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# Women's struggle for recognition

# Contents

## Statement

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# Introduction

Recognition is a key concept at the heart of the contemporary discussion in political philosophy. Since the very beginning of the 1990s, theories of recognition have benefited from a lively academic as well as public interest. Recognition has been defined as the "act of acknowledging or respecting another being[1]". It is both a means of valuing another person and of understanding one's own identity. Thereby, recognition is based on mutuality. It appears as a genuinely interpersonal endeavour that presupposes the existence of a subject of recognition and of an object. If those subjects can both be individuals, some philosophers even consider that groups or institutions can also be object of recognition[2]. The main purpose of recognition is to contribute to the development of one's practical identity. Recognition is of psychological importance. Those who fail obtaining adequate recognition generally also fail in forming positively their identities. Misrecognition is what hinders one's successful relationship to self. However, this violation of identity can also motivate the victims of lack of recognition to resist and engage in a social or political struggle. Demands of recognition indeed have to be linked to social and political dynamics. Recognition is thus a means by which both historical and contemporary struggles could be understood and justified; it is "proving central to efforts to conceptualize today's struggles over identity and difference[3]". It promises to explain a wide range of social movements, such as the struggles of ethnic or religious minorities, women or LGBT[4]. Those groups are engaged in a new form of politics called "identity politics". They struggle both to obtain equal rights and to affirm their particular identity. Framing those political struggles in terms of recognition allows insisting on the relational aspect of morality

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[1] McQueen Paddy, *Subjectivity, gender and the struggle for recognition*, Ebook, Palgrave MacMillan, 2014, p. 19

[2] I will come back to it later in the introduction, but Charles Taylor for instance defines the recognition of minorities' groups as central. However, I would like to add that the notion of recognition has also been recently brought into the field of international relations to explain the logic behind the legal recognition of states. Lindenman and Ringmar for instance claim that the behaviour of states should be perceived as a struggle for recognition. It cannot be simply understood as a striving forever more power.
See: Lindemann, T., and E. Ringmar, *The International Politics of Recognition*, London: Paradigm, 2011

[3] Fraser, N. and Honneth A., *Redistribution or Recognition? A political-philosophical* Exchange, London, Verso, 2003, p. 1

[4] LGBT: Acronyme for Lesbians-Gays-Bisexuals-Transexuals

and justice. For many political theorists, recognition is even an integral component of a satisfactory modern theory of justice. Nevertheless, while Kantian and liberal philosophers usually focus on one special dimension of recognition - the equal dignity of autonomous beings, Hegelian theories of recognition propose a more broad vision of that concept. They consider recognition as covering all spheres within modernity: the family, the civil society and the State. It is on those Hegelian theories that I will focus, in order to show how the notion of mutual recognition can be a helpful tool to understand dynamics of exclusion from the public sphere.

G. W. F. Hegel started having interest for the questions linked to the issue of recognition in his early years in Jena. He was especially inspired by Johann Fichte, who stated in *his Foundations of Natural Right* (1796) that an individual must acknowledge the claims of other free individuals in order to understand himself or herself as a being capable of action possessing freedom. Hegel analyses this idea in the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* first published in 1807[5]. It is one of the most important texts of Western philosophy, owing to the influence it had on many schools of thought in the XIXth and XXth centuries. In this work, Hegel proposes an inter-subjective conception of selfhood that finds its expression through the concept of recognition. He states that self-knowledge is never a matter of simple introspection. On the opposite, one must recognize oneself as mediated through the other. Therefore, recognition is the mechanism by which one's existence as a social being is generated. Hegel even asserts that it is through this recognition of freedom that right is actualised. Thus, rights are the concrete expression of our freedom. Hegel conceives the 'struggle for recognition' as an encounter between two individuals who both seek to affirm the certainty of their being for themselves. He explains this struggle through his famous dialectic of the master-slave. During their conflict, the master and the slave both risk their biological life to show that they are more than a simple body, that is to say a subject able to affirm himself or herself. The main point is that it is only by risking one's life that freedom can be obtained. As the attachment to biological life is strong for the slave, he gives up his freedom and submits to the master, whose attachment to liberty is primordial. Nonetheless, what Hegel affirms is that there can be no mutual recognition between the master and the slave. For both the master and the slave, the recognition of the other is worthless. One needs to be recognized by an equal subject. Consequently, the relation master-slave leads to their

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[5] See: Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Voltmedia Gmbh, 2005, 656 p.

own destruction, as autonomy can only be an inter-subjectively mediated achievement. A relation with an equal other is the fundamental condition for the phenomenological experience of freedom and right. An individual should be recognized by his equal at three levels to reach his full autonomy. First, it is within the family that one should be recognized. This recognition acknowledges the concrete needs of an individual; it develops through love and affection. Secondly, one has to be recognized as a person by the civil society. This cognitive recognition should acknowledge one's formal autonomy. Last but not least, one has to be recognized in one's individual particularity by the State.

Axel Honneth is the philosopher who proposed the most complete and relevant interpretation of Hegel's theory of recognition. First published in 1992, the *Struggle for recognition* provides an historical reconstruction of the Hegelian concept of inter-subjective recognition. Honneth draws on Hegelian inter-subjectivity in order to identify the mechanisms of how mutual recognition is achieved, "as well as establishing the motivational and normative role that recognition plays in understanding and justifying social movements[6]." He transposes the Hegelian recognition schema onto the cultural and political terrain. He aims bridging the classical opposition between philosophical and social thought. Like Hegel before him, he highlights the importance of inter-subjective recognition and explains that it is the relation with the other that grounds freedom. He also defines three forms of recognition. The first form of recognition occurs in the primary relationships, which constitute the origin of social life and his founder core. In the same way as in Hegel's theory, one is recognized through the satisfaction of his or her concrete needs. Emotional support is again central. However, while Hegel understands love as being essentially marital love, Honneth widens it to all affective relationships. The second form of recognition develops in the legal sphere. The individuals have to recognize each other as subjects of rights who all know the social norms of the community and the legitimate repartition of rights and duties. Like in Hegel's theory again, one has to be acknowledged as a morally responsible subject to gain cognitive respect. The last form of recognition occurs in the sphere of esteem. This sphere is a community of value where one strives to obtain social esteem. This feeling allows considering positively one's own qualities and concrete abilities. The object of this recognition is thus the subject as a social and unique being. The solidarity gives a base on which isolated individuals and judicial subjects can be integrated in an ethical community. This way, the individual reaches

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[6] MacQueen, Paddy, *Subjectivity, gender and the struggle for recognition*, p. 28

both a form of universality and individuality. This community allows the emergence of the political relation, which constitutes the State. In Honneth's work just as in Hegel's, each sphere represents a superior degree of universalization and individualisation of the individual. In addition, in both works, legal regulation can complement specific forms of recognition in the three spheres.

What is original in Honneth's approach is that he proposes a normative theory that tries to understand the moral logic of social conflicts starting from experiences of disrespect in the spheres of recognition. One particular type of disrespect belongs to each sphere of recognition. In the sphere of primary relationships, Axel Honneth considers that the disrespect would be an offence against the physical integrity of a person. For instance, he mentions humiliations that ruined the basic self-confidence, such as abuse or rape. In the sphere of legal relations, disrespect is the structural exclusion of certain rights within society. This disrespect damages personal autonomy. The individual is harmed in his expectation to be recognized as subject able to form moral judgment. Honneth defines the third form of disrespect as a denial or insult. It is about making a negative judgment concerning the social value of certain individuals or groups, who experience social downgrading. All those denials of recognition can lead to new political or social struggles, where the victims of those lack reconstruct their identity and demand recognition. Honneth thus offers a comprehensive theory of recognition that explains both the structural order of societies and the social and political struggles through the notion of recognition.

In 1992, the same year than *The Struggle for recognition* came out, Charles Taylor published *Multiculturalism and 'the Politics of Recognition'*. This Canadian philosopher and professor at the University of McGill based his analysis on the Hegelian concept of recognition, just like Honneth did. He also placed the concept of recognition in the paradigm of self-realization and defined it as "a vital human need[7]". He established a link between this Hegelian principle of recognition and contemporary identity struggles. However, if Honneth just focused on the concept of recognition, Taylor connected recognition to the contemporary political topic of multiculturalism and the relevance of ethnic identity for political claims. He applied the theory of recognition to the question of the status of cultural minorities and

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[7] Taylor, Charles, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, A. Gutmann (ed.), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 26

defined groups' recognition as fundamental. His main idea was thus that the democratic State should give to all members of the community the right to publicly show their differences. He wanted to respect the singularity of each citizen and his inscription in a moral or political community. Another competing model has been developed by Nancy Fraser at the beginning of the 2000s. This feminist political theorist engaged in a debate on recognition with Axel Honneth, which gave birth to the work *Redistribution or Recognition? A political-philosophical Exchange*[8]. Opposed to Honneth's vision of recognition, Fraser proposed a perspective dualism where recognition is not the only claim for justice anymore. Recognition is here to be seen as a complement to redistribution, which aims to fight political-economic inequalities. Both those two claims are under the umbrella of justice. Starting from Honneth's account where claims for recognition aims at being recognized as equal partner in a reasoned discussion in public sphere, Nancy Fraser carried out a justice-based modification. She attempted to rethink recognition outside of an account of individual identity-formation and developed a status model, where misrecognition was a status subordination that we should fight. She showed the importance of rights and power and explained that justice requires 'participatory parity', that is to say social arrangements that allow all members of society to interact with one another as peers. Therefore, this constituted a major difference to Honneth and Taylor who conceived recognition as an issue related to the 'good life'.

Though neither Axel Honneth's theory of recognition nor Charles Taylor's or Nancy Fraser's ones are in themselves aimed to address women's concerns, they all can nevertheless be used to do so. Charles Taylor's researches are important, as he has special interest for questions related to the status of minorities. Also, the account of Nancy Fraser is especially relevant for women, as it succeeds contrary to Honneth's and Taylor's ones in including power issues in the three spheres of recognition. In addition, the concept of 'participatory parity', which refers to a social organization that permits all citizens to equally participate in the public space, helps supporting claims aiming at more equality in the public sphere. Owing to this, Fraser's theory can contribute to feminist political philosophy. Feminist political philosophy is "focused on understanding and critiquing the way political philosophy is usually construed—often without any attention to feminist concerns—and on articulating how

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[8] See: Fraser, Nancy and Honneth, Axel, *Redistribution or Recognition? A political-philosophical* Exchange, London, Verso, 2003

political theory might be reconstructed in a way that advances feminist concerns[9]". It is a particular way of looking at the political world and at the public sphere, which consists in analysing ways in which women are poorly represented. Moreover, it is a field that allows developing new practices in this public sphere and bringing new ideas about the ways institutions should be designed. By public sphere, I mean the space open to all "in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs[10]". However, Habermas stresses that the concept of public is related to the notion of common and that it thus comprises both the common spaces and goods and the famous sphere where individuals come together to freely discuss and engage in critical public debate, I will limit the use of this term to the second meaning. It is mainly in this sphere of critical debate that women are less engaged and involved than men. For instance, though gender equality in all areas of life is a fundamental right and value of the European Union, a persistent under-representation of women in politics remains across Europe. In the European Parliament for instance, there are only 37% of women among the MEPs since the elections of 2014[11]. In national parliaments across the EU, only 24% of members are women. Women thus have less influence in the discussion and in decision-making[12].

Though Axel Honneth's account does not succeed in including power issues in the three spheres of recognition, his theory is still a good starting point to understand the ways in which power emerges and is used in public life[13]. Hence, I will claim that his theory is particularly suitable to analyse women's lack of presence in the public space. Thus, it can also contribute to the research in feminist political philosophy. As he defines recognition as the necessary condition of self-realization that allows one to participate in public life, Honneth's theory might help understanding the gap between men and women's involvement in the public sphere. According to Honneth, one needs to gain self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem in the three spheres of recognition before being able to fully engage in the public sphere. Hence, we could assume that women's low engagement would be due to the forms of

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[9] Stanford Enclyclopedia of Philosophy – Article 'Feminist Political Philosophy'
plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-political/
[10] Habermas, Jürgen, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, (transl. Th. Burger), Cambridge, MIT Press, 1991, p. 21
[11] Website of the European Parliament: www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/gender-balance.html
[12] Report of the European Commission "Women in European politics – time for action", January 2009
[13] Axel Honneth's theory, such as the theories of the members of the Frankfurter Schule, aims to keep from the Marxism and the ideal of emancipation of the Enlightenment the idea that philosophy should be used as a social critique rather than as a justification and legitimation of the existent order.

disrespect they are victims of in the sphere of primary relationships, the legal sphere and the sphere of esteem. Women indeed suffer from gendered types of misrecognition such as rape, sexual harassment or gendered discrimination. And because of those different forms of disrespect, they would be unable to fully participate in the public life. In addition, Honneth's theory might even provide indications as for women's emancipation and perspectives for social change. His idea that experiences of disrespect can trigger the necessary negative feelings to engage in political struggles is particularly relevant. Therefore, I will argue that Axel Honneth's theory of recognition is relevant to analyse women's issues, especially when it comes to understand their low engagement in the public sphere. To support this claim, I will analyse Honneth's theory of recognition in the light of the works of feminist political theorists whose interests were related to the issues of recognition and to topics related to the public sphere. Iris Young's feminist works but also Seyla Benhabib's researches will be central.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will explain to what extent Axel Honneth's theory is relevant to understand the gap between men and women's participation. I will first recall the conditions in which women were excluded from the public sphere. I will especially use Habermas' history of the rise of the public sphere to show how this space has been defined as a 'male' space of reason[14]. It is fundamental to recall that the constitution of the public sphere relegated women in the private domain and defined gender relations as beyond the scope of justice. Though women succeeded with the different feminist waves in contesting their exclusion and in entering the public sphere, they are still less involved than men in that sphere. It is to explain this weak engagement that Honneth's theory is fundamental. I will claim that his theory of recognition allows understanding and criticizing the ideal of impartiality and the standpoint of the 'generalized' other that hinders women's participation in the public sphere. Because of its inter-subject nature, it even allows overcoming this standpoint and making a step toward the viewpoint of the 'particular other', which proposes a more relational and contextual vision of morality.

In the second chapter, this inter-subjective recognition will be analysed. I will argue that it is both a vehicle of emancipation and of power. Honneth perfectly understands the stakes of recognition; he defines recognition as the condition of participation to the public

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[14] See: Habermas, Jürgen, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (transl. Th. Burger), Cambridge, MIT Press, 1991, pp. 1-56

life, and thus as an opportunity for women to emancipate. He highlights well how love-based, right-based and merit-based recognitions are necessary to fully engage in the public sphere. However, he does not really grasp that recognition can also work as a regulatory practice. He seems to ignore its ambivalent effects. Though he shows the emancipatory potential of recognition for women, he does not see its negative counterpart. Therefore, I will support Fraser's concurrent model of recognition and argue that misrecognition should be understood as status subordination. This way only, recognition can be defined as an issue of justice.

In the last chapter, I will show how Honneth's theory allows moving from women's experiences of disrespect to their perspectives of social change. Because women lack recognition in the three spheres of recognition, as they are victims of gendered types of disrespect, they are supposedly unable to fully engage in the public realm. However, Honneth's theory gives indications about the way in which they could leave their paralysing situation. He explains how experiences of disrespect, if they occur in the legal sphere or in the sphere of esteem, trigger moral feelings that could lead women to engage in a political struggle aiming at obtaining more equality between men and women. Though this theory explains the dynamic of social conflicts and offers opportunities of social changes, there is still one point that I will contest. Contrary to Honneth's intuition, experiences of disrespect in the sphere of primary relationships can also provoke the emergence of moral feelings. Therefore, the family really is a field of moral dispute.

# Chapter 1

# Honneth's theory of mutual recognition: a helpful tool to understand women's low engagement in the public sphere

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While women were at the beginning excluded from the public sphere, they finally succeed in entering that space and in claiming equal rights. But despite this fact, their engagement in the public space is still lower than that of male citizens. Thanks to his theory of mutual recognition, Axel Honneth helps understanding this gap between men and women's participation and going beyond the male vision of the public sphere.

## Part 1: From exclusion to the low engagement of women in the public sphere

The public sphere emerged in early modern Europe as a male sphere of reasoning from which women were excluded. They were relegated in the private sphere, while gender relations were considered as personal matters. Thanks to the three feminist waves, women succeed in contesting this exclusion and in obtaining equal rights. However, they are still less involved than men in the public space.

### a) The rise of a public sphere defined as "masculine"

The public sphere arose as a sphere of reasoning. As reason was historically defined as a masculine quality, the public realm has developed as a 'male' space.

### The public sphere: a space of reasoning

The public sphere set up as the place where rational discussions unfold. In his early writing: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* Habermas relates the story of

the rise of this public sphere of reasoning. He explains how this sphere developed in several institutions like free press. At the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the first journals appeared. They were journals targeting the new educated class - the "bourgeois" - who started occupying a central position within the public[1]. Furthermore, the public sphere grew in the French Salons, English coffeehouses and German *Tischgesellschaften* and *Sprachgesellschaften*. While only men were admitted in the coffeehouses and in the German *Gesellschaften*, the French Salons were essentially shaped by women[2]. Though they were legally excluded from the public space, women still had their input in that space of debate:

> "Women and dependents were factually and legally excluded from the political public sphere, whereas female readers as well as apprentices and servants often took a more active part in the literary public sphere than the owners of private property and family heads themselves[3]".

Those bodies gathered a combination of unproductive aristocracy, eminent writers, artists or scientists with the bourgeoisie of finance and administration. Aristocrats and bourgeois without regard of their status discussed matters of public concerns. At that time, the noble society separated itself more and more from the court. Their encounter with bourgeois intellectuals created a bridge between the old form of publicity – the courtly one – and the new one that is to say the one of the bourgeois public sphere. The public use of reason was thus rooted in the art of rational-critical debate that bourgeois intellectuals had learned from their meetings with courtly noble society. They discovered how to develop argumentation and how to use *öffentliches Räsonnement*[4]. Their aim was to mediate between society and the state, to hold the state responsible to society via the mechanism of publicity. They established as counterweights to absolutist states. The public sphere expanded against the political despotism practiced by absolute states and contributed to the establishment of parliamentary and democratic regimes.

Habermas conceives the public sphere as the sphere of private people coming together as a public through the "historically unprecedented[5]" public use of their reason. In the public sphere, the participants have to deliberate as if they were equal and about matters of public concerns. The public sphere is open to all men who are willing to act together. Just as in the

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[1] Habermas, Jürgen, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, p. 21
[2] Ibid., p. 33
[3] Ibid, p. 56
[4] Ibid, Chapter 5 "Institutions of the Public Sphere"
[5] Ibid, p. 27

Aristotelian or Arendtian definition of the public sphere, appearance is fundamental. Each participant tries to manifest himself, primarily in speech to others. Being able to persuade others is fundamental to have a rational-critical and unconstrained debate. Hence, the public sphere opposes the private realm that encompasses both the intimate and the private spheres. On one side, the intimate sphere is the core of the private sphere; it corresponds to the bourgeois nuclear family. Contrary to the public sphere, this sphere is hierarchical and defined as patriarchal. In this space of conjugal family, privatized individuals view themselves as persons capable of entering into "purely human" relations with one another. Privatized individuals are "psychologically interested in what was "human", in self-knowledge, and in empathy[6]". They care about their personal feelings and individuality. They are independent from the public space and even from the private sphere of their economic activity. On the other side, the private sphere refers to this market economy and its activities[7]. Emotions and personal issues have a main role to play in this private realm, though they were banned from the 'masculine' public sphere of reasoning.

**Reason: a historically 'male' quality**

While the public sphere arose as the space of reason, this notion of reason has been associated with the one of 'masculinity'. The early modern prejudices added to the constitution of a sphere of discourse that ban women from the public sphere contributed to such an association.

In the 19th century, the ideal of respectability and virtue dominated the bourgeois morality. Beauty was disembodied and desexualized. Respectability referred to norms that repressed sexuality, bodily functions and emotional expression. Women, because of their childrearing and domestic tasks, were strongly associated with body and emotions. They were thus considered as irrational, prone to degeneracy and vice. They were seen as a subversive force within the political order[8]. Thus, they had to stay under the rule of a respectable man who embodies rationality[9]. Mary Ryan for instance, explains how women's sexuality is censored and controlled more severely than that of men. She shows that in Irish novels, sex scenes were always described from a male point of view, while female sexuality was silenced

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[6] Ibid, p. 50
[7] Ibid, p. 51
[8] Pateman, Carole, *The Disorder of Women. Democracy, Feminism and Political theory*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1989, p. 18
[9] Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 129

and considered as a sin[10]. Consequently, women were often identified as passive and defensive and men as active and aggressive.

Hegel's theory, which will be later reformulated by Honneth in his *Struggle for recognition*, is a good example to illustrate those early modern prejudices. He assigned men and women to their traditional sex roles: "he codifies gender-specific differences as aspects of a rational ontology that is said to reflect the deep structure of *Geist*[11]". Women here embody the principle of particularity, immediacy, naturalness and substantiality, while men are linked to the universality, mediacy, freedom and subjectivity. Men and women are spiritually different. On one hand, men inhabit both spheres. They are able to conquer the public space through activity and freedom; they are concerned with the State and work in the 'external world'. On the other hand, women are "incapable of the spiritual struggle and diremption (*Entzweiung*) which characterize the lives of men[12]." They are excluded from political activities.

Hegel conceives the public realm of the state as expressing impartiality and universality as against the partiality and substance of desire. As this dichotomy refers to the distinction public-private and men-women, this claim of universal reason has thus been juxtaposed against feminine emotionality. It suggests that women lacked the sense of rationality necessary to participate in the public debate, as they are irrational. It thus requires their exclusion from the public sphere: "women are constitutively excluded hinges on the seemingly irreconcilable opposition between the universality of the public and the particularity of the private[13]". Therefore, the association of the notions of reason and masculinity helped justifying men's monopoly of the public sphere[14].

**The concept of reason in Habermas' theory of communicative action and Honneth's account**

After *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas kept studying the dynamics of the public sphere. In the *Theory of communicative action*, he performed a

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[10] Ryan, Mary, "A Feminism of Their Own?: Irish Women's History and Contemporary Irish Women's Writing", *Estudios Irlandeses*, Number 5 (2010), *Part:* "Sexual experiences"

[11] Benhabib, Seyla, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, Routledge: first edition, 1994, p. 245

[12] Ibid., p. 247

[13] Dean, Jodi, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics*, p. 85

[14] Landes, Joan B., "The public and the private sphere: a Feminist reconsideration", in: *Feminists read Habermas: gendering the subject of discourse*, New-York: Routledge, 1995, p. 104

synthesis between Marx and Weber and a differentiation between 'system' and 'lifeworld' that results in the differentiation between public and private. He carried out a linguistic turn and reconstructed the concept of reason. He set out to develop a concept of rationality that would no longer be tied to the subjectivist and individualistic premises of modern philosophy and social theory. He grounded reason in an emancipatory communicative act. He defines moral autonomy in terms of communicative rationality and understands language as the essential component of society. The citizens have to formulate rational argument that can be understood by all their dialogue partners. This way, he tries to model a 'power-free' discussion. He locates justice in the institutionalization of reflective, public discourse. The conditions of practical discourse here require that the participants respect one another as competent and truthful speakers, recognize the worthiness of each other to raise issues and claims, and understand each other as responsible agents. The State has to be neutral between all citizens and their different conceptions of the good. Habermas especially values communication, owing to the fact that he considers it as the only way to reach democratic agreement. He defines communication as a process of achieving mutual understandings that triggers social integration and solidarity. He underlines that it is through this inter-subjective process that people form their ego-identities.

Though he models impartiality as the condition for conducting a 'power-free' discussion, Habermas seems to offer the best direction for developing a conception of normative reason that does not seek the unity of a transcendent impartiality. Habermas bases rationality on the experience of discussion. This experience of discussion is an internal learning process that allows each participant in the public sphere to learn how to develop a rational argumentation. However, during this experience of discussion, desires and feelings can also be rationally articulated and understood just as facts about the world, arguments or norms. Therefore, Iris Young sees in Habermas' theory of communicative ethics the beginning of a critique of impartial reason that opposes reason to desire and affectivity. She characterizes Habermas' concept of reason as 'deontological.[15]' Nevertheless, to certain extent, he implicitly reproduces an opposition between reason and desire as he "devalues and ignores the expressive and bodily aspects of communication.[16]"

Axel Honneth was well aware of Habermas' theory of communicative action. He even leans on this theory to define his own vision of the public sphere. However, according to

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[15] Young, Iris Marion, "Impartiality and the Civic Public: Some implications of feminist critiques of moral and political theory", in: Praxis International 3, Section 3
[16] Ibid., p. 393

Honneth, the power-free context defined by Habermas is not enough to participate in a rational discussion on an equal footing. He claims that one also needs certain assurances in terms of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem to freely participate in the public sphere. These are acquired and claimed inter-subjectively in the three spheres of recognition. These are necessary to be fully included in the sphere of dialogue and debate. Therefore, women should benefit from self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem to leave the private domain where they are relegated.

**b) The relegation of women in the private domain**

Feminist critics of the public sphere seek to denounce the relegation of women in the private domain by showing the arbitrariness of such a relegation. This way, they can try to put gender relations under the scope of justice.

**Feminist critiques of the public sphere**

Mainly in the last decade of the 20th century, feminists identified the limits of contemporary theories of the public sphere, especially the flaws of Habermas' work. They emphasized the necessity to enhance women's access and participation in that space. They had "perhaps, the largest impact upon today's conceiving of the public sphere[17]".

First of all, they contested the exclusion principle. They argued that the traditional distinction between citizen and non-citizen was doubled by gender exclusion rules such as 'masculinity versus femininity[18]'. They pointed out that "the full utopian potential of the bourgeois conception of the public sphere was never realized in practice[19]", as this sphere was not accessible to all as it was supposed to be. Feminists suggested that exclusionary operations were essential to liberal public spheres, that it was a constitutive feature of the bourgeois public sphere:

> "Women of all classes and ethnicities were excluded from official political participation precisely on the basis of ascribed gender status, while plebeian men were formally excluded by property qualifications[20]".

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[17] Cuceu Codruta Liana, "An overview of the feminist critiques of the public sphere", *European Journal of Science and Theology v8 n3* (September 2012), p. 223
[18] Ibid., p. 227
[19] Fraser, N. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", in: *Social Text*, No.25/26 (1990), p. 59
[20] Ibid., p. 63

Then, feminists contested the presumption that it is possible for all interlocutors to deliberate as if they were equals. On the opposite, they affirmed that social equality is a necessary condition for political democracy. It is one of the main points of Nancy Fraser, who explains that discursive interaction within the bourgeois public sphere was governed by protocols of style and decorum, which highlighted social inequality[21]. We actually have to contest the fact that the debate in the public sphere is linguistically transparent. Inequalities have influence on the ability to express in public; "some citizens are better than others at articulating their arguments in rational, reasonable terms.[22]" In addition, where inequalities persist, deliberative processes tend to operate at the advantage of the dominant group. Hence, deliberation can serve to mask domination as it privileges a certain kind of speech and certain kinds of power.

Moreover, feminists highlight the fact that the notion of public debate as rational deliberative process focussed on topic of common interest has limits. First, because there is no natural common topic. What is of common interest is basically what is recognized as a matter of common concern by the participants in the public sphere. The second reason is that the claim that private interests should be ruled out has historically been used to restrict the universe of legitimate public contestation. It excluded some issues by personalizing them, often at the advantage of the dominant group[23]. For instance, considering wife battering as a personal matter excludes this issue by personalizing it and serves to reproduce gender dominance. We will come back to that example later.

Furthermore, feminists argue that to allow a widening of contestation, we have to end up with the 'single' and compact male public sphere, such as defined by Habermas. According to Nancy Fraser especially, we have to take into account non-bourgeois competing public spheres and promote the emergence of a multiplicity of publics. Subaltern counter-publics, such as the ones formed by women, workers or people of colour might help expanding the discursive space, even if they are weak publics, that is to say publics which promote extra-parliamentary debates focusing on opinion-formation. It seems that they have an emancipatory and democratic potential. Those weak publics are opposed to the strong

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[21] Ibid., p. 63
[22] Fiig, Christina, "A powerful, opinion-forming public? Rethinking the Habermasian public sphere in a perspective of feminist theory and citizenship", *Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory v12 n3* (December 2011),p. 297
[23] Fraser, N. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", p. 73

public, which hosts parliamentary debates and lead to decision-making[24].

In addition, feminists criticize the oppositional categories used to define the public sphere as masculine. They demystified the notion of 'male' subject of reason, contested the idea of an autonomous, self-reflective subject capable of acting on the principle of universality[25]. They showed their scepticism toward the claims of transcendent reason[26]. Though Habermas' model of the public sphere has been the target of many feminist reserves, his theory of communication offers a way to develop a conception of normative reason that would not oppose reason to desire and affectivity, as he bases rationality on the experience of discussion. He considers that participation in the public sphere is based on an internal learning process [27]. Hence, it is by participating in the public sphere that women could gain recognition and leave the intimate sphere where they are arbitrarily assigned.

## Women are arbitrarily assigned to the intimate sphere

> "Public-private split has historically encompassed a gender bias and, hence, what was at stake was to show, to demonstrate how neglected, even subordinate, were both the political and the social condition of women throughout the ages[28]."

One of the main contributions of feminist political theory in the western tradition is to have questioned the line between public and private. This definition of those two spheres has been used to assign women to the intimate sphere; it has an ideological content.

Feminist political theory helps highlighting the gender hierarchies in each of the two realms by following from an historical perspective the changes that occurred in defining the public and private spheres. The first codification of the distinction public/private occurred during the period when the public sphere was conceived as "a space of public, respectively of social or rather political performance of men[29]". During this period, the public sphere was designed as opposed to the private sphere assigned for women. At that time, private sphere referred to the domain of the household where women were confined. The second codification is linked to the reinterpretation and transformation of the roles assumed by men and women. The private sphere stopped being only the domain of household. It took an economic sense

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[24] Ibid., p. 70
[25] Benhabib, Seyla, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, p. 212
[26] Ibid., p. 213
[27] Young, Iris Marion, "Impartiality and the Civic Public: Some implications of feminist critiques of moral and political theory", p. 391
[28] Cuceu Codruta Liana, An overview of the feminist critiques of the public sphere, p.224
[29] Ibid., p.225

related to the notions of private property and market economy. The notion of private autonomy positioned bourgeois males in the public sphere of speech and action, and women in the intimate one[30]. From then on, women were also deprived of a control of the private sphere[31]. Thus, women were confined to typically female spheres of activity like housework, reproduction and care for the young and the elderly. They were kept off both the public agenda in the liberal state and the market economy[32].

The public-private line is mostly ideological. As Nancy Fraser underlines, the distinctions between 'public' and 'private' are not simply straightforward designations. They are "cultural classifications and rhetorical labels[33]" that have been used to relegate women in the private sphere by qualifying their claims as linked to 'personal issues'. For instance, 'wife beating' was a long time considered a private matter. It served to reproduce men's dominance over women. In the 1970s, feminist activists were the minority thinking that it was a matter of common concern. They renamed the practice of 'wife beating' with a term drawn from criminal law: 'wife battering' and created a new kind of public discourse. This way, they politicized this depoliticized experience and succeeded in establishing domestic violence as a legitimate political issue[34]. Hence, they deduced that issues relative to women were arbitrarily assigned to the private sphere. However, a main difficulty remains. The members of the subordinated group, here women, have often internalized those interpretations that work to their disadvantage. Therefore, to secure men-women equality, we need to challenge this public-private dualism. Also, it is fundamental to contest the fact that gender relations are beyond the scope of justice.

**Gender relations and the sphere of justice**

If any theory of publicity, public space and dialogue must suppose a distinction between public and private, it seems that this distinction is translated into the slip between justice and the good life. On one side, justice is linked to the public sphere and its debate on political justice. On the other, the question of the good life pertains to the nature of our

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[30] Flemming, Marie, "Women and the "Public use of Reason", in: *Feminists read Habermas: gendering the subject of discourse*, New-York: Routledge, 1995, p. 128

[31] Cuceu Codruta Liana, "An overview of the feminist critiques of the public sphere", p.225

[32] Benhabib, Seyla, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, p. 108

[33] Fraser, Nancy, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", p. 73

[34] Fraser, Nancy, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p. 176

relationships of kinship, love, friendship and sex. The good life thus refers to "personal" issues and to a private sphere that falls outside of the realm of justice. Consequently, if we follow this approach, men embody justice and women the good life, as they are assigned to the private sphere.

The good life has been excluded from moral theory with modernity. While the Aristotelian-Christian worldview saw the good life as defined ontologically with reference to man's place in the cosmos, modernity emancipated morality from this cosmology: "justice alone becomes the centre of moral theory when bourgeois individuals in a disenchanted universe face the task of creating the legitimate basis of the social order themselves[35]". The transition to modernity privatized the self's relation to the cosmos and places gender relations out of moral theory. However, justice as a key concept to analyse political, social or even personal relation was introduced only with John Rawls and his *Theory of justice*. Referring to justice thus implies referring to this specific type of analysis with a Kantian moral tenor, opposed to the Hegelian ethics used by Honneth.

This transition to modernity raises one main issue; it puts the injustices women are victims of beyond the scope of justice. It thus takes us away from the ability to acknowledge this unfairness. For instance, "the rules governing the sexual division of labour in the family have been placed beyond the scope of justice.[36]" Idealizing concept like privacy or intimacy does not allow seeing that women's work within the private sphere, like care for the children or the running of the household, has been unremunerated. Consequently, the removal of gender relations from moral theory has been pointed out by different feminist movements, as lying at the origin first of the exclusion, then of the weak presence of women in the public sphere.


**c) From the exclusion to the weak presence of women in the public sphere: the role of feminist movements**

Thanks to the past feminist actions, women are not confined to the private sphere anymore. The first-wave feminism led to an equalization of men and women's rights in liberal democracies. The second-wave allowed the affirmation of a female identity. However, women are still less engaged than men in the public sphere within Western society. They are

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[35] Benhabib, Seyla, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, p. 154
[36] Ibid., p. 108

less involved in politics; they make less speech and take less the floor than men in the public realm. It is important to define the role of the third-wave feminism in line with this problem, to see how the idea of inter-subjective recognition became fundamental when it comes to gender issues.

## The first-wave feminism: equalizing men and women's conditions

The first-wave feminism is a humanist feminism that aimed at equalizing men and women conditions and at eliminating gender differences. It occurred during the 18th and 19th centuries. It demanded the recognition of women's capacity to reason and their inclusion as free and equal voice in the public debate. This feminism is a struggle to acquire an education, the right of property and the right to vote. It arose during the French Revolution, because the freedoms, rights and legal equality acquired by men did not affect women who were excluded from the public sphere. Since then, they started expressing their voice collectively. Olympe de Gouges was one of those early feminists claiming that French women should be given the same rights as men. In 1791, she wrote the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female citizen*, which contains the famous sentence: "a woman has the right to mount the scaffold; she must possess equally the right to mount the speaker's platform[37]". She challenged men-women inequality and contested men's authority over their wives.

Although this claim for equality bore its fruits at the beginning of the 20th century, when most of the European women obtained the right to vote, the consequences of this politics are mitigated. This demand of equality led to a "gender blind" discourse where power relations have been mistreated[38]. Owing to its purpose of equalization, this theory took feminists away from the ability to consider historical determinants and social construction at the roots of women's difference. If women are rational, autonomous subject like men, why are they still different[39]?

## The second-wave feminism: defining women's identity

The second-wave feminism aimed at defining women's identity. It started in the early 1960s in the USA, before spreading out in the Western world. It broadened the debate on

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[37] De Gouges Olympe, '*Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female citizen'*, Article X.
[38] Benhabib, Seyla, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, p. 109
[39] Dean, Jodi, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics*, p. 63

feminism to cover issues within the workplace and the family including sexuality. It also drew attention to domestic violence and marital rape, sought a change of divorce law. This second-wave feminism emerged at the same time as other minorities' movements, such as the Black movement. Most of those movements had a huge emancipatory potential. They "aspired not only to assert hitherto denied identities but to bring a richer, lateral dimension to battles over the redistribution of wealth and power as well[40]." They were using political arguments that focused on the interest and perspectives of their own groups. They aimed at securing the political freedom of their marginalized groups within Western societies. Thus, they were involved in identity politics. They tried to find in the shared experience of injustice elements to constitute a group identity. Their main point was the following: "I want you to recognize me in my difference: I want you to see who I am in my need and particularity.[41]" They sought understanding their distinctiveness to challenge the dominant group's definition of power relations within the society.

Feminism thereby appeared as more than the extension of liberal principles and rights to women. The second-wave feminism tended to reify definitions of femaleness that were rejected during the first wave feminism. This feminism turned into a gynocentric feminism that tried to understand the activities and values associated with femininity[42]. It was a critique of the notion of modern subject, a denunciation of the fact that the political subject was defined as masculine. However, because of this search for identity, the second-wave feminism's politics of rights and equality turned into a celebration of feminine specificity. This movement was often criticized for being a reductive feminism that ignored the voices of women of colour, working-class women and lesbians. It seems that it was based on the reductive presumption that the experiences of white women could stand for all women. Postcolonial feminism emerged against the whitewashed feminism of the second-wave, arguing that this movement colonized the feminist movement, while it was unable to deal with cultural differences. They argued that even if most of the cultures are patriarchal, any generalization about women or gender inequalities should be rejected as essentialist:

> "Whatever the quality of the evidence presented or the strength of the argument made, the mere suggestion, if made by a First World Feminist, that women and girls in cultures other than our own are disadvantaged or oppressed by elements of their own cultures is regarded as offensive cultural imperialism.[43]"

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[40] Fraser, Nancy, 'Rethinking Recognition', *New Left Review*, 3 (2000), p. 107
[41] Dean, Jodi, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics*, p. 51
[42] Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p. 162
[43] Okin, Susan Moller, "Feminism and Multiculturalism: Some Tensions", *Ethics*, Vol. 108, N°4 (Jul. 1998), p. 665

In addition, Judith Butler especially points out the need to base feminism on women's identity. She claims that this need has prevented an investigation into the "multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of 'women' are constructed.[44]" She considers that even the notion of gender identity is problematical, as it is a culturally constructed difference. From then on, how to define women's status after identity politics? Could it be possible to define a feminine identity that would not be an organized set of expectations?

**The task of the third-wave: defining women's status after identity politics**

What is called the third-wave feminism started in the early 1990s. This movement partially arose as an answer to the failure of identity politics. It seeks to include different groups of women with their diverse set of identities. New feminists challenged the legitimacy of "woman" defined as an essentialist category of collective identity[45]. Therefore, they rejected identity politics in favour of a politics of diversity, more sensitive to group and in-group differences. They wonder whether there is a universally shared female experience and whether it is possible to determinate a female gender identity. This third-wave is not a collective movement and cannot be defined as a group with common claims. This wave is actually a really diverse and individualistic feminist wave. It usually integrates elements of queer theory, women of colour's movements, ecofeminism, post-colonial theory, post-structuralism, post-modernism etc. It thus breaks with the paternalistic, bourgeois perspective on the family and the public sphere. Its main idea is that this last sphere should have open and transparent borders:

> "A democratic public should provide mechanisms for the effective recognition and representation of the distinct voices and perspectives of those of its constituent groups that are oppressed or disadvantaged[46]"

Those new feminists want to abolish gender role expectations; they reject communal and standardized objectives such as the gender binary. If they benefit from the successes of the two first feminist waves, they still feel a need for further changes. They aim at fighting

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[44] Dean, Jodi, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics*, p. 66

[45] Borren, Marieke, "Feminism as Revolutionary Practice: From Justice and the Politics of Recognition to Freedom", *Hypatia v28 n1* (February 2013), *p.* 199

[46] Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p. 184

stereotypes against women both in the medias and in the common language. Though women obtained equal rights and succeeded in attracting the attention on the violence they are victim of, they still need better equality on some levels to be able to engage in the public sphere as much as men. What is now central is to focus on individual identity and inter-personal relationships. If women should be recognized as responsible agents, they should also be respected as competent and truthful speakers. Their worthiness to raise claims has to be acknowledged[47]. The self is henceforth viewed as constructed, formed through multiple interconnections with others. Consequently, the concept of recognition such as defined by Axel Honneth in his *Struggle for recognition* becomes pertinent. Because of its inter-subjective nature, it allows understanding the construction of the self through relationships with others. Therefore, this theory provides the tools to understand women's actual status within Western societies. It helps explaining their low engagement in the public sphere.

## Part 2: Explaining the weak presence of women in the public sphere with Honneth's theory of recognition

Understanding the weak presence of women in the public sphere implies having a look at the deep roots of their exclusion. One of those roots and probably the most important is the prominent ideal, which defines morality as impartiality. It is because this impartial ideal is essential when it comes to explain women's relegation in the private sphere that morality is the focus of the discussion on women in the public sphere. This impartial ideal asks all citizens to act from the standpoint of the 'generalized other', that is to say from an impersonal and impartial point of view. Axel Honneth, with his theory of mutual recognition, helps going beyond this ideal and making a step toward the standpoint of the 'particular other'.

### a) A critique of the standpoint of the 'generalized other'

An analysis of the Kohlberg-Gillian controversy is relevant to understand the flaws of the ideal of impartiality. It allows highlighting that though this ideal is supposed to be neutral, it is linked to 'male' qualities.

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[47] Dean, Jodi, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics*, p. 68

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**The Kohlberg-Gilligan controversy: the starting point of the critique of the 'generalized other'**

The Kohlberg-Gilligan controversy is the starting point of the critique of the 'generalized other'. At the origin of this controversy, we find the work of the famous psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg. At the end of the 1950s, he expanded the work of Jean Piaget on morality and developed an ethics of justice. According to this ethics of justice, morality is based on the principle of universality and thus on abstract principles of justice. Kohlberg defined six developmental stages of the moral reasoning that are grouped in three levels: pre-conventional morality, conventional morality and post-conventional morality. To reach the last level, one had to be able to answer to different moral dilemmas. From his experiences, he deduced that on average women reached a lower level of moral development than men: "girls are diminished and devalued at the conventional level[48]". They were less able to reason according to the principle of universality that is to say from the viewpoint of the 'generalized' other.

Opposed to this ethics of justice, the feminist philosopher Carol Gilligan suggested the need for a more differential account of moral development that includes the capacity to recognize the other as a subject deserving of equal respect[49]. She proposed an 'ethics of care' in *A Different Voice* (1982). She claimed that female psychology differs from the one of men, because women are more inclined towards care and responsibility to others. In the process of caring for others, they become aware of the contextually relative nature of moral judgment. Gilligan argued that women's moral judgments are more relational and contextual; they take into account relationships and narratives. She pointed out that women more have the tendency to take the standpoint of the 'particular other[50]'. Therefore, Gilligan challenged universalistic moral theories and tried to expand the definition of the moral domain. She suggested a new understanding of justice by linking it with the notion of care. It seems that she offers ways to understand universality through particularity.

Gilligan questioned the ideal of the autonomous self in the light of the experiences of

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[48] Dean, Jodi, "Discourse in Different voices", in: *Feminists read Habermas: gendering the subject of discourse*, New-York: Routledge, 1995, p. 208
[49] Dean, Jodi, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics*, p. 108
[50] Benhabib, Seyla, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, Part 2, Chapter 5, "The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controversy"

women and revealed the blind spot of the use of the neutral, third-person or observer perspective[51]. She underlined the fact that sexual differences disrupt the neutrality of this observer perspective. She showed that this perspective concealed male domination: "under familial, social, and cultural conditions where men dominate, calling the third person "neutral" occludes its male gender.[52]" Gilligan therefore challenged the rules of the traditional public sphere, claiming that the ideal of impartiality is a masculine ideal that we should overcome.

**A critique of the masculine ideal of impartiality**

In the public sphere, actors are conceived as 'generalized others'. They are considered as rational beings all entitled to the same rights and duties; they are supposed to have the ability to reason impartially[53]. The notion of veil of ignorance developed by John Rawls in his *Theory of justice* is a good example to illustrate how this ideal of impartiality can be set up in practice. This thought experiment gives a method to evaluate the justice of institutional arrangements. The different participants define the different positions and the distribution of rights and resources for the society they will be living in with a veil of ignorance that prevents them from knowing their status in this society:

> "No one knows his place in society, his class position or social status; nor does he know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence and strength, and the like[54]".

The veil of ignorance mentioned here originates from the procedural theories that emerged during the Enlightenment. They yielded an outcome that would be impartial and therefore just. They promoted an abstract and transcendent reason; all rules and conditions constituting the procedure should be abstract and formal enough to be valid everywhere.

The *Theory of Justice* is an attempt to model impartial judgement. However, though we can reproduce this experiment, it seems that the ideal of impartiality is merely a utopia. In practice, no one can adopt a purely impersonal and impartial viewpoint, separated from any particular context[55]. The 'other' as an age, a gender and a race; it cannot be an abstract person. He or she acts in a situation according to his actual possibilities. To a certain extent, it seems

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[51] Ibid., p. 190
[52] Dean, Jodi, "Discourse in Different voices", p. 213
[53] Benhabib, Seyla, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, p. 158
[54] Rawls, John, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Revised edition, 1999, p. 11
[55] Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p. 130

that this ideal imposes one definitional identity and represses differences. First, it denies the particularity of one defined[56] situation. Secondly, as it requires a detached judgment, it does not take into account the heterogeneity of feelings. Thirdly, it reduces the plurality of moral subjects to only one subjectivity[57]. Therefore, the impartial point of view generates exclusion. As Jodi Dean explains, "universality is thought to exclude the difference of the other[58]". The desire to construct an impartial moral reason does not generate unity but a dichotomy between universal and particular, reason and passion, public and private. The impartial ideal shuts out bodily and affective aspects of human existence from the public sphere; it claims that the rationality of the state depends on containing needs and desires in the private realm. Therefore, it is important to reject the whole notion of impartiality as being 'male'.

The ideal of impartiality should be understood as a regulative ideal, which serves ideological functions. It imposes the point of view of privileged groups, in our case the masculine point of view, into a universal position[59]. The "gendered nature of the cognitivist presumptions of universalism[60]" has to be denounced, as ideals of liberalism and contract theories are deeply marked by masculine biases. The point of view of the 'generalized other' seems to refer more to an organized set of masculine expectations than to a neutral position. It refuses to take into account the gender subtext of our societies while "the public conception of the self as the equal and abstract bearer of rights from which liberalism proceeds is belied by the inequality, asymmetry and domination permeating the private identity of this self as a gendered subject[61]." It is thus necessary to challenge and look beyond the ideal of impartiality and the one of the 'generalized other'. To secure gender equality, we have to move toward the conception of the 'concrete other'. Axel Honneth's theory of recognition is a really helpful tool to accomplish this change.


**b) The theory of mutual recognition: a step toward the standpoint of 'particular other'**

Axel Honneth's theory of recognition allows looking beyond the ideal of impartiality. Because of its Hegelian premises and of the importance that it gives to Mead's social

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[57] Ibid., chapter 4: The ideal of impartiality and the civic public, Part: The ideal of impartiality as denying difference
[58] Dean, Jodi, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics*, p. 153
[59] Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p. 112
[60] Dean, Jodi, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics*, p. 145.
[61] Benhabib, Seyla and Cornell Drucilla, "Introduction: Beyond the Politics of Gender", p. 10

psychology, the *Struggle for recognition* proposes to conceive a dialogical model of recognition, where subjects are both 'generalized' and 'particular other'.

In Hegel's theory, the process of realization of the Spirit is linked to the relation of the individual subject with himself, to the institutionalized relationships between subjects and to the reflexive relationships of socialized subjects with the world in general. The Hegelian recognition involves an unavoidable appropriation or assimilation of the other into one's own subjectivity. Axel Honneth uses G. H. Mead's social psychology to socialize Hegel's concept of mutual recognition. This socio-psychologist proposes an inter-subjective conception of human self-consciousness: "a human can only acquire a consciousness of itself to the extent to which it learns to perceive its own action from the symbolically represented second-person perspective[62]." The interaction with and perception of the other thus have a fundamental role for the development of self-consciousness, the 'me'. Individuals can only become aware of themselves in the object position. Autonomy always arises out of inter-subjective relationships. Hence, Honneth describes the process of socialization as the internalization of norms of action that results from a generalization of the expectations of all members of society. The purpose of socialization is thus to learn "how to appropriate the norms the 'generalized other[63]'".

However, Mead also evokes a friction between this 'me' and the 'I'. While the 'me' refers to the conventional norms of the generalized other, the 'I' has to be linked with the impulsiveness and creativity of the self. Henceforth, Honneth's inter-subjective recognition does not only recognize one as a generalized other, but also as a particular and autonomous person. What Honneth explains is that the universalization of social norms of the 'generalized other' should be supplemented by an expansion of individual freedom:

> "For, from the perspective that one takes towards oneself in internalizing that sort of 'generalized other', one can only understand oneself as a person with the same characteristics of morally responsible agency that all other members of society possess. By contrast, the 'me' of individual self-realization requires that one be able to understand oneself as a unique and irreplaceable person[64]"

It is therefore fundamental to look beyond the 'generalized other' to strive to be also recognized as an autonomous and individual person. Feminist theories, such as the theory of Axel Honneth support the adoption of the standpoint of the 'concrete other'. Seyla Benhabib for instance reframes moral respect as the mediation between the generalized and the concrete

[62] Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts,* p. 75
[63] Ibid., p. 78
[64] Ibid., p. 87

other. She considers that this 'concrete' other "requires us to view each and every rational being as an individual with a concrete history, identity and affective-emotional constitution.[65]" The adoption of this situated hypothetical perspective allows setting up a dialogical model of understanding[66], which looks like the model of mutual recognition defined by Honneth. The adoption of the viewpoint of the 'concrete other' supports feminist claims for different reasons. First, it supports Carol Gilligan's claim that women are not less able than men to reach an important level of moral development, though they might be defined as more emotional. It thus promotes the 'female' vision of morality. Secondly, it allows rejecting the ideal of impartiality that has contributed to women's association with the 'particular' and their exclusion from the public sphere.

According to the dialogical model of understanding promoted by Habermas in his theory of communicative action and Honneth after him, reason "does not mean universal principles dominating particulars, but more concretely means giving reasons, the practical stance of being reasonable, willing to talk and listen.[67]" The process of argumentation and exchange is here fundamental. Participants in the dialogue have to be able to take the observer position, which enables them to take accountability for others whom they risk excluding. This way, they could achieve a consensus through an 'illocutionary' action. An illocutionary action is an action during which 'alter' and 'ego' transform themselves by understanding each other. When they talk, those 'alter' and 'ego' disclose new meanings and understandings in relation to justice. They reach an agreement about the normative content of the claim of recognition. What deserves recognition is defined through a dialogical and democratic process. One has to convince one's partners of dialogue that his claim deserves recognition. Language thus acts an "internal mediation of action[68]", as it allows this inter-subjective relation of dialogue. In this relation of dialogue, individual desires and feelings can also be rationally articulated and understood. They are not excluded from the public sphere anymore. This ethics thus embeds our existence as gendered and embodied persons in its conception of the moral point of view[69].

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[65] Benhabib, Seyla, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, p. 159

[66] Dean, Jodi, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics*, p. 34

[67] Young, Iris Marion, "Impartiality and the Civic Public: Some implications of feminist critiques of moral and political theory", p. 391

[68] Lara, Maria Pia, *Moral Textures: Feminist narratives in the Public Sphere*, London: University of California Press, 1998, p. 68

[69] Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p. 158

Honneth's theory of recognition is thus a helpful tool to understand the current low engagement of women in the public sphere. Though women succeed in contesting their exclusion from the public sphere and their relegation in the private domain, they still have trouble getting involved in a public space that has been designed by men. The ideals of impartiality and of the 'generalized other' remain main obstacles. The theory of mutual recognition is particularly important regard to this issue, as it allows moving toward the standpoint the 'particular other'. Therefore, mutual recognition appears as a vehicle of emancipation for women. Similarly, the lack of recognition is at the origin of their subordination.

# Chapter 2

# Mutual recognition: a vehicle of both emancipation and subordination

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Mutual recognition is a vehicle of both emancipation and subordination for women. On one hand, love-based, rights-based and merit-based recognition allows women to fully engage in the public sphere. It is the condition *sine qua none* to participate to the public life. On the other hand, recognition is also a regulatory practice and a vehicle of power. Hence, misrecognition should be conceived as a status subordination and recognition as an issue of justice.

## Part 1: The inter-subjective recognition as a condition of participation to the public life

Honneth defines recognition as the fundamental condition of participation to the public life. One has to obtain Recognition in the sphere of primary relationships, in the legal sphere and in the sphere of esteem to gain the self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem necessary to take part in the public debate. Therefore, recognition has a huge emancipatory potential.

### a) Recognition and participation to the public life

Recognition is a process that leads to the positive expression of self within a community. It is a psychological and social process that might arise after a struggle between two people: 'alter' and 'ego'. This struggle is a moral conflict between the subject and his social environment to transform the symbolic order. It is a tension between collective will and the demand for individuation. According to Honneth, recognition occurs at three levels: in the sphere of primary relationships, in the legal sphere and in the sphere of esteem. All those spheres are crucial to the development of a positive attitude toward oneself. Personal autonomy is "tied to a psychological account of personal development in which we progress

through each stage of recognition[1]". Acquiring those different forms of recognition is hence a long-term trajectory that should lead to the positive expression of individuality[2].

In this sense, recognition is a "process of acquiring identity[3]". Recognition matters to identity because it confers the necessary 'semantic authority' to construct one's self-understanding. First, it gives the individual access to a community, which provides different forms of expression. Thanks to those forms of expression, the individual constitutes her self-understanding. Secondly, recognition offers the individual the necessary authority to influence the meanings of those forms of expression. Thirdly, it gives the individual a certain credibility within the community[4]. Owing to this, Honneth poses recognition as the necessary condition to participate in the public sphere: "recognition functions as the correlative concept of inclusion[5]". Thus, women should acquire recognition in the three spheres to be able to engage in the public space. Honneth considers that the overt problem is that of political participation. His theory helps analysing the motivational bases of participation and giving clear, epistemic justifications for democratic decision procedures. The motivational bases of participation originate from the desire for recognition. This desire for recognition is fundamental to individual self-development and connected to moral emotions that constitute the motivating force behind political engagement. Honneth does not define democracy as a simple set of political arrangements. He characterizes democracy as the type of regime that "encourages the development of autonomous citizens who can comprehend the worth of their contributions to social and political processes.[6]"

## b) Love-based recognition

Love-based recognition appeared with the marking off of childhood and the emergence of 'bourgeois' love-marriage. The relationships between men and women were gradually liberated from economic and social pressures; they opened up to the feeling of

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[1] MacQueen, Paddy, *Subjectivity, gender and the struggle for recognition*, p. 29
[2] McNay, Lois, 'The Trouble with Recognition: Subjectivity, Suffering, and Agency', in: *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 26, n°3 (Sept. 2008), p. 273
[3] Lara, Maria Pia, *Moral Textures: Feminist narratives in the Public Sphere*, p. 157
[4] Fiore, Robin N. and Lindemann, Hilde, *Recognition, responsibility, and rights: feminist ethics and social theory*, USA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003, p. 45
[5] Dean, Jodi, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics*, p. 79
[6] Zurn, Christopher F., "Recognition, Redistribution, and Democracy: Dilemmas of Honneth's Critical Social Theory", *European Journal of Philosophy v13 n1* (April 2005), p. 97

mutual recognition[7]. Love relationships have to be understood as the primary relationships constituted by strong emotional attachment. While Hegel only cared about love within family relations, Honneth broadens the definition of love to all primary relationships and considers that those relationships constitute the first stage of reciprocal recognition.

Honneth reinterprets D. Winnicott and J. Benjamin's theory to define love as a balance between independence and attachment. He argues that love relationships first develop between a mother and her newborn. At the beginning, they form a primitive and symbiotic unity; they are absolutely dependent. Then, there is a progressive abandonment of the mother. The child has to acknowledge her as the object of a full-right entity. There is a necessary cognitive acceptance of the independence of the other. Simultaneously, mother and child develop an affective confidence in the permanence of their reciprocal attachment. Hence, love is a particular form of recognition that reminds the secret desire of fusion with someone[8].

Love is the most corporal, material and immediate mode of reciprocal recognition. Loving recognition is an on-going process in which one develops and reinforces self-knowledge and self-confidence. Thanks to love, one can reach the fundamental level of emotional confidence. The inter-subjective experience of love "constitutes the psychological precondition for the development of all further attitudes of self-respect[9]". Thus, this self-confidence is necessary to participate in the public life:

> "For it is only this symbiotically nourished bond, which emerges through mutually desired demarcation, that produces the degree of basic individual self-confidence indispensable for autonomous participation in public life[10]"

Without this self-confidence, an individual cannot have the feeling of security necessary to participate autonomously in the public sphere.

However, there is a flaw in Honneth's theory. He does not seem to see that because this attributive recognition recognizes individuals with reference to their role in the relationships of love, it stresses women's practical exclusion from public sphere. It is owing to the gendered role interpretations in the sphere of primary relationships, that women were not seen as equal participants in political discourse and in the legal sphere.

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[7] Fraser, N. and Honneth A., *Redistribution or Recognition? A political-philosophical Exchange*, p. 139
[8] Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 106
[9] Ibid., p. 107
[10] Ibid., p. 107

## c) Rights-based recognition

The legal recognition of the individual "split off from the hierarchical value order insofar as the individual was in principle to enjoy legal equality vis-à-vis all others[11]." Legal recognition consists in subscribing to the legal system as free and equal beings, recognizing each other as morally responsible. It thus entails understanding each other as bearers of rights.

Honneth defines legal recognition by completing Mead's theory with the one of Hegel. On one hand, Mead attributes a limited normative content to the legal recognition. He considers that each human subject can be bearer of rights if he is recognized as a member of the legal community. He claims that recognition only depends on the development of one's capacity to relate to himself as a morally responsible person. On the other hand, Hegel affirms that the recognition of rights also consists in integrating universalistic moral principles, as the legal system refuses exceptions and privileges. It implies knowing the normative obligations we have towards the others. Using elements of both Mead and Hegel, Honneth arrives at the following vision of recognition:

> "Ego and alter mutually recognize each other as legal persons, in that they share a knowledge of those norms by which their particular community superintends the rights and responsibilities to which they are equally entitled.[12]"

According to Honneth, individuals are considered as legal persons because they possess a capacity for judgment that makes them the equals of all other members. Reason and autonomy are what defines citizens. Therefore, women were excluded from citizenship, because they were denied those capacities of reasoning and acting autonomously[13].

However, because of the numerous struggles to benefit from legal recognition, its field has gradually extended. First, the legal status extended to an ever-increasing number of members of society. If after the Revolution only 'bourgeois' men had the status of citizen, this status now also incorporates workers and women. More and more individuals are treated as full-fledged citizens[14]. Secondly, the legal status gradually broadened regard to its content, owing to the increasing number of legal and subjective demands. Nowadays, the pre-political or economical inequalities are questioned. The civil rights, which protect the person, her property and life from the State, extend to always guarantee more freedom. The political

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[11] Fraser, N. and Honneth A., *Redistribution or Recognition? A political-*philosophical Exchange, p. 140
[12] Honneth, Axel. 'Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on the Theory of Recognition', *Political Theory*, 20:2 (1992), p. 194
[13] Dean, Jodi, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics*, p. 79
[14] Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 118

rights improve to guarantee an increasing participation in the process of public will formation. In addition, the social rights develop to distribute an equitable part in the distribution of elementary goods. From then on, citizenship becomes a process through which individuals and social groups engage in claiming, expanding or losing rights. Rights claims appear as a vehicle for emancipation.

This right-based recognition leads to self-respect. Self-respect means "to have a sense of oneself as a person, that is, as a 'morally responsible' agent, or, more precisely, as someone capable of participating in the sort of public deliberation that Habermas terms 'discursive will-formation.[15]'" Thus, legal recognition ensures the real opportunity to use the universal capacities constitutive of personhood in the public sphere. Nevertheless, Honneth does not really develop this movement of recognition, which goes from the relation to self back to public life[16].

It seems that he cannot develop this movement further, owing to the fact that the right-based recognition also implies to a certain extent the cognitive recognition of the other as individual with personal qualities. Though the right-based recognition is generally independent of the merit-based recognition, it is not the case in certain traditional fields:

> "The recognition of someone as legal person is, to a certain extent, still bound up with the social esteem accorded to individual members of society in light of their social status. The conventional ethical life of such a community constitutes a normative horizon in which the multiplicity of individual rights and duties remains tied to differently valued tasks within a system of cooperation. Legal recognition is thus still situated hierarchically, in terms of the esteem that each individual enjoys as the bearer of a role, and this linkage breaks down only in the course of a historical process that submits legal relations to the requirements of post-conventional morality. [17]"

### d) Merit-based recognition

Even if rights-based and merit-based recognition are linked, we can still find a main difference between them:

> "The central question for legal recognition is how to define this constitutive quality of persons, while the question for social esteem is the constitution of the evaluative frame of reference within which the 'worth' of characteristic traits can be measured.[18]"

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[15] Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. XV
[16] Léchenet, Annie, « La reconnaissance, condition à l'exercice de la citoyenneté... y compris pour les femmes, ou ce que peuvent nous apporter les propositions de Axel Honneth », p. 8
[17] Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 110
[18] Ibid., p. 113

Merit-based recognition differs because it consists in judging abilities and achievements inter-subjectively "according to the degree to which they can help to realize culturally defined values[19]". This last form of recognition aims at answering the individual claim to uniqueness and irreplaceability.

Merit-based recognition should lead to social esteem. While before the rise of liberal democracies, this social esteem was linked to social honour, it is not the case anymore. There existed a universalization of honour into dignity and a privatization of honour into subjectively defined integrity[20]. The former notion of honour thus finds its equivalent in the idea of social prestige and esteem. These prestige and esteem are evidenced in financial compensation and other forms of social status that accrue to individuals on the basis of their contributions to civil society. According to G. H. Mead, it merely develops in the institutionalized world of division of labour. It is a recognition of one's abilities to do well one's job. Consequently, "esteem is a comparative concept that requires that some people be esteemed more highly than others.[21]" This third form of recognition comes with an identification with particular qualities and abilities. To benefit from this merit-based recognition, there is a permanent struggle where groups try to value the capacities linked to their particular way of life and to show their importance for common ends.

Hence, citizenship is no longer exclusively about the struggle for social equality. It also becomes a battle over cultural identity. To a certain extent, this account is problematic. If this recognition of particularity is linked to a battle over cultural identity, how to define social value without imposing the standard of the dominant group? How to promote individuality without imposing normative standards? The problem is that this social recognition takes place in specific circumstances that are regulated by norms entailed in defined social structures. Women for instance, because of the defined social values, had to conform to a set of expectations that men alone established[22]. Therefore, recognition appears as a vehicle power.

## Part 2: Recognition: a vehicle of power

In *The Struggle for recognition*, Honneth explicitly discusses misrecognition and

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[19] Ibid., p. 122
[20] Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 126
[21] MacQueen, Paddy, *Subjectivity, gender and the struggle for recognition*, p. 32
[22] Dean, Jodi, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics*, p. 83

proposes an identity model that conceives it as a form of disrespect. Misrecognition is about denying one's physical integrity, social integrity or dignity. It can disrupt a one's practical relation to self[23]. Misrecognition is thus defined as a psychological harm that restricts one's freedom to act, while recognition is the necessary condition for the development of this freedom. However, given its role and its effects in the sphere of primary relationships, it seems that recognition can also act as a regulatory practice. Thus, we have to criticize Honneth's approach in order to re-define misrecognition as a status subordination and to reconceive recognition as an issue of justice. Only that way, we can strive toward gender equality.

## a) Recognition and power

Though recognition contributes to one's self realization, recognition is not independent from power, especially in love relationships. It is linked to regulatory practices and discourses.

## Recognition and power in the sphere of primary relationships

Honneth emphasizes that love is constituted through struggle. His primary sources for his ontology of recognition are the works of Melanie Klein and Jessica Benjamin's *Bonds of Love*. In Benjamin's account, the love bonds between mother and child arise from a struggle for recognition, which looks like a power struggle for independence. If an infant gains its primary sense of self from parental recognition, his or her egomaniacal tendencies drive him or her to try to control the process of recognition through domination and even destruction of the parent. Though this ontology poses a main problem, which is to know whether it is appropriate to characterize the primal mother-child dyad as struggle or not given that the infant has not reached the level of consciousness necessary to claim for recognition[24], it seems that the mutual exercise of power is the relational condition under which someone can develop himself. Furthermore, J. Benjamin claims that recognition is possible precisely because the other's subjectivity can survive our attacks and attempts of taking power. She

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[23] Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 131
[24] McNay, Lois, 'The Trouble with Recognition: Subjectivity, Suffering, and Agency', p. 275

mentions a "recognition via negation[25]".

It seems that recognition works the same way between love partners. Benjamin's account of romantic-erotic love shows that exercises of power are required in order to continuously negotiate and define both partners' independence. She argues that the ideal of ego maturity arises from a psychoanalytic model, which identifies autonomy with domination and associates maleness with this autonomy[26]. According to this traditional organization, men are independent and sadistic, while women are dependent and masochist:

> "In a (love) relationship between masochist and sadist, the reciprocity of the intersubjective interaction is destroyed by the fact that one of the partners involved is not able to detach himself or herself either from the state of egocentric independence (man-identity) or from symbiotic dependence (woman-identity[27])".

While the father's role is to break dependence, the mother has to care about the needs and desires of the child. Therefore, the balance between self-affirmation and boundary-dissolution is interrupted and replaced by complementarity. This complementarity based on the dichotomy men/women leads to a pathology of loving recognition. The mother is not "recognized as someone whose recognition is crucial for the child's achieving independence[28]". She is not recognized as a legitimate partner in the relations of recognition.

Because Honneth's theory is based on Benjamin's account, it would be wrong to say that he ignores struggles in primary relationships. Nevertheless, as he claims that love is inherently different from power, his approach is not fully satisfactory. As Julie Connolly explains, his point seems to be that "love occurs in private and politics happens elsewhere or to put the point more precisely, affection animates close inter-personal relationships and power is evident in other types of social relationships.[29]" However, owing to the interpenetration and mutual constitution of public and private sphere, the organization of public institutions reflects assumptions about the structure of the private sphere. For instance, the presumption that the one who earns money in any given household is a father who has limited domestic responsibilities is still made by public policies. Employment practices often still presuppose that men do not have significant caring responsibilities that might disrupt

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[25] Connolly, Julie, 'Love in the private: Axel Honneth, feminism and the politics of recognition', *Contemporary Political Theory v9 n4* (Nov 2010), p. 429

[26] Meehan, Johanna, "Autonomy, Recognition and Respect: Habermas, Benjamin, and Honneth", in: *Feminists read Habermas: gendering the subject of discourse*, New-York: Routledge, 1995, p. 231

[27] Gregoratto, Federica, "Pathology of Love as Gender Domination: Recognition and Gender Identities in Axel Honneth and Jessica Benjamin", in: *Special Issue "Pathologies of Recognition", Studies in Social and Political Thought (forthcoming)*, 2015, p. 91

[28] Ibid., p. 92

[29] Connolly, Julie, "Love in the private: Axel Honneth, feminism and the politics of recognition", p. 423

their availability for work, while women have. It currently reinforces the gendered division of labour historically presupposed by the State and employers[30]. Hence, Honneth's analysis of primary relationships is deficient. He cannot fully admit that love is not power-free while he seems to neglect the fact that love is not the only normative principle that operates in the family. Because of it, he is unable to consider the normative implications of love-based recognition and to provide a conception of reciprocity in sexual love. His only suggestion to fight men/women inequalities in the sphere of primary relationships is to regulate their relationships with a universalistic legal system that would guarantees equal rights for all individuals. However, it is not enough to counter the regulatory effects of recognition[31].

Therefore, Honneth does not really seem to grasp the ambivalence of recognition in the sphere of primary relationships. He actually neglects important connections between recognition, power and institutions[32]. He ignores the fact that even appropriate forms of recognition have simultaneously empowering and normalising exclusionary effects: "any act of recognition can simultaneously exert negative (e.g. normalising/exclusionary) as well as positive (e.g. self-affirming) pressure.[33]" It might be that Honneth tends to treat power as extrinsic to love-based recognition because he considers that the 'primordial desire for recognition' arises in the pre-political realm of social suffering[34]. This premise leads him to misrecognize the role that power relations play in structuring and mediating the emotions of social suffering, as he defines the pre-political realm of social suffering as an unmediated realm of experience characterized by spontaneous feelings with inherent moral status[35]. Rather than focusing on psychological processes to analyse self-confidence like Honneth does, a feminist theory of recognition should analyse how recognition orients us within a given social space. We need an account that acknowledges recognition as being connected with regulatory practices and discourses, that understands that there can be no instances of mutual recognition that do not transmit and reproduce relations of power.

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[30] Ibid., p. 421

[31] Gregoratto, Federica, "Pathology of Love as Gender Domination: Recognition and Gender Identities in Axel Honneth and Jessica Benjamin", p. 83

[32] MacQueen, Paddy, "Honneth, Butler and the Ambivalent Effects of Recognition", *Res Publica: A Journal of Moral, Legal and Social Philosophy* v21 n1 (February 2015), p. 43

[33] Ibid., p. 49

[34] McNay, Lois, 'The Trouble with Recognition: Subjectivity, Suffering, and Agency', p. 277

[35] McNay, Lois, 'The Trouble with Recognition: Subjectivity, Suffering, and Agency', p. 278

## The ambivalent effects of recognition

Recognition has ambivalent effects that Honneth does not really succeed in taking into account because of his Habermassian premises. A feminist account that acknowledges recognition as being connected with regulatory practices and discourses is therefore a necessary corrective to his theory.

In his article 'Recognition as Ideology', Honneth claims that it would be wrong to accuse his theory of recognition of having ignored phenomena of domination from the very beginning. He analyses the claim that recognition is a vehicle for power and considers Althusser's argument that recognition functions as an ideology. As social recognition is a moral act that lets itself be determined by the value of other persons, Honneth agrees that the concept of recognition possesses a normative character. He admits that the search for identity is often influenced by social powers, but he contests the fact that social recognition is necessarily ideological and argues that we should distinguish ideological and appropriate forms of recognition[36]. This way only, we could see the emancipatory potential of appropriate forms of recognition that contribute to one's autonomy:

> "Far from being a mere ideology, recognition constitutes an intersubjective prerequisite for the ability to fulfil one's life goals in an autonomous manner[37]".

However, Axel Honneth though he addresses the issue of power does not see how power and speech produce differences between masculine and feminine experiences in the spheres of confidence, respect and esteem. He ignores the fact that power and speech have influences on the psychological processes that lead to struggles for recognition. He neglects that power and speech are at the origin of social organization and of men and women's status within the society. He wrongly refuses to admit that to a certain extent, recognition is necessarily ideological. The main problem is that like Jürgen Habermas in his theory of communicative action, Honneth considers that subjects control speech. Therefore, Maria Pia Lara particularly denounces this idea, arguing that "Honneth has ignored the fact that illocutionary – linguistic and symbolic – forces always mediate the relationship between psychological motivation, interactional gestures and social organizations.[38]" She rejects the notion of unmediated and anthropological linkage of self-respect and legal institution. We

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[36] Honneth, Axel, "Recognition as Ideology", in: Van de Brink, Bert, *Recognition and power: Axel Honneth and the tradition of critical social theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 328
[37] Ibid., p. 330
[38] Lara, Maria Pia, *Moral Textures: Feminist narratives in the Public Sphere*, p. 132

have to confront his account with the one of Judith Butler, who proposes a completely different appreciation of the relation between speech and subjectivity. She claims that speech produces subjects and that therefore, power is present in the constitution of any subjectivity. She argues that the subject is constituted through and within networks of power and discourse. Thus, the process through which one becomes a gendered subject is linked to power relations. Those power relations exert a normalizing and disciplinary pressure on that individual, who adopts and displays certain 'masculine' or 'feminine' signs. Subsequently, recognition determines the kind of subject one becomes. Recognition appears as a normative socio-political principle, as a set of institutional and social practices. J. Butler helps giving a correction to Honneth's over-attention to individual psychological experiences and moves toward an understanding of recognition as embedded within contemporary techniques of power and subjectivity[39]. However, it seems that she subscribes to an overly constructivist view of selfhood and agency, which only leaves little space to explain the possibilities of resistance[40]. Seyla Benhabib proposes a relevant corrective to Butler's approach. She develops a new account that explains how discourse and power both circumscribe and enable the subject. Instead of the concept of performativity developed by Butler, she proposes a 'narrative model of subjectivity and identity-constitution[41]'. This narrative view of identity offers a stronger concept of human intentionality and a more developed view of the communicative-pragmatic abilities of everyday life. It proposes a dialogical model of understanding, regards individuals and collective identities and stresses otherness and the fluidity of boundaries between the self and others[42]. With this model, we can better understand both the normalizing effects of recognition and the role of power, and the necessity to reconceive misrecognition as a status subordination and an injustice.

**b) Misrecognition, subordination and injustice**

Because Honneth cannot fully admit that love is not power-free and that recognition has ambivalent effects, his approach seems inadequate to report and explain women's subordination. Consequently, we have to contest his normative monism, his definition of

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[39] MacQueen, Paddy, 'Recognition, Social and Political', in: Fieser, James & Downden, Bradley, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2011, Part: The post-structural challenge
[40] Benhabib, Seyla, "Sexual Difference and Collective Identities: The New Global Constellation", *Signs*, Vol. 34, N°2 (Winter, 1999), p. 338
[41] Ibid., p. 341
[42] Ibid., p. 352

misrecognition as being mainly a psychological harm and of recognition as an issue related to the good life.

**A critique of Honneth's normative monism**

Honneth's normative monism has trouble dealing with men-women inequalities, as it contains several flaws. Axel Honneth proposes a monistic framework that regards distribution conflicts as struggles for recognition and claims that recognition suffices to capture all the normative deficits of contemporary societies. From the perspective of distributive justice, it seems that this view assumes that all maldistribution can be remedied indirectly by a politics of recognition[43]. Fraser opposes to this normative monism to promote a perspectival dualist analysis. What she explains is that in today's world, because of the demise of communism, the surge of free-market ideology and the rise of identity politics, recognition claims tend to predominate. However, recognition is not the only claim for social justice. There are actually two types of claims for social justice, claims for recognition but also for redistribution. Fraser treats recognition and redistribution as distinct perspectives and dimensions of justice. Neither distribution nor recognition theorists succeeded in subsuming the concerns of the other. She considers that "justice requires both redistribution and recognition[44]". Contrary to Honneth's reductive culturalist view on distribution, Fraser's approach allows a better understanding of the links between economic and cultural injustices. She defines misrecognition as rooted in cultural patterns of representation and maldistribution as stemming from the political-economic structures of society. If she can distinguish recognition from redistribution claims, she is also able to show that there are two-dimensionally subordinated groups[45]. Gender for instance is a two-dimensional social differentiation. It appears both as a class-like differentiation that is rooted in the economic structure of society and as a status differentiation, as institutionalized pattern of cultural value often privileges characteristics associated with masculinity[46]. Therefore, she contests the false antithesis that is often drawn between recognition and redistribution[47].

Though Fraser's critique of Honneth's monism is fair, this one still contains some

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[43] Fraser, Nancy. 'Rethinking Recognition', p. 111
[44] Fraser, Nancy, 'Recognition Without Ethics?', *Theory Culture & Society*, 18:2-3 (2001), p. 22
[45] Fraser, N. and Honneth A., *Redistribution or Recognition? A political-philosophical Exchange*, p. 19
[46] Ibid., p. 19
[47] Ibid., p. 12

flaws. The distributive paradigm developed by Fraser defines social justice "as the morally proper distribution of benefits and burden among society's members[48]". What Iris Young underlines is that such a focus on distribution inappropriately restricts the scope of justice and tends to obscure the institutional context within which those distributions take place[49]. The main problem is that this paradigm is based on an atomic conception of the individual who existed prior to social relations and institutions, which leads to a misleading social ontology. In addition, Fraser claims that theories of distributive justice should be concerned about non-material goods such as rights, opportunity or power. Young rightly shows that bringing power under the logic of distribution actually misconstrues the meaning of power, as power refers to social relation rather than material goods[50]. Furthermore, if we follow that reasoning, it is possible to argue just like Paddy McQueen does that Fraser fails to appreciate the fact that recognition itself might be considered a resource and hence can fall within the rubric of distribution and distributive justice[51]. Moreover, McQueen claims that owing to the fact that Fraser construes the categories of recognition and redistribution in objectivist terms, she can only postulate their imbrication from an abstract perspective. And as "agency cannot be deduced from abstract social structures[52]", she is actually unable to provide a robust account of agency. She thus falls into an objectivism that prevents her from developing some of the central insights of her own paradigm[53].

Eventually, theorizing such a dichotomy between recognition and redistribution is contestable. Instead of two categories of injustice, it might be more helpful to have a more plural categorization of oppression, especially when it comes to understand women's subordination. Iris Young for instance defines five faces of oppression. The first form is exploitation; it occurs through a process of transfer of the fruits of the labour of one social group to benefit another. For instance, "gender exploitation has two aspects, transfer to the fruits of material labor to men and transfer of nurturing and sexual energies to men.[54]" The second face of oppression is marginalization. It can both refer to the exclusion of persons from equal citizenships or to the lack of opportunity to exercise capacities in socially defined and recognized ways. Being powerless is the third face of oppression. The powerlessness are

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[48] Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference,* p. 16
[49] Ibid., p. 20
[50] Ibid., p. 31
[51] MacQueen, Paddy, *Subjectivity, gender and the struggle for recognition*, p. 35
[52] McNay, Lois, 'The Trouble with Recognition: Subjectivity, Suffering, and Agency', p. 288
[53] Ibid., p. 272
[54] Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference, p. 50*

those who lack authority or power. The fourth element of oppression is cultural imperialism. It develops when "the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other.[55]" Last but not least, violence is the fifth form of oppression. Violence can be a social practice. Specific physical violence for example is frequent against minorities, such as the rape directed against women.

With those five categories, it is easier to show how struggles can be directed at different kinds of goals. This approach can better accommodate the variations in oppressive structures. It resists to the tendency to reduce oppression to one or two simple structures. However, the presence of only one of those five criteria is enough to talk about oppression. Each criterion illustrates a different type of denial of recognition. For instance, one is marginalized, when the society refuses to recognize him or her as equal citizen, or to guarantee him or her the equal opportunity to exercise his or her citizenship. This misrecognition appears as status subordination. Iris Young, thanks to her plural categorization, succeeds in reconnecting issues of political economy with issues of recognition. Her categorization allows showing that cultural recognition is for most social movements a means to the economic and social equality that Fraser brings under the category of redistribution. Her definition of oppression highlights the fact that the structures of the division of labour and decision-making power are not reducible to the distribution of goods. They are linked to misrecognition and status subordination.

**Defining misrecognition as status subordination**

It is fundamental to redefine misrecognition as status subordination and to promote a 'status' model instead of the 'identity' one. In Honneth's identity model, individual identity is formed only through social relations of recognition. If this model allows understanding how one gains the necessary self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem to participate in public life, this account is nonetheless problematic. First, it leans to simplify and reify group identities. It is what Nancy Fraser calls the 'problem of reification[56]': recognition is sometimes inclined to put moral pressure on individual members to conform to a given group culture, to be recognized as members of that group. The idea is that by affirming a group's

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[55] Ibid., *p. 58*
[56] Fraser, Nancy. 'Rethinking Recognition', p. 108

identity, there is a risk of simplifying and reifying it. Thus, it seems that Honneth's model could impose to a certain extent a single and simplified group identity, which could denies the complexity of people's lives and the multiplicity of their identifications. Furthermore, this identity model mainly conceives injustices as psychological harms while it tends to deny its own Hegelian premises by supposing that misrecognised people can and should construct their identity by their own[57].

Nancy Fraser asserts the necessity to break with this standard 'identity' model of recognition. She claims that identity-based model succumbs to the limited scope of ethical evaluation. She attempts to rethink recognition outside of an account of individual identity-formation.[58] She redefines the politics of recognition in "non-identitarian" terms and links it to a deontological framework of justice. She proposes a 'status' model where the wrong is located in social relations:

> "On the status model, misrecognition is neither a physical deformation nor an impediment to ethical self-realization. Rather, it constitutes an institutionalized relation of subordination and a violation of justice.[59]"

Fraser presents "injustices as externally imposed injuries rather than as lived identities[60]". The denials of recognition women are victim of thus appear as injuries externally imposed by men. Fraser is against the reduction of political sociology to moral psychology. She treats recognition from the external perspective of a sociological observer rather than the internal perspective of individuals engaged in inter-subjective relations of recognition. Her anti-psychologism is an improvement, as status violations appear to have more salience in contemporary politics than harms to one's sense of self. In addition, as C. F. Zurn underlines, this anti-psychologism has normative advantages. The evaluation of misrecognition is from now on based on an objective assessment of existant social relations[61]. Misrecognition becomes subordination in the sense of being prevented from participating as peer in social life[62]. Hence, what requires recognition is now the status of group members as full partners in social interaction. Recognition happens to be an issue of justice.

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[57] Fraser, Nancy. 'Rethinking Recognition', p. 112
[58] Ibid., p. 115
[59] Fraser, N. and Honneth A., *Redistribution or Recognition? A political-philosophical Exchange*, p. 29
[60] McNay, Lois, 'The Trouble with Recognition: Subjectivity, Suffering, and Agency', p. 285
[61] Zurn, Christopher F., 'Identity or Status? Struggles Over 'Recognition' in Fraser, Honneth and Taylor', *Constellations*, 10:4 (2003), p. 532
[62] Fraser, Nancy. 'Recognition Without Ethics?', p. 24

**Reconceiving recognition as an issue of justice**

To promote gender equality, it is essential to reconceive recognition as an issue of justice. Most philosophers align distributive justice with Kantian morality and issues of justice, and recognition with Hegelian ethics (*Sittlichkeit*) and the ideal of the good life[63]. It seems that the schism between theories based on redistribution, and thus on justice, will always claim to trump theories based on recognition because of their Kantian and so 'absolute' moral demands in terms of justice, while Hegel-based accounts such as that of Honneth will always primarily refer to the 'good', which is historical and sociological.

Honneth transposes the Hegelian recognition scheme onto the cultural and political terrain. His work is an enquiry within the motivational sources of social discontent and resistance. He considers that all injustices must be interpretable as expressing the violation of well-founded claims to recognition. Thus, justice is "pertaining to how well a society is able to secure the conditions within which all its members can experience the good life, premised upon the satisfaction of their basic needs for recognition.[64]" From then on, Honneth claims the superiority of the good over the right and affirms that the purpose of recognition is to secure the good life.

On the opposite, Fraser proposes to re-conceive recognition as a matter of justice[65]. It is an essential step towards men-women equality. It allows putting the injustices women are victims of within the scope of justice, while they were before considered as pertaining to the 'good life' and thus characterized as personal issues. While Honneth approaches all issues of injustice as stemming from a lack, absence or distorted form of recognition, Fraser can qualify them as violation of justice, as forms of institutionalized subordination. Thus, she can proposes other solutions to the problem of misrecognition than an expansion or improvement of existing recognition relations. For instance, she mentions the possibilities of cultural and symbolic changes or political-economic restructuring[66].

Furthermore, Fraser's theory allows expanding the conception of justice with its notion of parity of participation. Against the reductionism of Honneth, she claims that "justice requires social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one

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[63] Ibid., p. 22
[64] MacQueen, Paddy, *Subjectivity, gender and the struggle for recognition*, p. 32
[65] Fraser, Nancy. 'Recognition Without Ethics?', p. 26
[66] Fraser, N. and Honneth A., *Redistribution or Recognition? A political-philosophical Exchange*, p. 14

another as peers.[67]" Behind this affirmation, there are two conditions. First, the objective condition: the distribution of material resources must be such as to ensure participant's independence and voice. Second, the inter-subjective condition: institutionalized patterns of cultural values should express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity to achieve social esteem[68]. These norms of participatory parity must be applied dialogically and discursively; they represent the principal idiom of public reason.

From then on, the discussion between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth is mostly about whether the institutional framework should aim for equal opportunity to participate or merely for equal opportunity to develop the necessary capacities of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. While Axel Honneth considers that society should only provide equal opportunity to acquire the different forms of recognition necessary to participate in the public sphere, Nancy Fraser argues that we should from the beginning foster the participation of all citizens. Therefore, she is more aware of the power structures within the society that have influence on the ability to express in the public sphere and of the lack of recognition minorities' are sometimes victim of.

Mutual recognition such as defined by Honneth acts as vehicle of both emancipation and subordination. It has ambivalent effects. If recognition is the mere condition to participate to the public life and thus has a huge emancipatory potential for women, it also acts as a regulatory practice. Therefore, misrecognition should be understood as a status subordination and recognition as an issue of justice. This way, the lack of recognition women are victim of could lead to new perspectives of social change.

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[67] Ibid., p. 36
[68] Ibid., p. 36

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# Chapter 3

# From the lack of recognition to the perspectives of social change for women

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Women lack recognition both in the sphere of primary relationships, the legal sphere and the sphere of esteem. They are victim of gendered types of disrespect, that take them away from the ability to be fully engaged in the public realm. However, as Honneth explains, experiences of disrespect can trigger moral feelings that lead groups to engage in political struggles. Thus, it seems that those experiences of denial of recognition could be the starting point of a social change aiming at more equality between men and women.

## Part 1: Women's lack of recognition in the three spheres

What Honneth calls disrespect is a behaviour "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.[1]" Because of the internal interdependence of individualization and recognition, a denial of recognition can disrupt a person's practical relation to self. This denial involves different types of injuries: against physical integrity, social integrity or dignity. I will argue that women more often than men are victim of denial of recognition. They suffer from gendered forms of disrespect. Owing to this, they are paralyzed in their situation of humiliation and often unable to enter the public sphere.

### a) The lack of recognition in the sphere of primary relationships

Women often lack recognition in the sphere of primary relationships. Because of the

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[1] Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 131

gendered violence they are victim of, they often lack the sense of reality essential to integrate in the civil society and public debate.

In the sphere of primary relationships, the denial of recognition affects a person at the level of physical integrity. One is "is forcibly deprived of any opportunity freely to dispose over his or her own body.[2]" It is the most fundamental type of personal degradation. It is exemplified by physical abuses:

> "Physical abuse represents a type of disrespect that does lasting damage to one's basic confidence (learned through love) that one can autonomously coordinate one's own body[3]"

Physical abuses tear one's self-confidence, which has been constructed with the loving interactions of a caregiver who preserves the body by fulfilling its needs and recognizing its sovereignty. They destroy the essential form of practical relation-to-self: one's underlying trust in oneself. From then on, one may be unable to trust another body anymore, or may be incapable of constructing one's subjectivity as equally worthy of the respect accorded to others. The victim of this disrespect loses her confidence in oneself and in the world. She is "deprived of all sense of reality[4]" and can even experience a "psychological death[5]". Without love-recognition, one is consequently unable to find the self-confidence necessary to demand recognition in the two other spheres and to participate in public life.

By physical abuses, we should here understand all type of physical gendered violence: abuse, rape and marital violence. These forms of violence are systemic. They are directed at members of a group simply because they are members of that group. Any woman for instance has a reason to fear abuse, rape or marital violence[6]. According to the estimations, in the world, 35% of women have been victim of physical or sexual violence[7]. Feminist theorists such as Andrea Dworkin highlighted how the physical degradation and violation involved in rape and sexual abuse are harmful to victims not only because of the manifest pain and suffering involved but also because such violation makes difficult the development of self-confidence[8]. They denounce this specifically gendered violence, explain how male violence erodes women's sense of their own bodily integrity and their sense of their own value. What

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[2] Ibid, p. 132
[3] Ibid, p. 132
[4] Honneth, Axel. 'Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on the Theory of Recognition', p. 190
[5] Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 135
[6] Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p. 62
[7] Website of UN Women: www.unwomen.org/fr/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures
[8] Zurn, C. F.,'The Normative Claims of Three Types of Feminist Struggles for Recognition', p. 74

we see with incest survivors for example is that "they lack a self - these women report difficulty in feeling that they have a continuous underlying personal identity and experience their subjectivity as disturbingly continuous and empty[9]". In a deep sense, there is a split between self and body. Male ability to rape and impregnate women without consent has been an important ground for patriarchal sexual and social power relationships. This ability to act unilaterally anchored the discourses that represent men as active women as passive[10].

However, it seems that Axel Honneth's theory misses one important form of disrespect in that sphere. If an attack against the physical integrity can trigger a split between the self and the body, psychological violence is also able to do so. Psychological violence is even often associated to physical violence to reach such a result. In addition, what we see is that it is mainly because of the psychological violence they are victims of that women are unable to engage in the public sphere. It is interesting to take the case of battered wives to illustrate this issue. Women who suffer from physical violence often underline the manipulation and blackmail that come with and explain that it has a main role in contributing to their lack of action. Therefore, forgetting psychological violence seems to be an important lack in Honneth's theory of recognition, as this specific form of violence plays a main role in women's exclusion from the public sphere and in their lack of recognition in the legal sphere.


**b) The lack of recognition in the legal sphere**

Women still lack recognition in the legal sphere, though men and women have equal rights in Western democracies. They are still victim of rights discriminations that might explain their lower engagement in the public sphere.

In the legal sphere, a lack of recognition implies that a person is not being accorded the same degree of moral responsibility as other members of the society. Hence, this form of disrespect is a "violation of the intersubjective expectation to be recognized as a subject capable of forming moral judgements[11]". It involves a structural exclusion of some subjects from the possession of certain rights within a social or moral community[12]. Those subjects lack the "status of full-fledged partners to interaction who all possess the same moral

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[9] Meehan, Johanna, "Autonomy, Recognition and Respect: Habermas, Benjamin, and Honneth", p. 243
[10] Mann, Patricia S., *Micro-politics: agency in a postfeminist era*, University of Minnesota Press, 1994, p. 68
[11] Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 133-134
[12] Ibid., p. 133

rights.[13]" This denial of recognition is thus a denial of rights and a social ostracism. It can affect one's normative understanding of self and even lead to a "social death[14]".

Even nowadays in Western democracies, women are not always considered as equally morally responsible subjects. We can still find rights discriminations in our societies. In 1983 for instance, Catharine McKinnon and Andrea Dworkin declared in their anti-pornography ordinance that pornography was a practice of sex discrimination and a violation of women's civil rights[15]. They considered pornography as the institutionalization of male supremacy, as pornography "objectifies women's bodies, sexualizes their human presence, and eroticizes the male subordination of women.[16]" They argued that most of women are coerced into participating in pornographic movies and that they are sexually degraded through the image of pornography and in its social reception. Therefore, they denounced an "organized expropriation of sexuality" and called for a 'sexual strike'[17]. If they lost the Feminist Sex War against the 'pro-sex' feminists who aimed at more sexual freedom, they still succeeded in making people aware that women are still victims of rights discrimination, though they acquired equal rights as men.

If our political institutions are supposed to act neutrally and guarantee equality, they are in fact often biased. It actually seems that male dominance is intrinsic to the way our institutions are designed. For instance, if the US government is officially gender neutral, its welfare policies still assume that "families do or should contain one primary breadwinner who is male and one unpaid domestic worker (homemaker and mother) who is female.[18]" The American welfare system has a dualistic structure; it is internally divided between family-based feminine benefits and labour-market-based masculine benefits. Those masculine programs are less demeaning; less effort is required to qualify and maintain eligibility to receive benefits. Nancy Fraser thus claims that women "are disempowered by the realization of an androcentric, possessive individualist form of social citizenship in the "masculine" subsystem[19]." They lack recognition in the legal sphere, and are consequently less able to demand the recognition in the sphere of esteem and to be part of the public debate.

However, it is often hard to separate injustices in this sphere from the injustices in the

[13] Honneth, Axel. 'Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on the Theory of Recognition', p. 191

[14] Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 135

[15] Mann, Patricia S., *Micro-politics: agency in a postfeminist era*, p. 62

[16] Ibid, p. 63

[17] Benhabib, Seyla and Cornell Drucilla, "Introduction: Beyond the Politics of Gender", p. 3

[18] Fraser, Nancy, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, p. 149

[19] Ibid., p. 155

sphere of esteem. The movement between the three spheres is not purely linear. The right-based recognition is not independent from the merit-based recognition. A denial of recognition in the legal sphere will of course have consequences in the definition of someone's worth. But it also works the other way around. The increased worth of a defined group will be visible in the legal sphere, as the law has to secure recognition. Consequently, though I choose to treat the lack of recognition in the legal and in the sphere of esteem separately, they are both linked and have influence on each other.

**c) The lack of recognition in the sphere of esteem**

Differences between men and women persist long after women are admitted to the achievement world. Last but not least, women are still often unrecognized in the sphere of esteem. They are victims of sexist stereotypes, while their work is neither socially nor economically recognized as relevant. From then on, they are hardly economically independent, even though this independence is fundamental to be able to engage in the public realm.

In this sphere of esteem, disrespect refers to denial or insult. It means making negative judgments about the social value of individuals or groups. This denial of recognition is a denigration of individual or collective life-styles. It has negative consequences for the perceived social value of this individual or group. Because of this last form of disrespect, one is "no longer in a position to conceive of himself as a being whose characteristic traits and abilities are worthy of esteem.[20]" This social devaluation entails a loss of self-esteem[21] that leaves 'scars' or 'injuries[22]'.

Because of a sexism that allows men to make negative judgements about the social value of women, women often experience social downgrading and lack self-esteem. Even if sexism is most of the time not explicitly verbalized anymore, it still develops at the level of practical consciousness. What Iris Young explains is that there is an unconscious sexism, which exists in behaviours, images and attitudes:

> "Group oppressions are enacted in this society not primarily in official laws and policies but in informal, often unnoticed and unreflective speech, bodily reactions to others, conventional practices of everyday interaction and evaluation, aesthetic judgements, and

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[20] Honneth, Axel. 'Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on the Theory of Recognition', p. 191
[21] Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 134
[22] Ibid., p. 135

the jokes, images, and stereotypes pervading the mass media[23]"

Mass media for instance produce magazines and movies depicting abuse and degradation of women in images intended to be sexually arousing[24]. Consequently, we need a cultural revolution that would both change the cultural habits and influence the structure of those unconscious behaviours. Women have to become aware of the stereotypes that contribute to their oppression to be able to fight them.

It is especially in the sphere of work that women suffer from those stereotypes, while work is essential to self-realization, as it ensures recognition by carrying out a socially relevant achievement. Nowadays, around 80% of the women are in the labour market within the European Union. However, in 2009, they were earning about 16,9% less than men[25]. Generally speaking, 'feminine' gainful employments such as 'care work' are low paid. Furthermore, women's domestic work is defined as unproductive work and unremunerated, even though men refuse to take their fair share in those tasks: "men enjoy the advantages of sharing their traditional economic responsibilities with women without taking on a goodly portion of the domestic duties.[26]" Hence, many women have a now 'double day' of work: they assume both economic responsibilities and domestic tasks.

At a time when remuneration seems to be the main medium for conveying social recognition to work, we have to discuss the fact that women's housework is neither socially nor economically recognized. The definition of work is an historical category with changing meanings. Nowadays, work is understood as gainful employment; it is "the exercise of activities for remuneration on the basis of a contract between the offerer and buyer of these activities or achievements[27]." On the opposite, family work refers to housekeeping or caretaking activities that people who live with children perform in their own household. Though it is necessary for society, carrying about your own children is often perceived as both a source of pleasure and narcissistic satisfaction and as a meaningless work[28]. This perception has been used against the feminist movement 'Wages for Housework' to justify the fact that this family work is unremunerated.

Axel Honneth supports feminist calls for recognition of unpaid domestic work. He

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[23] Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p. 148
[24] Ibid., p. 135
[25] Website of L'Observatoire des Inégalités : www.inegalites.fr/spip.php?page=article&id_article=1560
[26] Mann, Patricia S., *Micro-politics: agency in a postfeminist era*, p. 34
[27] Rössler, Beate, "Work, Recognition, Emancipation", in: Van de Brink, Bert, *Recognition and power: Axel Honneth and the tradition of critical social theory,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 138
[28] Ibid., p. 144

challenges the gender division of labour that denigrates women's work. He understands that "an important basis for the persistence of gender based inequality lies in a division of labor that assigns women primary responsibility for attending to the material and emotional needs of men and children.[29]" His theory of recognition maintains that family labour should be understood as socially relevant and of equal value than gainful employment. Therefore, it deserves a remuneration that should allow securing the economic independence of caretaking women. Similarly, this remuneration should promote the social recognition of family work. Thus, it would guarantee men-women equality and foster women's participation in the public sphere. However, this reasoning is contestable. It seems that "housekeeping and family work do not receive the same social recognition, not because these activities are unpaid but because it is work performed by women[30]." Beate Rössler especially points out that housekeeping and family work are not recognized as a socially relevant works owing to the fact that they are done by women. They are "expressions of women's nature[31]". Hence, unjust gender divisions require reinterpretations of the practices of love and care. The lack of recognition in the sphere of esteem is at the origin of inequalities that prevent a fair and equal discussion in the public sphere. This leads us back to Fraser's argument, that inequalities have influence on the ability to express in public. To remedy to those gender injustices, Fraser presents a model based on a radical reduction of time spent in gainful employment, a state-financed child care for the period of parental employment and an equal distribution of family work among both sexes[32]. Iris Young also proposes solutions, such as sharing the tasks of care work between men and women, to let them time for other socially recognized activities:

> "The proper way to address these problems is to encourage everyone – women and men – to participate in care work, and at the same time to make it possible for all care workers to have time and training for other socially valued activities.[33]"

It seems that the problem in itself is that not everybody is able to ask for recognition, while there is no criteria that allows defining a claim as an acceptable claim for recognition. Though Honneth's position promotes democratic functioning and offers perspectives of social changes, it triggers at the same time a pathology of recognition.

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[29] Young, Iris Marion, 'Recognition of Love's Labor: Considering Axel Honneth's Feminism', in: Van de Brink, Bert, *Recognition and power: Axel Honneth and the tradition of critical social theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 201
[30] Rössler, Beate, "Work, Recognition, Emancipation", p. 145
[31] Young, Iris Marion, 'Recognition of Love's Labor: Considering Axel Honneth's Feminism', p. 201
[32] Rössler, Beate, "Work, Recognition, Emancipation", p. 158
[33] Young, Iris Marion, 'Recognition of Love's Labor: Considering Axel Honneth's Feminism', p. 211

An analysis of the different forms of disrespect women are victims of thus helps understanding women's low engagement in the public sphere. Because of those denials of recognition, women are unable to properly acquire self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. However, according to Honneth's theory, those experiences of disrespect trigger negative moral feelings that can lead groups to engage in political struggles. They could therefore be at the origin of a social change.

## Part 2: From disrespect to social change

What is remarkable in Honneth's *Struggle for recognition* is the idea that experiences of disrespect can lead to social change, that they can trigger the necessary negative feelings to engage in a political struggle. Thus, women's subordination could lead to new political movements that would help defining gender equality as a fundamental feature of our societies. However, according to Honneth, only experiences of disrespect in the legal sphere and in the sphere of esteem can lead to such struggles. I will contest this last point and argue that integrating love-based recognition within the political analysis is essential.

### a) A misrecognition that leads to social change

*The Struggle for recognition* aims at proposing a normative theory that explains the moral logic of social conflict[34]. It tries to relate how misrecognition and the feelings it triggers can lead to social changes. Owing to this, it offers new perspectives for women.

As we have seen, human integrity is linked to the experience of inter-subjective recognition. Human beings' dignity depends on the approval of others, especially when it comes to their abilities or achievements. One of Honneth's main ideas is that the demand of recognition creates a moral tension in social life. His basic argument is that the desire for recognition is so fundamental to individual self-realization that it is the motivating force

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[34] Léchenet, Annie, « La reconnaissance, condition à l'exercice de la citoyenneté... y compris pour les femmes, ou ce que peuvent nous apporter les propositions de Axel Honneth », Texte présenté au Congrès annuel de l'Association Suisse de Science Politique à l'Université de Genève, 7-9 Janvier 2010, Partie 2 : Une théorie normative

behind social development. We also find this idea in Charles Taylor's theory, which claims that identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence. He explains for instance that women in patriarchal societies have been induced to adopt a depreciatory image of themselves, just like Black and Indigenous under and after the colonization. Therefore, both contemporary feminism, race relations and discussions of multiculturalism are "undergirded by the premises that the withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression[35]".

Honneth uses Ernst Bloch's theory to explain how the lack of recognition can be a source of moral motivation to underlie social change, how "negative experiences of disrespect and insult (…) turned the normative goal of securing human dignity into a driving force in history.[36]" He states that a social conflict finds its sources in the 'moral' wounds that occur from the ways in which the basic need for recognition is disregarded. This conflict thus takes place when there is a disrespect of implicit rules of mutual recognition, when one's claim to personal integrity is disregarded. Hence, Honneth considers societal change as "a developmental process driven by the moral claims arising from disrespect[37]". What he proposes is a phenomenology of social pathology, which explains all social struggles through the psychological need for recognition. Against an interest-based conception of agency, he emphasizes the emotional grounds of action and asserts that suffering may take the form of a political resistance. Feelings have a central role to deal with the moral tension in the social life. According to Dewey, those feelings are either positive or negative moral feelings. They accompany both the successful experiences and experiences of failure:

> "Negative feelings, such as anger, indignation, and sorrow, comprise the affective response involved when the person concerned inevitably shifts his attention to focus on his own expectations the moment the further consequences planned for a completed action are not forthcoming. Positive feelings, such as joy or pride, are, by contrast, the subject's reaction to being freed suddenly from a burdensome state of excitement by having been able to find a suitable successful solution to a pressing action problem.[38]"

An experience of disrespect particularly triggers negative moral feelings that lead one to engage in a political struggle. Therefore, a social conflict "takes as its starting-point moral feelings of indignation, rather than pre-given interests.[39]" The emergence of those negative moral feelings is linked to the moral expectations that individuals have towards the

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[35] TAYLOR Charles, "The Politics of Recognition", p. 36
[36] Honneth, Axel. 'Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on the Theory of Recognition', p. 177-178
[37] MacQueen, Paddy, *Subjectivity, gender and the struggle for recognition*, p. 29
[38] Honneth, Axel. 'Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on the Theory of Recognition', p. 198
[39] Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 161

community. Non-recognition from this community can thus contribute positively to the construction of self-identity, if it also succeeds in creating the conditions of resistance. The lack of recognition women are victim of could thus lead them to resist and to fight for a social change that would allow them to construct positively their identities.

Shame is one of the most important of our moral feelings. Because of shame, the subject cannot routinely continue his action, as he experiences himself as being of lower social value than previously assumed[40]. However, there are further steps to move from those negative moral feelings to collective social struggles. Individuals should first establish common experiences of disrespect. Then, they should locate these experiences within a socially generated framework of emancipatory discourse [41]. During this phase of emancipation, individuals often seek out smaller sub-communities within which they can engage in a political action. This action allows them to leave their paralyzing situation of humiliation. By their engagement, they discover a new form of expression and are able to develop a new relation to self. The experience of recognition within the solidarity of a group enables participants to esteem each other[42]. This way, a bridge is created between the impersonal aspirations of a social movement and the participants' private experiences of injury.

Jodi Dean with her notion of 'reflective solidarity' insists on the importance of solidarity for inclusion. This reflective solidarity expresses an inclusionary ideal, which allows overcoming the distinctions at the origins of numerous exclusions:

> "Positioning reflective solidarity as the bridge between identity and universality, as the precondition of mutual recognition necessary for claims to universality under pluralist, postmodern conditions, it argues that a communicative understanding of "we" enables us to think of difference differently, to overcome the competing dualisms of us/them, male/female, white/black, straight/gay, public/private, general/particular[43]."

She proposes a dialogical model of understanding where "we appeal to others to include and support us because our communicative engagement allows us to expect another to take responsibility for our relationship.[44]" All participants to the dialogue have to be open to differences and let their disagreements provide a basis, which would allow bounding them together. This way, they can esteem each other and answer to their basic need of recognition.

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[40] Honneth, Axel. 'Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on the Theory of Recognition', p. 199
[41] MacQueen, Paddy, *Subjectivity, gender and the struggle for recognition*, p. 29-30
[42] Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 164
[43] Dean, Jodi, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics*, p. 3
[44] Ibid., p. 39

It seems that Jodi Dean with this idea of 'reflective solidarity' offers new perspectives of recognition for women. If they enter dialogue, they could learn from and esteem each other. This way, they could leave their paralyzing situation and engage in the public sphere.

The demand for recognition thus appears as an ethical demand to resist marginalization. On one hand, it seems that discourses of recognition help guaranteeing inclusion of all citizens in the public sphere. One the other, it appears that those discourses might "help to reveal the political significance of damages caused by assimilation, cultural imperialism, systemic disrespect, or the stigmatization of non-dominant identities[45]". According to Charles Taylor, the current struggles for recognition aim at making States recognize equal value to all culture: "the claim is that all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings.[46]" There is a struggle for a change self-image.

However, what Honneth underlines in the *Struggle for recognition*, is that those personal experiences of disrespect are "embedded in a process of historical change[47]" only if they happen in the legal sphere or in the sphere of esteem. Each new form of recognition in those spheres opens the perspectives for new possibilities of identities that often require a new struggle for recognition. He argues that it is not the case when it comes to experiences of disrespect in the sphere of primary relationships, as those experiences cannot be interpreted as something that can potentially affect others. I will contest this vision and claim that the family is also a field of moral dispute.

**b) The family as a field of moral dispute**

In this last part, I will argue against Honneth's first intuition that the family is a field of moral dispute. He acknowledges this mistake in a more recent article, but without being able to propose a wholly satisfactory approach. He still has to integrate love-based recognition in his political analysis to fully put primary relationships within the scope of justice.

In his early writings, Honneth adopts Hegel's position toward love. Like Hegel, he considered that man and woman are complementary and that bonds of affection should sustain justice in the family through recognition in the intimate sphere. His first idea was that

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[45] Fiore, Robin N. and Lindemann, Hilde, *Recognition, responsibility, and rights: feminist ethics and social theory*, p. 53
[46] TAYLOR Charles, "The Politics of Recognition", p. 66
[47] Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 133

primary relationships do not entail moral experiences that could trigger new struggles, as affection and love are 'personal' issues. If recognition in the sphere of primary relationships is the elementary form of recognition, its goals and purposes cannot be generalized beyond the primary relationships to become questions of public interests[48]:

> "A struggle can only be characterized as 'social' to the extent that its goals can be generalized beyond the horizon of individuals' intentions, to the point where they can become the basis for a collective movement. With regard to the distinctions made above, the initial implication of this is that love, as the most basic form of recognition, does not entail moral experiences that could lead, of their own accord, to the formation of social conflicts[49]"

Consequently, Honneth treated love-based recognition as central to his analysis of subjectivity but marginal to his analysis of politics[50].

Honneth's first claim, that primary relationships belong to personal domain and do not entail negative moral feelings that could lead to new political and social struggles, is highly contestable. First, the family is not a personal domain free from State intervention. The state has always played a major role in defining the family. The nuclear monogamous family defended by Hegel has been shaped by Western States, which defined marriage as a central institution. Marriage did not only consist in emotional bonds; it was a social and juridical institution, which codified men's domination over their wives. We thus have to move beyond public and private spheres[51]. Love is not the only normative principle that operates in the domestic sphere. Conflicts about distribution, consumption, sexuality and the gendered division of labour are actually relevant to the internal normative order of the family. The second argument is that some debates arising in what is defined as the private sphere have already been mobilised for political ends. It was the case for instance of the issue of "wife battering" that we already mentioned. This issue, which was characterized as 'private' and personal, succeeded in entering the private sphere in the late 1970s, before being redefined as a public matter[52]. Feminists fought to define this domestic violence as a matter of public interest, considering that it was not simply a personal misfortune but a widespread experience

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[48] Léchenet, Annie, « La reconnaissance, condition à l'exercice de la citoyenneté... y compris pour les femmes, ou ce que peuvent nous apporter les propositions de Axel Honneth », p. 15

[49] Honneth, Axel, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 162.

[50] Connolly, Julie, "Love in the private: Axel Honneth, feminism and the politics of recognition", p. 420

[51] Dean, Jodi, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics*,: "moving beyond public and private sphere"

[52] Fraser, Nancy, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Geder in Contemporary Social Theory*, p. 175

of social disrespect that concerns lots of women in their conjugal and love relationships[53].

In a more recent article 'Between justice and affection: the family as a field of moral dispute', Axel Honneth takes into account those arguments and changes his position. He admits that struggles in the sphere of primary relationships could possibly lead to social change. He analyses the changes within the modern family and explains why justice can from now on be relevant to the private sphere. He claims that with the liberation of marriage from external influence, the prohibition of child labour and the legal regulation of the distribution of wealth between spouses, family has gained access to an increased autonomy. Family is liberated from convention and tradition, it has been transformed "into a "pure" constellation in which emotional bonds have become the sole source of integration.[54]" Family is less and less determined by conventional role expectations and increasingly dependent on personal feelings. Since the 1930s, the figure of the father lost part of its authority, while women obtained their independence by entering the labour market. According to Honneth, new dangers have emerged along with this process of liberation. He states that the inner life of the family reached a degree of emotional fragility and instability: "both women and children are highly exposed to forms of injury that can be understood as ambivalent consequences of the end of traditional family life[55]". Those 'forms of injuries' refers to the disrespect that affects one's physical integrity in the sphere of primary relationships; they correspond to physical abuses, such as maltreatment, rape or domestic violence. Consequently, for Honneth, bonds of emotion are too fragile to sustain justice in family, as its internal normative order is often disrupted[56]. 'Justice' can henceforth be relevant to the private sphere. Honneth joins Iris Young's claim that "particularistic relations between men and women in marriage must be nested in an universalistic legal system that guarantees equal rights for all individuals.[57]" Simultaneously, he asserts that the increased significance of rights brings to light how important are emotional bonds. He perceives a moral loss, when the discourse of rights is used to describe interpersonal relationships; for instance, if we speak about 'legal obligation to care about one's parent'. Therefore, his main difficulty is to find a balance between the male domination that occurs without political regulations, and the loss of the self that might

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[53] Léchenet, Annie, « La reconnaissance, condition à l'exercice de la citoyenneté... y compris pour les femmes, ou ce que peuvent nous apporter les propositions de Axel Honneth », p. 16
[54] Honneth, Axel, "Between justice and affection: the family as a field of moral dispute", in: *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Polity, 2007, p. 145
[55] Ibid., p. 147
[56] Ibid., p. 156
[57] Young, Iris Marion, 'Recognition of Love's Labor: Considering Axel Honneth's Feminism', p. 203

happen if there are too much political regulations.

Even though this article allows considering family as a field of moral dispute, some critiques remain. First, I doubt that the high number of rape or maltreatment should be linked to the rise of the modern family. Those forms of disrespect were already present in our societies way before women's emancipation. They were simply silenced and not recognized as breaking the law. In France for instance, the notion of rape was not defined in the penal code before the law of the 23rd December 1980. Only with this law, rape is recognized as "all act of sexual penetration, no matter their nature, committed on someone else by violence, coercion, threat or surprise[58]". Secondly, even if Honneth acknowledges the moral potential of experiences in the intimate sphere, his conception of love relationships is still not wholly satisfactory. He admits that love relationships have a 'normative surplus' but still refuses to integrate love-based recognition in his political analysis, while this integration is essential to put the sphere of primary relationships within the scope of justice.

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[58] Original version : « *tout acte de pénétration sexuelle, de quelque nature qu'il soit, commis sur la personne d'autrui par violence, contrainte, menace ou surprise* » (Article 222-23 du Code Pénal)
Website of Legifrance:
www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCode.do?idSectionTA=LEGISCTA000006181753&cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006070719&dateTexte=20100128

# Conclusion

The *Struggle for recognition* is a relevant tool to analyse the questions of recognition related to women and to their place in the public sphere. While women were at first excluded from this sphere, they succeeded thanks to the first feminist movements in entering that space and in acquiring equal rights as men. Nevertheless, a gap between men and women's participation to the public life remains. This gap has been the object of study of this thesis. What I have shown is that we can explain it in the light of Honneth's theory of mutual recognition. This inter-subjective theory allows, as we have seen, grasping how the ideal of impartiality and the standpoint of the 'Generalized Other' contribute to women's difficulties to integrate in the public debate. Even more, this theory offers the possibility to go beyond this doctrine and to make a step toward the 'particular other', with which women are more familiar.

Therefore, Honneth defines recognition as a vehicle of emancipation of which women could take advantage. If they manage to obtain love-based, rights-based and merit-based recognition, they could have the opportunity to fully engage in the public sphere. However, it is fundamental to highlight that this recognition, though it can contribute to women's emancipation, has ambivalent effects. It is also a vehicle of power and subordination, as it acts like a regulatory practice. Owing to this, I opposed to Honneth's conception of recognition as being mainly psychological harm. On the opposite, I argued that we should follow Fraser's approach and reconceive it as status subordination. That way, recognition could refer to justice, instead of being related to the 'good life'.

Defining recognition as an issue of justice is essential to fight the denials of recognition women are victim of in the three spheres. Both in the sphere of primary relationships, the legal sphere and the sphere of esteem, women suffer from gendered types of disrespect, such as physical abuses like rape, rights discriminations and denigration in the medias or in the world of work. Even though those disrespects take them away from the ability to really take part in the public debate, Honneth argues that they can trigger moral feelings that could lead women to engage in political struggles, if they happen in the legal sphere or in the sphere of esteem. Thus, those experiences of disrespect could be the starting

point of a social change aiming at more equality between men and women. This point is relevant to explain social dynamics, though as I have claimed Honneth is mistaken when he refuses to fully consider family as a field of moral dispute.

While Honneth's account is a relevant tool to analyse gender issues, it also offers many resources for feminist criticism. As we have seen, the feminist criticism completes Honneth's theory when it comes to move from the impartial ideal to the viewpoint of the 'particular other'. It gives indication about how to remedy the regulatory effects of recognition. It looks for solutions to answer to women's lack of recognition in the three spheres of recognition. It explains how disrespect in the sphere of primary relationships can lead to struggle for recognition. Last but not least, it emphasizes the importance of integrating the issue of justice in the debate about recognition. According to feminist theorists, justice is the main issue, as only justice could guarantee men-women equality in the public sphere. As a consequence, the feminist criticism contributes to Honneth's reflection on the ways power emerges and is misused in public life. To a certain extent, this feminist criticism even provides clues about possible ways to counter this power. To fight against inequalities and domination in the public sphere, feminist theorists for instance propose a new conceptualization of this space and an innovative understanding of deliberative dialogue. They consider the public sphere as the place where justice should be defined and interpreted[1]. Thus, they define deliberative democracy as the condition of justice and freedom in the sense of self-determination. Because it requires participation in public discussion and processes of democratic decision-making, they claim that deliberative democracy allows reaching decisions whose substance and implications best promote just outcomes. With its radically open procedure, this form of democracy is supposed to guarantee that the voices of all citizens will be heard. Therefore, it could help women and more broadly minorities to become part of public reason. It could give them the opportunity to renegotiate and rearticulate the distinction between public and private at the origin of their exclusion. It could enable a transformation of the current 'masculine' public institutions. From then on, feminist theories could help developing a recognition that would be based on mutual understanding instead of subordination. They could contribute in defining the social change Honneth is describing in the *Struggle for recognition*.

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[1] Lara, Maria Pia, *Moral Textures: Feminist narratives in the Public Sphere*, p. 108

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