

Strategies of Normative Ambivalence in Critical Theories of Recognition for the Decolonised Diagnosis of Conflict and Oppression

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Abstract: A context of protracted postcolonial misrecognition and social injustice brought most of the contributors to this special issue together. This context raises an acute awareness of the ideological limitations not only of the dominant normative frameworks of recognition, developed by social and political theorists such as Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser, and Charles Taylor, but of the African philosophical conceptions of recognition represented by *ubuntu*. What is the ethical or normative status of the insights into social ontology that we find in theories of recognition? The authors acknowledge the entanglement of norms of recognition in contested relations of power that influence the formation of subjects and the normative ambivalence of recognition which enables and constrains subjective agency. Ongoing inequality and social injustice makes palpable the practical effects of norms of mis/recognition. The authors reinterpret the concept of recognition to allow for normative ambivalence and ideological sensitivity in the current postcolonial setting.

Keywords: ambivalence, critical theory, ideology, postcolonial conflict, recognition, social ontology

Most articles in this special issue were first discussed at a workshop symposium hosted in the small, peaceful coastal village of Chintsa

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on the southern edge of South Africa's 'Wild Coast' under the auspices of the University of Fort Hare's research niche in African liberation heritage. The workshop served as a platform for philosophers and political theorists to reassess the relevance and limitations of critical theories of recognition for contemporary social and political challenges, and to identify both suitable theoretical frameworks for the diagnosis of conflict and conditions for renewal in complex postcolonial contexts.

The Wild Coast, where European settlers of the former Cape Colony met, conquered, converted, annexed, exploited, and traded with the Xhosa-speaking people of the eastern frontier homelands, has figured over the past two hundred and fifty years as a violent battleground of misrecognition. A century of eight frontier wars lasted from 1779 to 1879, when the last Xhosa-speaking territories were absorbed by the Cape Colony. On the eastern frontier, a narrow finger of land between the Fish and Keiskamma Rivers was set aside for Mfengu and Rharhabe Xhosa-speakers, predominantly, followed to the east by a second buffer territory of Europeans sandwiched between the Keiskamma and the Kei Rivers, followed by a larger territory of Gcaleka, Thembu, and Pondo Xhosa-speakers, stretched below the escarpment along the south-eastern coast, from the Kei to the Umtamvuna on the southern border of Natal. The 1913 Native Lands Act formally marked out the reserves. After 1936, Blacks were only allowed to buy land in this part of the Cape. The Ciskei and Transkei were 'decolonised' by apartheid, though only South Africa and the territories recognised such sovereignty. After apartheid, the Eastern Cape was absorbed by these 'Bantustan' regimes.

The Eastern Cape people have raised and schooled many leaders of the liberation struggle and cultivated philosophies of resistance, but it is the province with the most violent social conflict in post-apartheid South Africa, with the highest per capita murder ratio, of 17.6 per 100,000 people (2,382 in the latest six-month report, from October 2023 through March 2024), and the highest prevalence of reported sexual offences – 23.5 per 100,000 (3,768) (Zweni and Mjangaze 2024). Most sexual offences, like extortion and kidnapping, which have been increasing at an alarming rate, go unreported, since reporting them leads to immediate threats and intimidation (Zweni and Phale 2024). A crackdown on corruption

at the University of Fort Hare over the past few years – at the *alma mater* of Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Robert Sobukwe, and Chris Hani – has led to a series of assassination attempts on senior managers, including the Vice Chancellor and the Deputy Vice Chancellor, with two fatalities, including the transport fleet manager and the Vice Chancellor’s bodyguard/driver. What role does recognition or misrecognition play in the persistence of violent conflict in this distorted social context, where a settler regime colonised half of the territory of the Ama-Xhosa, refused to assimilate them, and set aside the other half for victims of forced removals and as a retribalised reservoir of semi-skilled migrant labour? How may one construe a suitable theory of recognition for the diagnosis of social conflict and oppression in such a conflicted postcolonial social context?

Theories of recognition are valuable for understanding and diagnosing the persistence of social injustice, conflict, oppression and violence in postcolonial societies, and for setting out standards of social justice for postcolonial nation-building. African communitarian conceptions of recognition have been traditionally expressed, for instance, in the Ndebele maxim *inkosi yinkosi ngabantu* (“A king is a king through his people”), which offers an indication of the transient and relational meaning of *ubuntu* in endogenous ethical and political thought. One does not have/possess power, for power must be negotiated in consensual political relations. Likewise, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*: one does not have/possess personhood; personhood is only ever recognised/revealed in one’s relationships with others.

These statements of the relational social ontology of human personhood represent a social view of the self, which recognises how one’s sense of self is shaped by relations of recognition. Affirmation of the dignity of harmonious mutual recognition in *ubuntu* remains attentive to and is informed by a critical awareness of ambivalence in the negotiation of sameness and difference, as emphasised by Kwame Gyekye in ‘Person and Community in African Thought’ (2002) and by Kwasi Wiredu in *Cultural Universals and Particulars* (1996). And African criticism of indignity, with reference to *ubuntu*, reveals significant insights into the necessary conditions of dignity for mutual recognition as a universal criterion for the realisation of the common good. Mutual recognition is a necessary

condition for the common good, but it is not a good in itself. Its normative status is ambivalent, depending on the commonly recognised good to which it is attached and the manner in which it is practised.

Recognition, like the social ontology of *ubuntu*, is often interpreted as a normative concept, or as an intrinsic normative good in itself. The social ontology of *ubuntu* has been instrumentalised and manipulated in the South African context to suit narratives of forgiveness and reconciliation for multicultural nation-building. The uncritical adoption of *ubuntu* as an ethic of communal reconciliation has arguably served ideological purposes in South Africa which have covered over colonial injustices of the past for pragmatic political purposes that have suited elite interests and sustained oppressive structural conditions of power. Bernard Matolino (2023) has argued that the romanticisation of *ubuntu* as a remedy for social, political and ethical problems overlooks its limitations in addressing the complex and diverse contemporary realities of social justice, rights and governance. As a framework for the prescription of ethical conduct and the diagnosis of social conflict, the normative status of *ubuntu* is put into question for its ambivalence in a multicultural postcolonial context characterised by violence, inequality and oppression.

There is clear alignment between such African understandings of the relational and dialogical conditions of personal identity and self-knowledge in social relations of recognition and power, and Western communitarian conceptions, formulated most influentially in Hegel's dialectical representation of encounters of mutual satisfaction and frustration between self and other in our struggles for recognition. Taylor (1994) and Axel Honneth (1995) have influentially explored how recognition is essential for the development of individual identity, and how misrecognition is bound up with the distortion of identity in oppressive social relations. These theorists have developed normative models of mutual recognition for the diagnosis of social conflict and the identification of conditions of social justice. Although Nancy Fraser criticises Honneth's theory of recognition for neglecting concerns of distribution and redistribution, her normative model of social justice includes recognition. One may ask: how do these theories of recognition apply, in turn, to the postcolonial context?

Frantz Fanon's insights into the pathologies of colonial and post-colonial domination offer a helpful framework for the diagnosis of postcolonial conflict. Drawing on his experience in psychiatry, Fanon also offers a helpful account of the reciprocity that is needed to reconcile opposed interests in the postcolonial context to cultivate democratic civic solidarity. Charles Villet distinguishes three *features* of recognition in Fanon's account, which align with Honneth's influential theory of recognition: (1) humane action in the formation of subjectivity; (2) basic values of humanity; and (3) acknowledgement of shared aims and differences (2024: 175). Honneth distinguishes three *conditions* of recognition for a just society on this basis, which may be said to promote love/friendship, rights and solidarity in society: (1) emotional support; (2) cognitive respect; and (3) esteem.

These three modes of recognition offer a normative basis for the identification and diagnosis of relations of misrecognition, which are experienced as injustice in instances of disrespect, indignity, exclusion, social conflict, exploitation and domination. As we see in the first two articles, however, the normative status of recognition remains ambivalent in the distinctive conceptions of recognition not only in Fanon (Tabensky) but also in Hegel (Mogomotsi). Likewise, Honneth's theory of recognition has faced considerable criticism from decolonial and feminist scholars, putting into question the normative status of the concept for the diagnosis of complex conditions of sustained postcolonial social conflict and oppression.

An Agonistic Critique of Ambivalent Recognition as a Normative Ideal

David Owen and Bert van den Brink (2007) have documented several problems with Honneth's appeal to mutual recognition as a normative standard of appraisal for the analysis and diagnosis of social conflict. Hegel's account of the *struggle* for recognition makes clear that power is a constitutive element of the formation of social identities. Power is key to contestation of dominant standards by which recognition is granted. Thus, diagnosis of the dynamics of misrecognition depends on analysis of the power relations that shape agents' identities. Honneth (2007), in response, denies that

social conflict is an inevitable feature of the human condition. He is critical of a reductively self-centred, instrumental view of human agency. Yet his normative evaluation of relations of recognition depends on an idealised distinction between the dignity of mutual recognition and the indignity of disrespect. Owen and Van den Brink (2007) point out that this criterion is itself contested, caught in ambivalent relations of power between the reassurance of one another of our similar needs, identities and capacities, and our status as distinct individuals with unique needs, abilities and traits.

Conflicts over the adequate interpretation of the general and dominant standards of recognition make a moral point about the right conditions of agency for moral subjects. Even as Honneth's framework is attentive to the centrality of *autonomy*, as a justified source of moral claims in public moral reasoning over standards of recognition, he remains aware of obstacles to autonomy in public deliberation, where agency is shaped by patterns of exclusion and insidious inclusion in regimes of disciplinary power – as Foucault, Taylor, Butler, Allen, Tully and others have demonstrated in various influential social studies.

Amidst such contestation, Honneth (2007) maintains, we can identify and distinguish – from the moral grammar of struggles for recognition – an adequate account of legitimate moral expectations. The moral and intellectual heritage of liberation struggles – the basis for resistance to indignity which brings people together in solidarity – offers a negative clue to legitimate normative criteria for mutual recognition, tracing an index of standards of respect for human dignity. Forms of disrespect, of recognition withheld, cause shame, hurt or indignation, resulting in struggles for recognition and criticism of ideological forms of recognition. Honneth (2007: 15) sees moral progress in the history of social struggles, which incrementally shaped the meritocratic legal order of modern society. But his critics point out significant structural injustices in the signifiers of this dominant normative order – in bourgeois marriage, liberal democracy and capitalist 'meritocracy' (2007: 20). Sexist, economically exploitative and/or racist relations of power influence the emergence of ideological principles and practices of subjectification in exclusion and in governmentality.

Honneth admits that recognition can be an ideological mechanism of domination, encouraging subjects to conform to social

expectations that devalue certain identities, individuals, and groups (2007: 323). Ideological standards of recognition often do determine who is recognised and how. Relations of recognition may be abused for social control, aggravating inequalities and exclusions. Honneth maintains that the normative function of recognition depends on underlying social, political and economic conditions and relations of power. Admitting the ambivalence of recognition (Honneth 2007: 334), he nonetheless insists that it remains a crucial mechanism of identity formation. One's sense of self is shaped by relations of recognition in interactions with others. The relational social ontology of recognition links personal identity to social identity. Is recognition or mutual recognition an intrinsic good?

In Honneth's (2021a, 2021b) dialogue with Judith Butler (2021a, 2021b), both interlocutors consider the normative ambivalence of recognition, which is at once a fundamental need and means of empowerment and an instrument of domination, marginalisation and control. They agree that recognition enables and constrains political agency. Yet recognition remains central to understanding relations of power, legitimation, resistance, integration and conflict that affect the healthy functioning of democracies, with deep implications for justice and equality, in struggles of affirmation and negation that are never fully resolved.

Amy Allen (2021) has exposed undue optimism in Honneth's foundational mode of recognition, love. His account of love does not attend to the ambivalence, conflict and aggression inherent in loving relations, which we see in an infant's sometimes aggressive desire for autonomy from dependence and attachment. Allen is critical of the normative role of love as a basic driver of the teleology of social progress in Honneth's account, which bases our desire and struggles for recognition on an ultimate attempt to regain the fusion of infancy, failing to reckon with the potential for aggression, domination and exclusion in ambivalent relations of love. The contributions to this special issue by Andrea Hurst (on misrecognition in love), Colby Dickinson (on intimate and singular attachments) and Lindsay Kelland (on playful curiosity in receptive, loving perception) engage with this normative ambivalence to assess the function and value of recognition for the negotiation of sameness and difference in different contexts.

Recognition is not reducible to domination, but it can be appropriated for dominant ends. For this reason, David Owen and James

Tully have advocated an agonistic turn in critical theory in order to avoid normative theory, and have instead sought to empower agents to challenge and disrupt normative social orders of recognition and to create space for marginalised voices to be heard (Owen 2011). Owen draws attention to Tully's approach to public philosophy, which, he believes, ought to take a critical and historical approach to studying the norms of recognition that govern how citizens exercise freedom and to challenge and modify norms that govern identities in social and political practices. Tully and Owen are averse to developing a universal normative theory of recognition. Instead, they engage in critical genealogical explorations of the histories of its contestation in order to redescribe normative orders with critical intent, to question fixed, pre-established norms in a dynamic, open-ended process without aiming to establish a final resolution, just as Michel Foucault questions how intersubjective norms govern practices of government (of state and self). Since ambivalent recognition is continuously contested, philosophy cannot hope to offer a teleological normative theory of right recognition, argues Owen (2021), but he maintains that philosophy can help participants to critically contest and to redescribe the norms that govern social and political practices of recognition.

In his book *Black Dignity* (2022), Vincent Lloyd contends that Hegelian critical theories of recognition have altogether misrecognised and/or misdiagnosed relationships of domination between master and slave. Emancipatory struggles of resistance against domination, Lloyd argues, are motivated not by a desire for recognition but for freedom from domination. Lloyd finds normative value not in the social ontology of recognition but in emancipatory struggles against domination for ontic dignity, for which resistance to racist Black domination represents a foundational signifier. Certainly, violent conflict and domination are not just symptoms of misrecognition. And redistribution, as Fraser (2003) points out, is irreducible to normative terms of discourse which pertain to the analysis and diagnosis of recognition.

The agonistic turn to the critique of ideological forms of recognition insists on constant critical scrutiny, which complicates the normative framework of recognition sought by Honneth. This means paying critical attention to the contested forces and relations of power at stake in the historical conditions of emergence

of normative social and political relations of recognition, in public philosophy, to open up ways for the contestation and subversion of these norms. On the Wild Coast, however, one may question the ultimate value of such constant contestation and emancipatory resistance. What good is an agonistic turn for a society plagued by violent conflict? What is the cost of an exclusive focus on resistance to social injustice? Where conflict and contestation are pervasive, there is an urgent need for constructive civic empowerment, ethical dialogue, engagement and diplomacy, despite the normative ambivalence at stake.

Lloyd emphasises freedom from domination, rather than recognition, as the central concern of the figure of subordinated slaves in relations of domination, arguing that normative value can only be identified in resistance to domination, especially racist Black domination. Critics of Honneth have long contested the normative status of recognition. Arguing that relations of recognition are normatively ambivalent and entangled in relations of power, they have called for critical contestation of dominant norms which marginalise and constrain agency. But from the perspective of the Grand Hotel Abyss, a beautiful coastal lodge on the side of a hill alongside the beach on the Wild Coast of South Africa, one cannot help but wonder where constant agonism and resistance leaves a society struggling for dignity and pride in the lives of its people. A great deal of contestation and resistance has been introduced to this adaptive, organic society with tragic results, while African normative customary practices have been misrecognised, marginalised and erased by Western norms in processes of *epistemicide*.

Freedom is the positive term of a dialectic between slave and master in the struggle for recognition, the negative term being domination. Of course, the slave wants freedom from the master. But neither are satisfied. Consciousness is not yet realised. Were it not yet clear in Hegel, Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* shows that the free lord is not all there. Freedom is an attractive chimera, out of reach, an unsatisfactory American tale, a figure of voluntary, autonomous, independent, rational consent, manufactured in governmentality.

Lloyd (2022) rightly sees that recognition from a master is not the slave's priority, but freedom is not the end of domination and indignity, which depends on the common good of mutual recognition.

Freedom, the positive term of a polarised dialectic of domination, is a means to an end. To seek mutual recognition, beyond domination, one should not overlook power relations to hold faith in some normative ideal that is considered good beyond contestation. But philosophies of resistance and emancipation do not strive towards freedom as an end in itself. Three generations on of critical theory, and we are all forced to be critical. Critical reflexivity is demanded in order to contemplate the contested character of hegemonic knowledge, which marginalises and excludes disempowered others. Critical reflexivity and constant contestation are indices of merit embraced by masters of disciplines most often taught to those who can ill afford it. What is thereby excluded? The agonistic turn in critical theories of recognition may be trapped in a struggle for freedom from domination while the transcendent telos of harmonious social relations of recognition remains out of reach.

Mutual recognition plays a key function in stipulating a criterion of universality for norms. Recognition also plays a role in determining which norms, rights, goods and practices are commonly accepted. But ideals of recognition, of love, respect, and esteem – for instance, in Honneth’s account – carry ambivalent normative value, since they are subject to contestation and vulnerability, to relations of domination, exclusion and inclusive governmentality. If social ontologies of recognition are of ambivalent normative status, caught up in relations of empowerment and domination, with potential ideological consequences, then, although mutual recognition may be necessary for any universal common good, it is not a good in itself, aside from its association with some recognised good, norm or customary practice.

Owen’s response to such problems advocates an agonistic turn from teleological normative critical theories of recognition to genealogical critique, with the intention to empower ongoing and open-ended critical contestation and redescription of social norms. Yet this resonates uneasily with a postcolonial context of sustained violent contestation and deconstructive combat, as Dimpho Maponya explains, in her contribution to this special issue, with a decolonial feminist critique of extraverted, masculine African philosophies of resistance. How may one therefore represent an ambivalent normative account of reciprocal receptivity across cultural contexts, asks Kelland, and even non-reciprocal receptivity across species,

to animal pain, asks Abraham Olivier? Maponya and Kelland both consider approaches to decolonised knowledge and pedagogy which take note of the normative ambivalence of recognition from an intersectional feminist perspective. Hurst, Dickinson and Kelland consider how love, loving perception, and our singular intimate attachments slip through and past the distinctive normative categories of recognition and equal recognition, which they inform and enrich. Pedro Tabensky and Jane Gordon consider the ambivalent function of recognition in building democratic civic solidarity and pluri-national political participation. While these authors reflect critically on the ambivalent normative status of recognition, they also extend the concept beyond resistance and contestation to explore the roles that recognition can play for the diagnosis of conflict and the empowerment of ethical agency for the common good.

Strategies of Ambivalent Recognition

A Functionalist Reading of the Struggle for Recognition

The first article in this special issue, by Olerato Mogomotsi, offers a functionalist reading of Hegel's conception of recognition, which addresses and accommodates the ambivalent reading that comes to light in such critical engagement with Honneth, questioning the validity of recognition as a normative framework with which to diagnose social conflicts. Mogomotsi reminds us that consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is not looking for recognition when it bumps into the other, seeking for itself epistemic self-certainty and ontological actuality regarding the being that it is. Consciousness wants affirmation, beyond its own take on what it is, of what it is, so that its self-conception is not fictional but a matter of fact about the world. To gain such affirmation, one needs to see one's being for oneself in the recognition of another being for itself. Mogomotsi argues that recognition is not a normative ideal, or a goal, as Honneth's normative project misconstrues it. It is an ambivalent means to determine what one is, a constitutive necessity that is open to manipulation, exploitation and domination, which may prevent or frustrate such substantiation of our concrete identity.

*From the Temporary Solidarity of Violent
Resistance to Civic Recognition*

The second article in this special issue reflects on postcolonial conflict from the comparative perspective of Fanon and on how to constitute a postcolonial Algeria that would recognise the humanity of all in such a way as to be free from colonial misrecognition. Tabensky argues that the violent revolutionary struggle which Fanon recommended – to overthrow the dehumanising prejudice of French occupiers and to dispel the categories of oppressor and oppressed and coloniser and colonised – allowed for no more solidarity than a fragile, temporary revolutionary brotherhood of resistance, while it forestalled the civic recognition needed for public deliberation and inclusive citizenship to contribute to democratic nation-building.

The mass slaughter of citizens in the Algerian Revolution (1954–1962) and the Algerian Civil War (1992–2002) instead produced an oppressive, kleptocratic indigenous dictatorship. Hannah Arendt's writings *On Violence* and *On Revolution*, Tabensky tells us, explain why politically motivated violence takes on a life of its own, destroying conditions for civic society. A violent revolution against domination, they both argue, undermines the support that citizens need to work together for the common good, excluding a diverse range of distinct voices for the sake of an undifferentiated majority, 'the people', whose abstract interest bears little relation to the lives of ordinary people. Though it may support relations of recognition in emancipatory practices of resistance and contestation, revolutionary violence, Tabensky argues, is thus inimical to civic solidarity.

*From Resistance and Difference to a Reconstructive
Study of Decolonised Knowledge*

Maponya draws attention to Achille Mbembe's caution against too much insistence, in the theorisation of recognition, on resistance and contestation of difference and alterity, which can impede recognition of our common humanity. An exclusive focus on resistance and contestation in emancipatory postcolonial critical theory, Mbembe observes, overshadows the 'intensity of the violence of "brother" toward "brother" and the status of "sister" and "mother" in the midst of fratricide' (2006: 181). Maponya argues that the focus of African philosophy on the 'philosophy of resistance' is a result of

mimicry of the fixation of Western philosophy on liberation and of insistence on combating false Western impressions of Africans. Such deconstructive obsessions, she argues, are male-centric, privileging a masculine viewpoint, concerns and agency while marginalising the interests of women. Maponya's article shows how women have been excluded, in the narrow focus on deconstructing colonial structures, at the epistemic and individual levels, which has thereby denied them the opportunity to reconstruct their identities in ethical relations of recognition.

Whereas patriarchy was a consistent feature of colonialism, Maponya argues, decolonisation, conversely and logically, ought to involve the recognition of women. Recognition of women in decolonisation must involve a turn from a male-centric focus in the philosophy of resistance to a critical engagement and reconstruction of decolonised knowledge so as to build a world of common humanity. This is not to retreat from the critical task of contestation. But the rallying call of male African philosophers for resistance to coloniality, Maponya observes, typically aggravates the misrecognition of Black African women, expecting 'race loyalty', which silences their voices against injustices in racial boundaries. Allowing for the normative ambivalence of power and contestation in recognition, Maponya urges us to undertake reconstructive studies which recognise decolonised forms of knowledge and know-how.

Love beyond Recognition

Hurst offers a critique of the ideological conception of teleological normativity that is commonly associated with recognition in love – that is, love as cohesion/fusion/sameness (which is evident in Honneth's normative approach, one may note). She attributes this ideological misconstrual to its Hegelian formulation in terms of dialectical reconciliation or synthesis. As we have seen, Mogomotsi's functionalist reading corrects this misconception, which attributes undue normativity to the ambivalent struggle for recognition and its end. Hurst considers such misunderstanding with reference to Lacan's understanding of love as giving what one does not have, that is, recognising one's lack and giving it to another.

Whereas Allen shows how the ambivalence of love and aggression, or normalising subjection in loving relations, serves an ideological function by fixing subjectivities in relations of power, Hurst

observes that love altogether exceeds relations of recognition. Drawing on Lacan's critique of the *ideology of Eros*, she explains that, whereas an *ideological* conception of love emphasises striving for harmonious oneness and cohesion, genuine love, by contrast, affirms a healthy ethic of non-recognition, involving ongoing negotiation between sameness and difference. She argues against the idea that the recognition that we need to build human relationships (familial, friendly or romantic personal relationships, egalitarian civic solidarity, and even abstract or divine relationships) is driven by the ideological striving for oneness. Taylor, she explains, shows how conflict has consistently arisen over whether the reciprocal recognition of all for all, without imbalances of power, that is needed to bind us together in an integrated community should involve recognition of our universal sameness or our unique individuality/difference/singularity (whether this pertains to individuals or particular groups). Both interpretations of the politics of recognition are aporetic – mutually opposed, internally inconsistent – which calls for careful negotiation of the normative ambivalence between them.

Hurst augments Taylor's account with reference to a healthy ethic of non-recognition which she finds in Lacan's analysis of Eros. True love, she explains, refuses the validation of unbearably narcissistic, claustrophobic, suffocating sameness, which, without the air of lacking, snuffs out the flame of desire. Genuine loving relations, she argues, celebrate the unrecognisable aspects of the other and affirm a readiness and flexibility to be stretched beyond self-recognition. Extending this insight into love, which escapes the ideology of Eros (universal cohesion), to political obligations of civic solidarity, Hurst shows that 'the human dignity that commands recognition as respect lies in our intrinsic unrecognisability'. Dignity, like love, exceeds reciprocal recognition. We cannot fully recognise ourselves in others, she concludes, but nobody has to be fully recognisable to command respect. Such recognition of the value of non-recognition is preferable in politics to the agonism of competitive power struggles over one or another aporetic version of recognition.

Intimate Attachments and Sovereign, Unique Identities beyond Recognition

Stressing the irrationalities of love, connection and intimacy, in the following article Dickinson reiterates Hurst's emphasis on the unnameable

singularity of our most intimate attachments, which exceed rational scrutiny or equal recognition. True recognition, he argues, is bound up with passionate, unique attachments that exceed the social and political categories we use to recognise one another, for example, in equal recognition before the law. It is our civic duty to negotiate this tension between law and love. Although we cannot escape the selectivity of our categories of representation, equally we ought to treasure the untranslatable, unrecognisable and unique attachments that compel us to instantiate such categories in the first place. ‘The monotheistic label of *imago dei* placed upon the human being is a historical reminder of not only where “human rights” descend from, it is also witness to the specialness that we ascribe to our very existence’ (p.101, this issue).

Recognition of the non-realizability of universality, which is fundamental to universality, is a liberating experience from fixed identities that promote rigid boundaries between diverse things. Dickinson argues that recognition of the dignity of human persons, which may be affirmed in recognition of communal identity with others, ought not to exclude due recognition of the unrecognisable singularities which belong to some of our most intimate attachments and passionate commitments.

Reciprocal Receptivity in Higher Education

The obligation of ambivalent normative receptivity to identity and difference in relations of loving recognition is taken up in Kelland’s call for ‘recognition as intentional action aimed at loving perception’, advocating for reciprocal recognition of epistemic agency in higher education curricula and pedagogies to develop students’ identities in terms of knowing, acting and being. This ethic of reciprocal receptivity imposes on educators the duty to avoid the epistemic injustice of perpetuating hegemonic frameworks that exclude and silence others. Kelland draws on the work of Marilyn Frye to explain that reciprocal receptivity, in loving perception, is not restricted to exclusive sameness (belonging to arrogant perception). Development of epistemic agency depends on seeing the other on their own terms. This depends, in part, on displacing the ego to hold oneself in abeyance and pay attention. Kelland argues that reciprocal receptivity is best supported by an attitude of playful curiosity, which Maria Lugones associates with openness to surprise and vulnerability in our interactions.

Like Maponya, who is critical of a narrow, polarising, deconstructive critique of colonial domination in the philosophy of resistance, Kelland is equally sensitive to the African feminist critique of the Western feminist deconstructive critique of patriarchy, in so far as this is restricted to a narrowly *colonial* focus on binarity, essentialism and universality. She therefore appeals to a multidimensional approach to intersectionality, which she finds in Sylvia Tamale's feminist approach to critical social theory, to resist such colonial thinking. On this basis, she works with the normative ambivalence of recognition to argue that epistemic agency is best supported in teaching by playful self-discipline, loving perception and reciprocal receptivity, and by a curriculum which speaks to students' identities while making sure not to exclude or erase them.

NON-RECIPROCAL RECEPTIVITY TO THE RECOGNITION OF ANIMAL PAIN

While Kelland argues for reciprocal receptivity in higher education, we have seen from Hurst's account that love and respect for others does not depend on reciprocal recognition alone. In the following article, Olivier makes clear that we owe animals rights on the basis of non-reciprocal recognition of their pain and suffering. Receptive recognition need not be mutual. Olivier's phenomenological approach to the pain and suffering of animals explores how animals express pain differently to humans. To disclose such expressions calls for the bracketing of anthropocentric conceptions of pain. The receptive recognition of pain and suffering extends human attention beyond reciprocity to animals' species-specific means to express it, imposing an obligation on us not to cause it. Olivier appeals to Mbembe's critique of the self-destructive Anthropocene, which shows how critical race thinking exposes the irrationality of colonial ideologies of human mastery. African liberation heritage questions such human supremacism. He argues that the non-reciprocal and receptive recognition of the pain and suffering of animals imposes duties on us to stop the war on animals and to abolish human-induced animal suffering by imposing laws that protect their rights.

Postcolonial Meta-National Nation-building

The final article of this special issue, by Jane Gordon, returns to the consideration of the normative ambivalence of postcolonial conditions of political recognition, with which this special issue starts,

by responding to political criticism of the Euro-modern model of the nation-state, which has in turn advanced plurinational states, creolising the nation, separating states from nations, and abolishing the state. Gordon examines the question of political recognition in state-building in African liberation heritage – from the perspectives of Jean-Jacques Dessalines after the revolution in Haiti, Fanon in Algeria, Amílcar Cabral in Guinea, and Kwame Gyeke in postcolonial Ghana. She considers various ways to avoid imposing narrow, homogenising national identities in state-building, to allow for bottom-up internationalism through open-ended *creolising* self-formations. Effective states, she argues, with Cabral, cannot bypass or centralise the local participatory mechanisms and organisation on which the cultivation of political relations depends. Collective solidarity should be developed through a continuous, shared approach to problem-solving that confronts oppressive power structures. What Gyekye (1997) calls ‘meta-national states’, she insists, must be sufficiently decentralised to facilitate sensitivity to local participation and localities, drawing selectively on historical and cultural resources to engage in ongoing development and evolution. Although she admits that creolising is typically more evident in music, food and dance than in intellectual or political activities, she maintains, the onus is on citizens to counteract elitism in creolised states.

Conclusion

These collected articles have considered how critical theories of recognition may be used to diagnose and analyse conflict, such as we find in the Eastern Cape, a region deeply affected by colonialism, apartheid and ongoing socio-political violence, where land dispossession, forced removals and the creation of pseudo-sovereign ethnic nations contributed to a distorted social fabric characterised by violent conflict and severe poverty. Various problems have been identified with the dominant normative framework of recognition in critical theory, such as we find in Honneth’s account, which is informed by a Hegelian dialectical conception of contradictory relations between self and other. However, an alternative interpretation is given.

It is found that the operationalisation of recognition, as a normative ideal for the diagnosis of misrecognition in social conflict, is vulnerable to ideological distortions, most especially due to the ambivalent functions and values of recognition, for instance, in relations of power. The authors therefore consider theoretical strategies to avoid such ideological construal, which may assist marginalised voices to contest and to reshape social norms. It is argued that the agonistic contestation of recognition in philosophies of liberation is inadequate to the task of rebuilding postcolonial societies where violent social conflict is endemic and where there is an urgent need to reconstruct indigenous knowledge systems to build a world of common humanity. The question is asked, however, whether endogenous knowledge, such as we find in the normative framework of *ubuntu*, is any less permeable to ideological distortion and manipulation than Honneth's schmalzky normative triptych of (1) emotional support; (2) cognitive respect; and (3) esteem.

Various conceptions of recognition have been considered, which take on board such concerns about the ideological role recognition plays when construed as normative ideals. A functionalist approach to the concept is recommended, evident in Hegel's formulation of the struggle for recognition, to allow for the ambivalent negotiation of sameness and difference, singular attachment, civic solidarity, recognition and misrecognition, reciprocal and non-reciprocal receptivity, and meta-national sovereignty. Recognition plays a useful heuristic role in the diagnosis of conflict where its normative ambivalence is acknowledged. This is helped by paying close genealogical attention to historical conditions and possibilities, which determine the emergence of normative concepts and customary practices of dignified mutual recognition. These contexts are informed by agonistic contestation and relations of power, so rather than imposing a preconceived normative ideal of recognition, one may, with immanent critique, take a functionalist approach to misrecognition in social conflict, drawing out consequent contradictions in normative orders and working with recognised norms at stake to appeal for their rational, dignified reconciliation.

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