic at play that caused misrecognition. In this sense, recognition theory becomes a new way workers relate to each other.

Ultimately, DuFord gets it right when zooming in on the anti-domination goal as a critical solidarity feature, which is why looking at the working-class case is so fundamental. It combines different oppressions in one struggle—which also presents a massive potential for conflict—and here, I argue, recognition theory can serve as a mediator. By following Honneth's recognition theory, one can create structured conversations about withheld recognition. In turn, this functions as an equalizer between group members since they can grasp how their received recognition differs from others. It is through claims of recognition that more marginalized working-class solidarity group members can demonstrate how they are in a unique position to give input on the mechanisms of class oppression.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I examined the potential of recognition theory being used as a mediator for conflict within solidarity groups. Overall this work has actively engaged and contributed to three different debates. The first chapter has been dedicated to the conceptualization of the working class. While materialism is a fundamental component of class discourse, the claim has been advanced that a cultural understanding of class is indispensable for an accurate class analysis. Significantly, the potential tension between the materialist notion of class on the one hand, and the constructivist understanding on the other, has been explored. By investigating the shortcomings of either approach individually, it has been argued that what is needed is a combined approach of the two. While structuralist and constructivist approaches to the working class in their extremes are incompatible, the analysis has shown that they are not in irreconcilable tension.

If the understanding of the working class is expanded to include both dimensions, working-class solidarity is more likely to thrive. The best example for this is the perception of unions. If one adopts a sheer materialist approach, a union is only a means to an end. In this sense, they have a mere instrumental meaning. In a way, this means unions are potentially weaker because they lack personal investment of their members. If, however, the working class understands itself as a cultural entity with a material base, unions become part of the culture and in this sense part of the working class identity.

The second chapter provided an extensive account of Axel Honneth's theory of recognition. After laying the theoretical groundwork, three important debates concerning recognition theory and the working class were introduced. Firstly, the exchange between Fraser and Honneth has been used to illustrate the potential limits of recognition theory regarding redistribution. Secondly, an intervention by Worsdale discussed a shortcoming of Honneth's reliance on suffering and the discrepancy between inflicted suffering and subjective perception. Lastly, the ambivalent character of recognition was discussed. While this chapter pointed out numerous limitations of the recognition paradigm, recognition theory has been presented as an important theory of social conflict. In particular, Honneth's claim that the struggle for recognition is a motor for moral progress has been supported.

The final chapter was devoted to providing an account of solidarity. DuFord's conflict-based account of solidarity was introduced and then compared to Honneth's concept of solidarity. More importantly, I developed DuFord's account further by integrating recognition theory to achieve a theory of productive conflict mitigation within solidarity movements. It has been argued that DuFord credibly claims that conflict is at the heart of solidarity groups. In this line, it has been suggested that a strategic approach to recognition claims can be used to mediate inner group conflicts of solidarity groups. This has been done by arguing that the language of recognition theory allows individuals to gain a new perspective concerning their condition and their relation to others.

This work presents an innovative approach to the interconnection between the working class, solidarity, and recognition. While the themes of power and structural oppression have been mentioned within this work, more is left to be explored. Taking this as a starting point, future research should aim to develop this approach further by actively considering the connections between power, structures, working class, and recognition. At the same time, the meaning of discourse and dialogue has remained underexplored within this work. Investigating those fields in connection with the presented mediator function of recognition presents a promising new direction for research.

To summarize, I have argued that working-class liberation has a unique potential to combat a variety of oppressions, including racism and sexism. Capitalism plays a major role in upholding and reinforcing these systems, so an increased focus on class can advance the goals of non-domination more broadly. It has been argued that this requires an intersectional approach. On a fundamental level, this thesis has shown that recognition theory can function as a conflict mediator for solidarity groups. Above all, this thesis is to be understood as a plea for the revival of class identity, discourse, and theory.

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