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Recognition, misrecognition and justice

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ABSTRACT
My critical engagement with David Ingram's book 'World Crisis and Underdevelopment' is divided into three parts. In the first part I will explore how experiences of misreognition are related to experiences of injustice. In the second part I will ask about the criteria that make experiences of non-recognition or misrecognition unjust. Finally, I will briefly discuss the 'self-subordination social recognition paradox'.

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Introduction

This paper examines two claims made by David Ingram in his book 'World Crisis and Underdevelopment' (Ingram 2018). The first claim is that the concept of misrecognition can play a specific role in discovering and criticizing injustices such as (global) poverty. This claim has two distinct parts: firstly, I interpret Ingram to argue about the phenomenology of injustices, that they always involve experiences of misrecognition. Secondly, as I understand it he argues that misrecognition somehow, at least partially, can explain what constitutes an injustice as a moral wrong. I want to argue that recognition theory needs to establish thresholds of proper recognition, and hence misrecognition, which cannot be simply extracted from existing social norms and practices. Recognition theory should be able to distinguish not only between recognition, non-recognition and misrecognition but also clarify when misrecognition constitutes an injustice. Otherwise it will not be able to combine its phenomenological analysis with a normative criticism.

In this respect Ingram's framework leaves some crucial questions unanswered and this affects also how to interpret some of his claims about (the moral wrongness or ambiguity) of poverty and anti-poverty measures. I will use the example of microcredits for women to clarify this point, which is discussed by Ingram to highlight paradoxes in anti-poverty programmes. Referencing Serene Khader Ingram points out that women can increase their welfare and gain social recognition by subordinating themselves under patriarchic norms and practices. Khader calls this the 'self-subordination social recognition paradox'. My main point here is not that Ingram, or Khader, are wrong about the possible negative effects of microcredits on women's agency, but to question what is at stake here from the viewpoint of recognition theory. On the one hand, in my interpretation this paradox is a widespread one, which means that it applies to many

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forms of recognition (and agency) under capitalist conditions, and on the other hand, it forces recognition theory once again to clarify which kinds of (social) recognition are in fact forms of misrecognition and hence unjust, and where this judgement comes from.

Experiences of misrecognition

If one wants to make a theory of recognition fruitful for a critique of global poverty and other global injustices, then some challenges are associated with it. After all, the theory of recognition, as understood by Axel Honneth (Honneth 1996, 2014) and Ingram, is a theory other than liberal theories of justice that dominate philosophical discourse. Recognition does not simply describe a particular form of the currency of justice, but is both instrumental and intrinsically valuable, and has its own phenomenological dimension. Recognition is not a resource that can simply be distributed, but arises from the interaction of people who recognize each other – or between institutions and people – and thus give each other experiences that are valuable to them. That is one side. The other is that recognition is not just an experience, but is framed and shaped as such culturally and socially. This is shown by the fact that it is so difficult to deduce from the general concept of recognition the infinite number of manifestations of recognition in social interactions. Thus, while a resource-oriented theory of global justice, despite the necessary differentiations, can relatively easily evaluate what the globally poor lack – which makes their condition unjust – this is more difficult for a theory of recognition in principle. To a certain extent, a critique of global poverty based on recognition theory is also counterintuitive. Do poor people really lack recognition and not just money and other goods to satisfy their basic needs?

David Ingram gives a structured and multivariate answer in his book. He combines Honneth's theory of recognition with Habermas, he combines human rights duties and social justice duties, and does so within the framework of an immanent critique that finds its normative restraints in a theory of modernization as the formation of individual human rights (Ingram 2018, 32ff). It would be too much to go into all the details of this theory here, so I will confine myself to some, in my opinion, central statements. Ingram advocates the phenomenological thesis that injustice implies or is accompanied by an experience of misrecognition. He writes:

> "Lack of recognition does not imply injustice, but perhaps injustice implies lack of recognition. To begin with, it seems that anyone who suffers injustice also experiences disrespect or lack of proper recognition. If injustice and lack of positive, proper recognition always accompany each other, it is important for purposes of remedial action to know which (if either) of these dyadic terms is explanatorily primary." (Ingram 2018, 74)

Before I go into the question of what constitutes an injustice, I want to remain here on the phenomenological level. There is the empirical thesis that injustice goes hand in hand with experiences of misrecognition.

This seems to me to overlook some important aspects: Not all injustices are associated with experiences of misrecognition. First, there are people who do not have the mental capacity to experience (certain forms of) misrecognition or to comprehend it correctly. These include, for example, children or people with severe disabilities. Of

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course, they too can be treated unfairly (economically, politically, socially or culturally) without being able to relate these experience to themselves in terms of recognition and misrecognition. Ingram's theory shows a rational agent bias, which is discussed in the philosophy of childhood (Archard and Macleod 2002). Secondly, there are people who are alienated or who have developed adaptive preferences in a way that makes it impossible for them to associate injustice with experiences of misrecognition or even to name them as such. It seems to me that certain pathologies of the social have precisely the form of separating injustices and experiences of misrecognition. These include forms of epistemic injustice such as have been discussed in recent years (Fricker 2007), and perhaps there is a specific form of an epistemic injustice that makes it impossible for people to adequately classify and process experiences of recognition or misrecognition.

Not all injustices are experienced as such at all. Things I mentioned above play a role here: lack of mental abilities, lack of knowledge, social pathologies, adaptive preferences etc. If, however, injustices are not experienced as such or are not properly cognitively comprehended, they will on the one hand cause less likely experiences of misrecognition and if they do so, the persons will not be able to establish a connection between the injustice and their experiences of misrecognition. At the phenomenological level of the subject, however, they remain separate. They can then perhaps be brought together at the level of research and social criticism, which at least significantly weakens the status of the persons concerned as independent agents and speakers for themselves. It seems reasonable to assume that in highly developed capitalist societies, most people do not understand at all or at least misunderstand the most injustices they face and, for example, unquestioningly accept the exploitation of their own labour and wealth concentration or even consider it necessary and right. Othering is such a phenomenon (Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin 2010).

Not always are injustices and experiences of misrecognition properly connected. It is quite possible that an injustice is experienced (for example an economic exploitation) and here also an experience of misrecognition is present, but this is wrongly attributed. If one remains with the simplified tripartite division of the forms of recognition into love, respect and social esteem, then it could happen that an economic exploitation, which actually has to do with respect and social esteem, is perceived as lack of love. This would then be problematic to the extent that this person would address his or her demands for recognition incorrectly and demand the wrong form of recognition: instead of demanding respect (legal or social protection, for instance) and social esteem for the economic performance, this person would demand emotional attention.

In the first two cases, when either the injustice is not perceived as such or there is no experience of misrecognition, it becomes more difficult for a theory of recognition to maintain its critical programme. It can then either understand itself enlightenmentally, the aim of which is to help people understand themselves and their own position better and correctly, or it can be content with the injustices, which are actually articulated as such by the victims and confine itself to these experiences. The second way would make many forms of injustice inaccessible, thus blunting the critique of recognition theory, the first way on the other hand would be more or less elitist and would drop an important

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aspect of the theory of recognition, namely to interpret the experiences of misrecognition and injustice as movens for normative critique. Ingram writes about this:

> "In other words, recognition theory takes up everyday feelings of moral outrage, encourages theoretical elaboration of new concepts by which to name and identify the harms that occasion that outrage, and thereby provides theoretical guidance to the formation of social movements aimed at overcoming a vast array of distinctive types of social injustices beyond those concerning the violation of universal human rights." (Ingram 2018, 78)

If, however, it is the case that these daily feelings and experiences of misrecognition are often missing or misguided, then the theory of recognition faces a problem in being able to implement the claims formulated here.

A third way out could be not to focus on individual or collective experiences of misrecognition, but to develop objective standards. As far as I understand Ingram, this way out is rudimentary present in his theory, but it is not explicitly pursued by him. The question of objective criteria is located on the side of the concept of injustice and not already on the side of the concept of misrecognition. It would certainly be conceivable to argue here, for example, on the basis of Avishai Margalit, who defined humiliations as 'behaviour or condition that constitutes a sound reason for a person to consider his or her self-respect injured' (Margalit 1996, 9). What is important here is not whether the victims actually feel humiliated – they often do –, but whether they have good reasons to feel so. The actual experience of misrecognition and the subjective feelings of the victims would then continue to be relevant as an indicator and starting point of a social critique and theory of justice, but the normative core would be to determine which individual or institutional forms of misrecognition give people sound – i.e. also intersubjectively identifiable and comprehensible – reasons for making certain experiences, which can be perceived as violations of their positive self-relations.

What constitutes an injustice?

A critical theory of recognition, such as Ingram has in mind, cannot be satisfied only with the fact that injustice and forms of misrecognition are often, if not always, connected in the experiential world of the people concerned. After all, this does not say anything about whether a certain experience represents an injustice at all and there is a need for a substantial normative theory. Here too Ingram gives an answer that does not quite convince me. As far as I interpret his remarks, he suggests that recognition as an ethical category can provide such a measure if it relates to what people need to develop positive self-relations. He writes:

> "If recognition designates more than an ontological status attached to socially accountable agents but also marks a historical achievement whose meaning is captured by the dignity of the individual as a selfactualizing agent, then it will also designate a normative standard against which social injustices and social pathologies can be measured." (Ingram 2018, 63)

What does this normative standard consist of? This question has a positive aspect, i.e. the task of reconstructing recognition and its forms and explaining exactly what people have a moral claim to here. But there is also the negative aspect, i.e. the task of showing which forms of misrecognition are there and which of them constitute an injustice

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(Klikauer 2016). This is because there is not a simple fit – that is, the lack of positive recognition does not yet allow one to conclude that there is misrecognition. This is the case because there is a (normative and practical) gap between non-recognition and misrecognition. And both do not describe the same phenomena. Put simply, one could say that the difference lies in the activity, non-recognition is passive, while misrecognition is active (Voswinkel 2012). This seems to me to be a meaningful distinction because many of the phenomena discussed by Ingram in his book are based on passivity. The mere absence of (sufficient) social rights is something other than the active violation of social rights which are formally granted.

What are the concrete standards that can indicate when non- or misrecognition is unjust? What is the telos of recognition, what is recognition supposed to help to realize? It is about freedom, but freedom of what kind must be asked. If the experience of recognition is necessary for the constitution of agency and freedom, then it needs to be sufficiently explained what kind of agency and freedom is morally valuable. Ingram (Ingram 2018, chap., 1) brings into play here – based on his reading of Hegel – a concept of social freedom which is richer than legal (negative) and moral (positive) freedom and which has developed extensively in a historical process of modernity. It is a freedom that is based on and produced by mutual recognition on the one hand, and that is also held and realized in social fields and institutions such as the family, politics, the market or law on the other. In this sense, the concept of social freedom is relational and not atomistic-individualistic and allows people to move in the essential fields of social life and to give and experience recognition there. I interpret this as a mutual conditionality: only in social fields is there recognition and thus social freedom, and only through recognition and social freedom are these fields constituted in such a way that recognition and freedom can be experienced in them. Struggles for recognition – the spread of modernity and its ideas and institutions – stand in the background of the historical and social development of these fields and the forms of recognition that enable them to enjoy specific social freedom. Ingram characterizes it so:

> 'What makes these institutional spheres of personal, economic, and political life essential for developing individual freedom is that individuals bound together by love, economic cooperation, and democratic self-determination self-consciously recognize the freedom of the other as a precondition for, rather than as a limit to, their own freedom.' (Ingram 2018, 67)

Nevertheless, I still see a hiatus between this concept of social freedom and the derivation of norms for social critique from it or the development of a critical theory of justice. To this end, it would be necessary to indicate the standards by which social freedom must be measured in each of these fields – when is there enough social freedom in a field and what forms of recognition are necessary for this? This is notoriously uncertain if one takes a closer look at certain fields such as the family, politics or the market. Is the point here to be as free as possible in these fields, and if so, free to do what? Even if one assumes (Ingram 2018, 204), that capitalist markets, for example, are better than their predecessors and that they do not necessarily have to be exploitative, the question remains as to which demands for recognition markets should satisfy, i.e. how markets should look so that all people in them can experience social freedom. The ideal of self-realization – like that of the agency – is both corruptible – it

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can take on pathological forms, overtax people and be abused for exclusion – and conflict-laden, since different demands of different people can collide here. Furthermore, it should be noted that both social freedom and access to the fields in which it can take place are based on certain conditions which are themselves controversial: the participation of children in politics and the labour market, people with severe disabilities or even illegal migrants is in principle or according to social norms severely restricted.

A possible helpful distinction could be to distinguish between local and global autonomy (Franklin-Hall 2013), i.e. between the possibility of making decisions about individual areas of life and the possibility of being the author of one's own life, i.e. of pursuing goals that constitute the core of one's own personality – the paradoxes of such demands for authenticity in modern capitalism are well known (Hartmann and Honneth 2006; Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). With such a differentiation it could also be possible to expand the circle of addressees again and to understand not only adult, (cognitively) healthy, able-bodied people as subjects of recognition, i.e. as subjects with agency and freedom.

It should also be borne in mind, as Ingram rightly points out (Ingram 2018, 41), that recognition alone may not constitute agency and freedom – neither in a psychological nor a social sense. In the terminology of the capability approach, this includes further conversion factors – internal, external, psychological, social, material and immaterial – such as education, knowledge, experience, resources, etc. – which are not only a matter of the individual, but also of the individual. One could try to understand all these things as forms of recognition, but that would greatly expand this terminology. Conversely, this also means that it is not only experiences of non- and misrecognition that can impede agency and freedom, but other factors also play a role. This is where the debate between Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser, taken up by Ingram (Ingram 2018, 74ff), comes in, in which it was precisely a matter of the extent to which all injustices can be traced back to non- or misrecognition.

But I want to stick to the point, which experiences of non- or misrecognition constitute an injustice and in which relation this stands to other forms of injustice. Ingram mentions (Ingram 2018, 73) that not all persons deserve recognition; non- or misrecognition is therefore justified at least when persons refuse legitimate recognition to others, as in the case of racists. That is true. But three observations are central here: First, it is not only about recognition as an interpersonal relation, but also about the institutionalization (and materialization) of recognition or its negative counterparts. The behaviour of a racist is immoral, but for a social theory and critical theory of justice, the case of institutionalized racism is particularly relevant. For example, in the case of exclusive social and educational policies or global development policies that reproduce colonial logics. In the institutional structure, however, it is more difficult to determine, who deserves recognition or misrecognition, because people are always actors in different, overlapping social fields with their own antagonistic rules and forms of recognition. Social rights and market esteem do not go hand in hand.

Honneth's programme here is towards a welfare state of the 1970s, but the antagonism between the forms of recognition in the institutional structure is not overturned. Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch (Schmidt am Busch 2010) showed this beautifully by arguing that motivational impulses to prioritize either difference (social esteem) or

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equality (respect and rights) can translate into institutional inequalities. There is also empirical evidence that modern capitalist systems function in this way, with weaker members of society in particular suffering as a result, who are increasingly excluded from the sources of institutionalized, market-based social esteem, but who can also no longer rely sufficiently on (social) legal security (Schweiger 2013, 2014). At the global level, which is the horizon of Ingram's considerations, these tendencies are all the more problematic. Ultimately, the question is whether a capitalism that is tamed and confined by the theory of recognition can achieve what it is supposed to, namely to actually ensure the experiences of recognition for all, so that they can train and realize agency and freedom.

Secondly, it must be asked how recognition should materialize in institutions in order to guarantee the desired telos of recognition. If one wants to apply a classical terminology, then a recognition-theoretical theory of justice locates itself on the side of universalism and aims at a sufficiency-based distribution. The theory of recognition becomes universalistic, also with Ingram, because it wants to reach beyond the boundaries of individual societies and asks what is due to all people. This is difficult, as Ingram himself points out (Ingram 2018, 42), on the basis of Honneth's considerations, because the latter thinks strongly within the national boundaries of a society (Heins 2008). The reference to human rights is a way out, but it must nevertheless indicate what level of recognition every person at a certain place and time is entitled to. This is where sufficiency comes into play, since the answer is probably that it is just as much recognition as is necessary to realize one's own agency and freedom. One can easily imagine that in highly developed societies, the material demands for agency and freedom are different (and more demanding) than in other parts of the world: one must possess more, be able to do more, be more in order to be an agent there. Recognition must therefore be materalized and institutionalized in a different form in order to keep up with the socially shaped demands, otherwise groups of people threaten not only to fall into material poverty, but also to be threatened by social exclusion in a different form, which ultimately can also take on traits of social pathologies.

The "self-subordination social recognition paradox"

Finally, Ingram's reflections on microcredit programmes for women, which represent a discussion of 'self-subordination social recognition paradox', as Serene Khader has elaborated (Khader 2014), will be briefly addressed. The central thesis seems to me to be the following:

> "Access to certain opportunities and goods (income, self-esteem, etc.) that may be essential to the exercise of autonomy agency depends upon conformity to socially recognized patriarchal gender roles, which effectively require limiting autonomy agency to meet the demands of collective identity agency." (Ingram 2018, 80)

Firstly, I agree that such a paradox can occur, and certainly not only in the case of microcredit programmes for women. The described paradox is widespread and lies rather at the core of recognition theory. This addresses two aspects: Firstly, the empirical level, under which concrete social conditions such paradoxes occur and how widespread they are at present. And, secondly, the level of theory, i.e. to what extent this paradox is built into the

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normative foundations of recognition theory. If the paradox is due to certain social conditions, it is reasonable to assume that it can be overcome; if, on the other hand, it is part of the theory itself, it can be assumed that the occurrence of such paradoxes cannot be avoided in principle. I suspect that the paradox is laid out in a fundamental conflict between the three forms of recognition (love, rights and social esteem), but is reinforced within the framework of existing social relations and assumes specific harmful forms. If it can be assumed that the pursuit of recognition will always produce conflict (either because it is a positional good of recognition, or the desired recognition is denied by others for legitimate reasons) and not all recognition demands can be met equally, people will cut back on certain recognition demands that allow them to have those recognition experiences that are particularly important to them.

I have already mentioned that conflicts between forms of recognition reproduce at the institutional level and can thus lead to severe restrictions for individual groups of persons on their agency. This seems to be the case here as well. On the one hand there is individual autonomy in a certain area (economic autonomy), which goes hand in hand with the experience of recognition, on the other hand there is the restriction of individual autonomy in another area (feminist self-determination as a woman), which is paid as a price for the first-mentioned autonomy and is linked to experiences of non-recognition and misrecognition. From the point of view of recognition theory, it would be interesting to reconstruct whether this is a conflict between social esteem and respect or a conflict within one of these two forms – the economic sphere seems to belong more to social esteem, while the limitations that have to be accepted for it touch more on the sphere of respect than on the sphere of an equal member of society with equal rights. However, such conflicts or 'deals' between conformism and self-realization are an integral part of the capitalistic order. The entire economic sphere of capitalism is based on the abandonment of freedom by large sections of the population to have access to the sphere of market-based social esteem. One can think here of Marx and his figure of the doubly free worker who is free to sell his labour because he is free of means of production and must therefore sell his or her labour (Banaji 2003). This is about more than the field of economic reproduction, but also about adapting to the norms and practices of capitalism that deeply affect the self-image and autonomy of the workers. As long as the theory of recognition of market-based (and therefore capitalist) societies speaks a moral value that is reflected in the realization of social esteem, all people face paradoxes similar to "self-subordination social recognition paradox. The crisis of the self described by Khader and Ingram, which can result from such paradoxes, is phenomenologically typical for capitalism, which is characterized by alienation and self-exploitation (de Souza and Gustavo 2017).

Secondly, in the specific case of microcredit programmes, the question is again as to exactly what is unjust here and how much injustice should be accepted in the sense of the experience of non-recognition or misrecognition. The injustice is at least a double one: it is unfair that women have to conform to patriarchal norms of recognition and it is unfair that they are driven into a crisis of their self-image by the adaptation to them while at the same time realizing their economic agency. The benchmark for both remains somewhat fleeting. It is undisputed that patriarchal norms of recognition do not correspond to the standards of a critical theory of recognition. The non-recognition or misrecognition that is present here, however, can be differently materialized and

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institutionalized, and this is relevant for the social criticism that has been put forward. Perhaps there is even a social pathology here which, according to Christopher Zurn (Zurn 2011), is located on the second order. Some possible criteria would therefore be: is the patriarchal order systemic and endemic, i.e. widespread and supported by legal and political rules, which areas of life are specifically affected by it, by what means are these social norms and practices reproduced, where are there fractures? Then also the question whether it is sufficient to criticize such experiences of non-recognition and misrecognition, which are put forward by the women concerned themselves, or whether there is a need for elitist enlightenment criticism here, which necessarily also transcends the horizon of the local society, whereby it should not be overlooked which pitfalls lie in such projects.

Thirdly, I am not entirely convinced that global change is needed to solve such paradoxes, as Ingram suggests (Ingram 2018, 83). The situation in highly developed capitalism was no different until a few decades ago. In Germany, for example, until 1977 women needed the consent of their husbands to work, and until 1962 they were not allowed to open a bank account alone. That was not so long ago, and the radical changes that have taken place in Germany and elsewhere over the last forty years have been marked by both internal and external factors. The expansion of women's equality, which has brought her both access to market-based social esteem and equal rights in many other areas, was the result of local struggles for recognition, which had a universal appeal, but yet aimed largely at the local norms and practices that needed to be changed. This was certainly supported by the fact that service capitalism had a strong interest in expanding the labour force potential, drawing women from the household sphere to the employment sphere – although it should not be forgotten that under capitalism the employment sphere is not a place of well-being or increased freedom, especially in typical women's occupations. It is perhaps a little better than being chained to the household, but far from enabling adequate and undistorted recognition experiences.

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