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Experiences, Struggles, and Recognition

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Date of submission: October 2018

Accepted in: May 2019

Published in: June 2019

RECOMMENDED CITATION

MELO, Rúrion (2019). "Experiences, Struggles, and Recognition". [artículo online]. *Digithum*, n°.23, pp. 1-10. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya y Universidad de Antioquia. [Consulta: dd/mm/yy]. <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i23.3156>



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Abstract

One of the strong theses defended by Axel Honneth's theory is to show that the motivation of the struggles for recognition arises from everyday experiences of denial of recognition, closely linking forms of moral disrespect with the production of social conflicts. I intend to present initially what I understand as the main contribution of Axel Honneth, namely, the attempt to link the place of subjects' daily negative experiences with the grammar of social conflicts. Next, I expose some critics against the supposed psychological motivation of the struggles. Finally, I would like to propose that the reconstruction of negative experiences of disrespect should be linked to the studies of social movements. The political deficit of the concept of disrespect would be avoided if we could see how individuals engaged in social movements articulate their previous experiences to the motivation of the struggle for recognition.

Keywords

theory of recognition, experiences of disrespect, social struggles, social suffering

* The publication of this issue was funded by the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) (Spain) and the Fund for Specialized Journals promoted by the Vice-President for Research of the University of Antioquia (Colombia)

Experiencias, lucha y reconocimiento

Resumen

Una de las mayores tesis defendidas por la teoría de Axel Honneth es mostrar que la motivación de la lucha por el reconocimiento surge de las experiencias cotidianas de negación del reconocimiento, que vincula estrechamente las diferentes formas de falta de respeto moral con la producción de conflictos sociales. Tengo la intención de presentar lo que considero la principal contribución de Axel Honneth, es decir, el intento de vincular el lugar de las experiencias negativas diarias de los sujetos con la gramática de los conflictos sociales. A continuación, expongo algunas críticas contra la supuesta motivación psicológica de la lucha. Por último, me gustaría proponer que la reconstrucción de las experiencias negativas de falta de respeto se vincule a los estudios de los movimientos sociales. El déficit político del concepto de falta de respeto se evitaría si pudiéramos ver cómo las personas involucradas en los movimientos sociales relacionan sus experiencias anteriores a la motivación de la lucha por el reconocimiento.

Palabras clave

teoría del reconocimiento, experiencias de falta de respeto, lucha social, sufrimiento social,

In the formulation of its most important exponent, Axel Honneth, the concept of recognition was intimately tied to the notion of struggle and, more significantly, intended to embrace the moral grammar that accompanies the diversity of demands of social movements. One of the strong theses defended by Honneth is to show that the motivation of the struggles for recognition arises from everyday experiences of denial of recognition, closely linking forms of moral disrespect – such as insults and humiliations, violations, vexations and exclusions – with the production of social conflicts in the public sphere. I intend to present initially what I understand as the main contribution of Axel Honneth, namely, the attempt to link the place of subjects' daily negative experiences with the grammar of social conflicts (I). Next, I expose some critics against the supposed psychological motivation of the struggles, mainly the criticism elaborated by Nancy Fraser against the pre-political experiences that would be presupposed by the perspective of a moral psychology (II). Finally, I would like to propose that the reconstruction of negative experiences of disrespect should be linked to the studies of social movements. The political deficit of the concept of disrespect would be avoided if we could see how individuals engaged in social movements articulate their previous experiences to the motivation of the struggle for recognition (III).

1 – Patterns of recognition and experiences of disrespect

The theory of recognition has become a decisive part of the recent history of critical theory. It opened, so to speak, a “new paradigm”¹ for critical theory to continue to contribute to the renewal of critical diagnostics of the present time. Its international impact is unquestionable. Besides conceptual sophistication, it has demonstrated above all great interest and explanatory potential for political studies, considering studies of social conflicts and cultural approaches of different types. Recognition thus marks a “post-socialist” diagnosis of justice and the emancipatory imagery of the new social movements². In its paradigmatic and renewing aspect, it is possible to affirm that the struggles for recognition do not only have a cultural dimension but also concern class politics, that is, “material” struggles. However, we have seen new studies focusing on gender, race and sexuality (considering the intersections between these experiences and class cut) that find in the theory of recognition an adequate reference for the investigation of the sources of conflicts, sufferings and social pathologies, a reference which could also reveal many of society's emancipatory aspirations³.

I do not intend to go into details of this already comprehensive and meaningful debate that the theory of recognition has provided. My intention will be limited to thinking in certain aspects of the version of this theory elaborated by Axel Honneth, mainly in his better-known book, *The Struggle for Recognition* (HONNETH, 1995)⁴. I am more interested in how Honneth understood the concept of recognition as a moral grammar of social conflicts.

1. On recognition theory and the significance of its renewal in a critical theory of politics, see Thompson, 2006. For the exposition of recognition as an important philosophical and political paradigm, see Zurn, 2010, p. 1-19.
2. In the same sense used by Fraser, 1997.
3. Adequate not only conceptually but empirically to a series of contemporary social conflicts and experiences. See O'Neill and Smith, 2012.
4. For important and comprehensive analyses of his work, see in particular Deranty, 2009; Petherbridge, 2013; Teixeira, 2016; Melo, 2013.

His thesis seems to me very useful for theories concerned with elaborating a more plural diagnosis of new types of social conflict, carefully relating the grammar of recognition to certain daily experiences, forms of domination, and, in turn, resistance and struggle.

What would be then the core of Honneth's version of the struggle for recognition and how does it intend to be related to the dynamics of social conflicts? I would like to mention two aspects: the starting point for a kind of negative phenomenology, where normative patterns of recognition find their genesis in negative experiences of disrespect, and the understanding of social conflicts as being morally motivated by the generated grammar of recognition.

It is common to understand that the main part of Honneth's book, *The Struggle for Recognition*, consists in presenting and analysing in Chapter 5 the three intersubjective patterns that normatively structure the relations of recognition, namely, love, rights, and solidarity. However, from the point of view of the exposition, the experiences of disrespect, that are investigated in Chapter 6, that, in my view, should precede the analysis of intersubjective patterns. For, according to Honneth himself, the starting point of theoretical analysis rests initially on the daily experiences of social disrespect. In other words, the *negative* phenomenology of rejected forms of recognition constitutes the genesis of the normative patterns of recognition that are conceptually reconstructed.

According to Honneth, we experience in the formation of our personality and autonomy conflict relationships both in the primary dimension of our intersubjective affective relationships (whose experience is investigated in elementary interactions between the mother and her baby throughout the first months of life) and in social spheres mediated by rights or by criteria of social esteem. The concept of recognition presupposes as a starting point of its reconstruction a set of negative practical experiences that allude to the feelings of moral violations. We are morally troubled or even suffer from experiencing some form of social injury (involving maltreatment, offence, vexation or structural exclusion) because we assume that intersubjective relationships are loaded with normative claims that have been somehow violated by forms of social disrespect. Therefore, moral categories linked to everyday experiences, such as when one feels offended or downgraded by other people, refer to forms of disrespect as "denial of recognition": "In this sense, our ordinary language contains empirical indications of an indissoluble connection between, on the one hand, the unassailability and integrity of

human beings and, on the other hand, the approval of others. What the term 'disrespect' refers to is the specific vulnerability of humans resulting from the internal interdependence of individualization and recognition" (HONNETH, 131).

The feeling of injustice and moral violation depends, of course, on the typology of the experience of disrespect lived by individuals and groups. They pass through varying degrees in which normative assumptions (moral aspirations) are violated. Honneth refers to maltreatment and physical violation, denial of rights or exclusion from participation in the political life of the collectivity, and the degradation or offence suffered by those whose social value (by prevailing hierarchies of values, worldviews, and modes of belief) are depreciated and disrespected because they are unable to attribute social value to their own capacities and self-realizations. Therefore, the denial of equal legal claims and the devaluation of certain forms of self-realisation constitute negative social experiences characterised by non-recognition. Such experiences lead to "negative emotional reactions" (HONNETH, 1995, p. 136) insofar as a subject realises that the social recognition has been illegitimately denied to him in an unjustified way, producing the psychological symptom of feeling ashamed or enraged, hurt or indignant. Hence, Honneth says, "the experience of disrespect is always accompanied by affective sensations that are, in principle, capable of revealing to individuals the fact that certain forms of recognition are being withheld from them" (HONNETH, 1995, p.136).

Therefore, the next step in Honneth's theoretical reconstruction is to demonstrate that social conflicts could result precisely from these forms of disrespect, offence, humiliation, and deprivation experienced daily by certain individuals. As I understand it, this is an important and theoretically justifiable premise, and in many cases it is empirically fruitful. For the experience of lack of recognition has produced in history a strong political grammar that could be observed in many contemporary social conflicts around class exploitation, racial discrimination, gender inequality, minority rights, ethnic aspirations, and so on. Many of these social conflicts seem to involve struggles to overcome some kind of perceived source of degradation and exclusion. Honneth's strong thesis consists in showing that negative experiences are capable of triggering political and cultural attitudes motivated by an appropriate demand for the recognition of socially disrespected individuals and groups⁵.

The link between negative experiences and the normative grammar of recognition finally leads us to the more central thesis of Honneth's book, according to which denial or denigration of

5. Thesis that was critically discussed by Mattias Iser (2013). For this author, Honneth attempts to link the idea of a morally justified social revolt to the notion of a successful individual self-realisation through reciprocal recognition. Iser wants to show that revolts are caused by moral discontents that do not necessarily refer to the violated ethical structures of the good life and individual self-realisation. I follow Iser's critique at this point, that is, in regard to moving the source of indignation (the central link between revolt and justice) of the ethical presuppositions of individual self-realisation. It is important to note that this criticism also refers to Nancy Fraser's considerations as to the possibility of thinking of injustices with "distributive" grammars, for example (FRASER, 2010).

recognition must be able to motivate individuals to social resistance and lead to conflict. This formulation of the theory of recognition depends then on a successful explanation of the passage from daily experiences of disrespect to the social struggle which is morally motivated by recognition, that is, from the “internal connection that often holds between the emergence of social movements and moral experience of disrespect” (HONNETH, 1995, p. 161). It should be noted that in the book’s exposition, the primary conflicts of affective relationships do not directly provoke unfolding in terms of collective conflicts. Honneth demands that some moral experiences of injustice could be capable of being interpreted as affecting entire groups, turning moral indignation into socially shared revolt and into collective aspiration for expanded relations of recognition. This is the case with the dimensions of rights and solidarity with regard to the feelings of injustice provoked by denial of rights, political exclusion and social denigration. Thus, “the models of conflict that start from collective feelings of having been unjustly treated are those that trace the emergence and the course of social struggles back to moral experiences of social groups who face having legal or social recognition withheld from them” (HONNETH, 1995, p. 165).

The aspects summarised here (the forms of disrespect and the moral motivation of the struggle) show that the grammar of recognition must emerge from the domain of the social, that is, that it must produce a normative expectation (for example, in order to provide protection against the harm arising from disrespect and humiliation to which human beings are constitutively vulnerable) that is internal to their own conflicts. In other words, the experience of the lack or denial of recognition and the moral motivation it produces cannot be external to social interactions. Thus, the theory of recognition would guarantee the desired social immanence of its critical-normative categories⁶.

2 – The limits of experience and the critique of moral psychologism

Although the social anchoring of the patterns of intersubjective recognition has been carefully substantiated by Honneth in order to avoid assumptions that could be incompatible with the post-metaphysical conditions of current social critique, many aspects of recognition theory still require explanation. After all, would recognition require some kind of anthropological rootedness? In order to identify forms of disrespect, would Honneth need to presuppose original or ethically accepted intersubjective structures of reciprocal recognition? Was there a need for prior substantive notions of culture and identity that

would be depreciated by the lack of recognition? Is it possible to apply the concept of recognition in a strongly systematic way to all forms of social interaction? What then would be the intersectional potential of the concept? And what about one of its most important hypotheses concerning the moral grammar of social conflicts, its role in the affective and psychological motivation of social struggles and different forms of indignation? In this case, would all experiences of disrespect be linked to damage to the psychic integrity? And finally, how could the reconstruction of normative patterns of reciprocal recognition incorporate historical and cultural processes and experiences that are not confined to the reality of which it departs at the origin of its conceptualisation? In political terms, how to incorporate the experiences of domination and social struggles underlined, for example, by postcolonial or “queer” perspectives in the justification of their normative standards?

It would not be possible to address each of these issues separately in the space of this article. My intention is to know if the relationship between political processes that generate social conflict and the point of view of the emotional and affective experience of disrespect would create an over-determination of politics by the psychological dimension. Undoubtedly, psychic experience is important to critical theory and may explain some of the relevant facts in the genesis of social indignation and the broader aspiration for justice. But there are some central problems that need to be addressed by the theory to see if we are adequately considering the passage of negative experiences of disrespect, that are experienced daily by individuals, and the production of a moral reaction or motivation leading to social conflicts.

One of the more contentious criticisms that has been addressed to the place of experience in Honneth’s critical theory was that formulated by Nancy Fraser. According to her, Honneth adopts experience as a starting point for the normative reconstruction of critical categories (the patterns of recognition) because it seeks to ensure an “empirical reference point” that is immanent to social subjects and at the same time constitutes valid norms that “transcend the immediate context that generates them” (FRASER, 2003, p.202). However, his strategy of accommodating immanence and transcendence depends mainly on grounding his critical categories in the “moral psychology of pre-political suffering”: “Identifying immanence with its subjective experience, he proposes to connect critique with its social context by deriving its normative concepts from sufferings, motivations, and expectations of social subjects” (FRASER, 2003, p.202). As a result, the critical concept of recognition runs the risk of “collapse normativity into the given”.

6. On the anchoring of the theory of recognition in social practices, see Stahl, 2013, p. 157-181; Celikates, 2009. See also Boltanski and Honneth, 2009, p. 83-116.

The first problem lies not only in the risk of “strong internalism” in relation to context, but in assuming a notion of subjective experience that would be *pre-political*. And the other fiction of the Honnethian theory consists in interpreting the daily sense of injustice (negative experiences of disrespect such as insults and humiliations) always as matter of denied recognition. As Honneth states, these forms of disrespect designate “behavior that represents an injustice not simply because it harms subjects or restricts their freedom to act, but because it injures them with regard to the positive understanding of themselves that they have acquired intersubjectively. Without the implicit reference to the claims to recognition that one makes to one’s fellow human beings, there is no way of using these concepts of ‘disrespect’ and ‘insult’ meaningfully” (HONNETH, 1995, p. 131). Fraser assumes that, empirically, theoretical access to subjective experiences is not transparent. Individual suffering has subjective dimensions that make it impossible for critical theory to find a more objective normative ground. In order to become a grammar with more perceptible normative senses, disrespect should be publicly articulated to some extent. And when one already establishes itself on a moral grammar, the everyday experiences of injustice are then mediated by idioms of political claim-making. So, Honneth establishes as primordial experience a *mediated* dimension, because it is normatively elaborated: the experience of disrespect is determined by the moral language that the implicit concept of recognition makes necessary. Thus, “the appeal to a stratum of experience that is empirical and primordial is incoherent” (FRASER, 2003: 204), because we can never have access to moral experiences unmediated by normative discourses.

The unfolding of Fraser’s criticism against the psychologism of the theory of recognition is very significant and it helps us understand other problematic consequences of Honneth’s approach. More specifically, the problem of rooting the theoretical critical point of view in social experiences reveals that Honneth has difficulty in articulating social expressions in their diversity and complexity with the moral grammar of recognition. This kind of difficulty can be seen in different critical formulations against the recognition theory, which would put aside *conflicting elements of the intersubjective experience*. In other words, intersubjective experiences may be more complex than what the normative grammar of recognition indicates.

Following a similar line of argument, Danielle Petherbridge shows why Honneth is forced to deal with an “unfortunate consequence” arising from the fact that “intersubjectivity” and “recognition” are concepts mutually defined and interchangeably used. This equation between both terms would make recognition a category based on a notion of intersubjectivity that originates in human life. According to her, Honneth “conceptualizes mutual recognition as an originary condition, a pre-existing ‘nexus’ of

ethical relations that constitutes the social. In this schema, struggle itself is not a (co-) constitutive condition, but is in fact viewed ‘as *disturbance and violation* of social relations of recognition’” (PETHERBRIDGE, 2013, p. 82).

For Petherbridge, this risk of an intersubjective constitution, where struggle and conflict would be virtually absent from the constitutive moment of the social, reveals that recognition theory would depend heavily on certain anthropological assumptions. That is, an unexplained anthropology would create an insufficient image of social interaction insofar as it leaves in the background the complexities of the basic experiences and the intersubjective relations in dispute. This ethical-anthropological reduction would lead to a decrease in the normative and explanatory capacity of recognition in its political dimension. For we cannot count on an anthropological guarantee to make recognition the main normative characteristic of all intersubjective relations and therefore the moral grammar of all social conflicts. However, perhaps this is exactly what recognition theory has to assume, because the concept of recognition was designed to provide a moral infrastructure for analysing the social conditions of individual self-realization and the development of social relations and institutions.

Indeed, the link between the daily sense of injustice and the negative experience of misrecognition would show that the normative grounding of recognition seems to be conceptually based on an original notion of intact intersubjectivity (one of the effects of presupposed philosophical anthropology), which is understood to guarantee fundamental preconditions for the successful formation of the subject and the immanent development of the ethical life. Thus the normative pretensions structurally inscribed in the recognition relationship do not only reflect aspects that are relationally produced in struggles proper to intersubjective interactions, but these struggles would result from a disposition of the human subjects to the successful practical self-relation⁷. But it is precisely this initial ethical disposition that would both block the most nuanced apprehension of negative experiences and determine, albeit in a weak sense, the practical overcoming of these experiences in a morally constituted grammar.

Another important point is to make disappear from the experiences of disrespect “pathological” aspects of the subjectivation of domination. The theory seems to lose the elements of “negativity” in the genetic constitution of the category, naturalising the passage from disrespect to struggle. Although the starting point of the Honnethian theory of the struggle for recognition are the negative phenomena of social disrespect, Honneth could not explain, on the one hand, how and to what extent recognition would block the struggle and the critical capacity of resistance of the subjects, instead of always trying to explain the positive motivation underlying recognition experiences⁸. After all, could the crystallisation of the patterns of

7. The theory would suffer here from a “romanticism of presocial authenticity, to use the terms of Rahel Jaeggi, 2013, p. 122.

8. See Mariana Teixeira’s thesis of “latent negativity” (2016).

recognition not replicate social power in such a way as to make it impossible to experience subordinated interactions as domination and, in this way, without generating morally motivation to struggle? On the other hand, the disrespect itself is internalised by the subjects so as not to make conscious the situation of vexation and injustice. And if disrespect is not felt to be negative by those concerned, then it could not function as a practical motivation to overcome this situation. This is because the very subjectivation of domination may be psychologically ambiguous for the affected ones themselves (BUTLER, 2008).

The political consequences of this way of dealing directly with the relationship between experiences and psychological motivations of struggle need to be accentuated. As Mattias Iser reminds us, it cannot be a completely secure foundation nor the only way of justifying social struggles: "It is not safe, because we do not experience many injustices, of which we have become victims, psychically as disrespect" (ISER, 2013, p. 117). Some people may not perceive certain crystallized cultural values as bad (with dominant world values and visions, which reproduce sexism, chauvinism, heteronormativity, whiteness etc.). The problem is that, if they do not experience them negatively, then such experiences would not produce a critical behaviour, that is, a moral motivation for recognition and justice. Moreover, "the psychic experience of disrespect is not the only way to discover injustices, because we can also recognize injustices without our having been hit by them ourselves" (ISER, 2013, p. 117). That is, men can engage against violence and injustice experienced by women, just as white women are morally motivated to fight racism, or heterosexuals participate in social movements to combat sexual discrimination and homophobia. In fact, the "social perspective" of those who suffer directly from injustices will be specific and unique, but such experiences may represent moral indignations and broader political challenges, leading subjects and groups (not just those directly affected or "marginalised") to engage in disputes and conflicts of society⁹.

Thus, returning to Fraser's argument, the subjective affection and psychological motivation produced by experiences of disrespect cannot serve as a strong normative foundation for critical theory. Actually, Honneth recognises Fraser's argument and ends up moving further away from the notion of experience once he seeks to nullify the vestiges of all psychologisation: "Especially in the debate with Nancy Fraser it became clear to me that, when we anchor critical standards in experiences of disrespect, we run the risk of accepting as justifiable all expectations [...] The excessive tendency towards psychologization and the normative deficit

led to the correction and internal improvements of my position" (HONNETH, BOLTANSKY, 2008, p. 96-97)¹⁰. For her, subjective experiences of injustice and individual indignation do not substitute the normative grounds of social critical theory. Therefore, the lack of recognition needs to be treated as a specifically social condition (according to the model of "social status" that she advocates), not as a block to the personal self-realisation and regardless of the negative moral feeling initiated by experiences of disrespect.

In my view, however, there are two advantages to assuming the phenomenology of experiences as the basis for the later production of recognition grammars. The first is to keep theory bound up with social praxis, preventing the normative and critical standards employed by theory from being produced externally to social interactions, ways of life, and social subjects. The second advantage of the concept of experience lies in its plurality. Experience does not have to be understood in a predetermined and closed way. Quite the opposite. We need to work with the always plural notion of *experiences*. Fraser is right by saying that the idea that one single motivation underlies all discontent is "*prima facie* implausible" (FRASER, 2003, p. 203). For this reason, experiences of disrespect need not always be linked to forms of misrecognition (they also include resentment, abhorrence, aversion, revulsion, antipathy, anger, indignation, even hate etc.). However, this does not mean that the grammar of recognition, which is linked to moral disrespect, is completely absent from everyday subjects' experiences. This is also not true. And the problem with the alternative developed by Fraser is to run the opposite risk of completely abandoning the phenomenological approach of experience and denying the influence of the psychological dimension in general for potential reactions against daily injustices. When we listen to the narratives about injustices experienced by certain subjects (usually subaltern), a significant portion of negative experiences of disrespect is actually accompanied by aspirations for justice and more social recognition.

Therefore, I do not find it problematic to say that Honneth's theory allows us to show that certain social experiences could trigger struggles for recognition. The real problem would arise if recognition had to be accepted as a moral grammar of *all* possible social conflicts. There are many reasons to doubt that recognition is empirically plausible as the one and only grammar of social conflicts¹¹. I would like here only to indicate this difficulty when we relate an appropriate grammar of the various contemporary social conflicts to the plurality of negative experiences suffered by individuals. Thus, instead of excluding the relation between social

9. For this formulation about the relation between marginalised social perspective and political representation, see Young, 2000, p. 121-152.

10. Honneth's new position can be seen in his book *Freedom's Right* (2015), where the method of "normative reconstruction" exposes a clear distance from the point of view of experience, anthropological foundations, and moral psychology.

11. I myself focused on the incompatibility between the empirical plausibility of the concept of recognition and the complexity of political dynamics (MELO, 2018).

conflict and lived experiences (which I still see as fruitful in the constitution of the concept of recognition), the task of a critical social theory is to reconstruct the plausible empirical links between individuals and groups in struggles and the specific narratives of their concrete experiences of injustice and disrespect, that were experienced differently in each context of life. By minimising the psychological component – i.e. the centrality of the subjective feeling of indignation and injustice as genesis for the reconstruction of the normative patterns of recognition, on the one side, and motivation for the social struggles, on the other – and seeking to think about recognition more specifically in political terms, the empirical research on social conflicts and the participants' native references to their daily experiences must be closely linked¹².

3 – Social experiences and moral motivation of struggles

I do not intend to develop in detail the nexus between experiences and social struggles, because this certainly requires an empirical investigation focused on specific cases. The arguments that I intend to present as a conclusion to this article are general, and are intended to show that it is possible to investigate the links between pre-political experiences and the elaboration of political conflicts in the public sphere, the possibility of an immanent critique that, from the perspective of the affected, allows a reconstruction of normative criteria, and finally, how recognition can be, not the only, but one of the possible grammars of struggles against injustices that are experienced every day.

To some extent, Fraser's position against the risk of psychologism that threatens the place of experience has the advantage of pointing to grammars of struggle that are already articulated in public contestations. According to her, pre-political experiences do not constitute a better reference point for critical theory than the social-movements discourses that are already publicly mediated: "if Critical Theory's reference points should be normatively reliable – if, in other words, they should help us to conceptualize what really *merits* the title of injustice, as opposed to what is merely *experienced* as injustice – then social-movement claims are at least as plausible candidates as untested prepolitical discontent" (FRASER, 2003, p. 205). However, the absence of the place of experience in the critical model developed by Fraser – perhaps caused by the critique of the notion of "identity" – can bring motivational and explanatory deficits to her diagnoses of social struggles.

Honneth himself gives us important bibliographical indications that the experiences of disrespect and the point of view of injustice are connected with the pretensions of the social movements that have been studied. In referring to authors such as E. P. Thompson and Barrington Moore Jr., Honneth attempts to link the demands for justice with the social conditions and precarious life stories to which the subjects and groups were submitted during the period of the Industrial Revolution (THOMPSON, 1963; MOORE, 1978). Thompson's concept of "ways of life" is appropriated by Moore in order to investigate the accumulation of daily experiences in which living conditions become suffocating by those affected, conditioning a discursive elaboration on the effective possibility of social justice. The examples of disrespect are not based on abstract conceptions of justice, but on the worsening of a daily life in which denigrations, exclusions, losses and scarcity are reproduced (for example, in the exchange of bread for potatoes, beer for tea, the closure of reading clubs, in the absence of daily spaces of socialisation, in the difficulty of access to cultural reproduction and education, increase of labour time etc.). Therefore, the accumulation of injustice and suffering, because they were experienced in the daily life of certain groups in precarious conditions, were able to produce a sufficient moral indignation to mobilise an immense class struggle¹³.

This intuition can be developed based on other researches and conflict contexts. The literature of social movements – that is not directed solely by the analysis of the forms of public contention, disputes of interest and performance of action – can in some cases give more room for the genesis of indignation and revolt in the constitution of certain political subjects. It is not uncommon for studies of anti-racist movements to focus on the prior and everyday experiences of racism as a crucial element in the formation of public demands. Participants of black movements often refer explicitly to the situations of exclusion and violence they have lived, thus attributing to daily experiences of racism their motivation to fight for equality, justice and recognition¹⁴. Disrespect for black people creates a political dynamic around the racial question in which the moral grammar of recognition is publicly employed in various ways. A recent study on racial justice movements in the USA (VESELY-FLAD, 2017), which highlights, above all, the Black Lives Matter Movement, collects many narratives about disrespect or extreme violence experienced by black people, highlighting how indignations caused by racial prejudice became struggle for justice. In these cases, it is not a question of merely emphasising something empirically evident in

12. On how contemporary political theory can benefit from empirical social research, see Melo, 2017.

13. Some research on social suffering does not deny the negative character of everyday experiences, but it does not always show the link between suffering and the production of struggles and conflicts. For a consideration of experiences of disrespect and its relation to a more comprehensive analysis of social suffering, see Renault (2017, 2019). For the difference between disrespect and suffering in Honneth's theory and in different works, see Teixeira (2016).

14. For indications on the relationship between experiences of disrespect, activism and anti-racism institutionalisation in Brazil, see Melo, Machado and Silva (2010) and Costa, Melo et al. (2011).

the narratives of individuals, namely that their daily lives are full of examples of cases of racism. It is not the conviviality with racism that must be empirically presented, but to note that the disposition for political praxis can be related to the varied experiences of misrecognition. The grammar of recognition is attributed to physical violations (such as physical abuse), denigration of their lifestyles (clothing, music, spaces of sociability, black cultures), inequality in education and the labor market, political exclusion, denial of rights, among others¹⁵.

Although recognition can be reconstructed more closely to the stated experiences of politically engaged agents, it is still necessary to reject the systematic intent of recognition as an explanatory category of all forms of domination and justifiable normative claims. Even if we can reconstruct the narrative nexus about previous experiences of injustice, as we have indicated above, the use of the concept could be more modest. I follow here the argument developed by Nancy Fraser when she questions the centrality of recognition and its empirical domain of application. We need to avoid linking all experiences of injustice directly to misrecognition, because that means accepting that “all political demands must be translated into claims for recognition; all modes of subordination must be interpreted as denied recognition and traced to the recognition of society; and all criteria of justice must be reduced to subvarieties of recognition” (FRASER, 2003, p. 206). Can we really put all social grievances and all political motivations into this singular category, however multifaceted their standards are? I am not sure if the category of recognition alone is sufficient to capture all the normative deficits of contemporary societies and all the political challenges faced by those seeking emancipatory transformations. Far from incorporating the whole of moral life and political culture, recognition must be understood as a limited, if crucial, dimension of contemporary societies (FRASER, 2010). Hence, the challenge remains whether it is fruitful to subsume the completeness of current political demands to a single category, even if this entails costs for a theory with systematic intensions, as is the case with Honneth’s philosophy, He himself admits that this kind of question about the explanatory potential of the concept of recognition could only be answered in empirical terms (HONNETH, 2012).

So, the maintenance of the grammar of recognition, which I consider to be fruitful enough to investigate political processes and social experiences, must imply, in turn, that the plural space of intersubjective conflicts becomes the genesis of recognition relations. For the reconstruction of critical-normative concepts must be rooted in the practical genesis of conflicts themselves, that is, in the complexity of previous experiences and different motivations. It is necessary to insist that not every conflict should be understood according to the grammar of recognition, otherwise

the critical grammars of the struggles could never generate new normative categories that are not variants of recognition. However, if recognition is one of the normative points of view that can be reconstructed by a critical social theory, then it assumes a *derived* reconstructive position: never as the original condition that precedes the conflict, but always a *normative aspiration among others* that is also tied to certain forms of disrespect and domination.

I believe then in the possibility of reconciling the place of negative experiences with the articulation of a public discourse. Recognition can be a grammar of social conflict if we can demonstrate that violations and denigrations are experienced by individuals and groups as unjustifiable disrespect that could be fought in struggles for justice. In fact, recognition allows us to look at these previous experiences, not only by establishing normative criteria for the conceptions of justice advocated by social movements, but by drawing attention to the injustices suffered in the social life world. I insist that forms of disrespect do not necessarily always depend on an implicit reference to the claims and patterns of recognition, as Honneth defends, but that we can reconstruct their adequacy when the current grammar of contestation becomes more explicit in terms of recognition.

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15. The same could be indicated for cases involving gender violence and feminism, as is possible to see in Merry, 2009.

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