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ABSTRACT: This article argues that we must distinguish between two distinct currents in the politics of recognition, one centred on demands for equal respect which is consistent with liberal egalitarianism, and one which centres on demands for esteem made on behalf of particular groups which is at odds with egalitarian aims. A variety of claims associated with the politics of recognition are assessed and it is argued that these are readily accommodated within contemporary liberal egalitarian theory. It is argued that, *pace* Taylor, much of what passes for 'identity' or recognition politics is driven by demands for equal respect, not by demands for esteem/affirmation. Given the inherently hierarchical nature of esteem recognition, no liberal state can consistently grant such recognition. Furthermore, these demands pose the risk of intensifying intergroup competition and chauvinism. Esteem recognition is valuable for individuals, but plays a problematic role for egalitarian politics.

KEY WORDS: *claims, difference, equal respect, esteem, identities, multicultural, recognition, rights, struggles*

What is the politics of recognition and what is its relation to egalitarian politics, broadly conceived? It is often said that recognition is a vital human need and, given the intersection of personal and collective identities, meeting this need requires the explicit public acknowledgement of group-differentiated citizenship.¹ For Anglo-American political theory, then, the politics of recognition is virtually synonymous with multiculturalism. I hope to bring the complexity of demands for recognition into sharper focus by suggesting that we can in fact distinguish recognition claims which are essentially egalitarian, and are concerned with eliminating disrespect, from those which are competitive and hierarchical in character, and concerned with esteem. While respect recognition is of central importance to an egalitarian politics, the dynamics of the politics of esteem recognition are fundamentally at odds with the non-hierarchical recognition of social difference which provides the moral force behind many recognition claims.

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Liberalism, Difference, and the Politics of Recognition

In Taylor's narrative, the politics of recognition emerges in response to the hostility to social difference embodied in the Enlightenment ideal of equal respect.² The egalitarianism of the Enlightenment reflects ethnocentric biases and is fundamentally oppressive in withholding public recognition from those particularities which are central to everyone's sense of personal identity and self-worth.³ The politics of recognition aims at rectifying an injustice, but also, rather like the Marxist critique of alienation, with rectifying an ethical deficit in modern societies: their indifference, and even hostility to a particular sort of intersubjectively constituted good – recognition – which is essential to one's sense of self-worth.

If we are swayed by Taylor's narrative, then it will seem plausible that the politics of recognition poses a radical challenge to liberal egalitarian political theory. There are good reasons, I think, to reject this line of thought. One might suspect, in particular, that the old Marxist left provides a much better target for this critique than contemporary liberal egalitarianism. The view that 'real' equality is concerned with economic resources, rather than with 'symbolic' goods like respect (which Rawls takes to be one of the most important primary goods), is one more familiar from old debates about the primacy of class struggle over 'identity' than from contemporary egalitarianism.⁴ Similarly, Marx's early critique of liberal freedom as a poor substitute for human emancipation exemplifies Enlightenment hostility to difference much better than the work of any recent liberal theorist.⁵ In what way, then, do liberal ideas about equality and respect fail to get to grips with issues of recognition?

One might argue that liberal egalitarians simply do not recognize differing social identities and resulting differing needs because they are committed to a 'one-size-fits-all' model of equal *treatment*.⁶ This involves a relatively trivial sense of 'recognition', however, meaning little more than 'knowledge' of relevant differences and no one could plausibly argue that egalitarians are 'difference-blind' in the sense that they *ignore* differing needs. The claim must be that that liberals are aware of social differences but attach no moral significance to them. However, this isn't obviously true because, since Rawls, liberals have been centrally concerned with the problem of structural inequality – something perhaps not widely understood outside academic political philosophy. A concern with remedying structural inequalities has led liberal egalitarians to endorse the sorts of affirmative action policies which aim at responding to differing needs and to historical injustices.⁷ Dworkin, of course, famously argues for affirmative action on the grounds that equal concern and respect can mandate departures from equal treatment.⁸ Liberals cannot plausibly be criticized on the grounds that they are insensitive to structural inequality, or that they cannot support group-differentiated public policies like affirmative action. If the politics of recognition is to pose a radical challenge to liberal egalitarian theory, then there must be more to it than this.

More promising, perhaps, is the suggestion that what's at stake is not structural inequality per se, but recognition of plural *situations* and the way in which interpretations of needs and interests are culturally situated. This focuses attention more on democratic politics than on distributive justice: how differently situated persons interpret and articulate their interests is what matters. Plural situations give rise to subtle and complex differences in perspective which will require patience and effort to fully comprehend.⁹ This raises a non-trivial sense of 'recognition' as it is not only the *content* of views that matters, but also that we show *respect* for one another by engaging with these views. Even here it might be argued that this issue is already central to the sort of deliberative politics espoused by mainstream political liberals. One might interpret the demand for civic respect as a call for some sort of 'intercultural dialogue' but this hardly constitutes a major theoretical innovation, as whatever force this has clearly derived from two familiar concerns: first, with 'anti-paternalism' and, second, with the epistemic focus on making informed judgements.¹⁰

Anti-paternalism simply requires us to respond not only to the interests of others, but to their interpretations of those interests. Without this requirement, democratic government would be little more than a collective version of benevolent despotism. Recognizing people as democratic citizens means that their perspectives, and not simply their interests, count. Procedural conceptions of democracy already do justice to this insight, then, to the extent that they suppose that every citizen is to have a formally equal say in self-government.¹¹ Indeed, this anti-paternalist aspect of recognition is already built into the morality of rights, insofar as being a rights-bearer means that one must be consulted about one's interests, i.e. one's status as someone capable of making claims on others, and as someone on whom claims may be made in return, must be recognized. The morality of rights, then, is already premised on a certain sort of recognition for, over and above questions about the force of a particular claim, one's status as a claimant presumes recognition of one's membership of the moral community of claimants.¹² Respect recognition, I suggest, has always been a central component of liberal egalitarianism, and it directs our attention to significant social differences in both needs and perspectives.

The second, epistemic, aspect of the demand for intercultural dialogue latches onto simple deficits in knowledge and, perhaps, of imagination. Given the fact that others' situations are different to our own, the nature of their beliefs and interests may not be immediately apparent to us, and may require careful investigation. No doubt this is true, but arguably it amounts to little more than a salutary reminder that we should be careful not to make ill-informed judgements concerning others. Our judgements may be derailed, however, not only by simple ignorance or inattention, but also by an excess of misguided 'cultural sensitivity' which projects exotic misapprehensions onto others. Here the risk is that one may lapse into orientalizing modes of thought in an effort to demonstrate one's 'respect' for otherness. A striking example of this is the way in which the British

government organized the 1931 'Indian Round Table Conference' on the future of India along strictly sectarian lines, despite Gandhi's protestations that India was no more divided along religious lines than anywhere else.¹³ Similarly, it has been argued that the currently popular category of 'indigenous peoples' is little more than a cleaned up version of discredited ideas about racial difference and the existence of 'primitive' peoples.¹⁴ We can misrecognize others in more than one way and the best safeguard against this is perhaps dialogue *simpliciter*, without additional 'cultural' qualifications.

Finally, one could argue that the politics of recognition has particular constitutional implications that may require us to depart significantly from liberal practices, if not from liberal ideals as such.¹⁵ Here the idea is that devices like federalism, consociationalism and group representation are essential to extend recognition to group-differentiated citizens. Once again, however, the distance from liberal egalitarian politics turns out not to be very great simply because liberal principles can be given a plurality of institutional expressions – liberal ideals do not commit us to Westminster or Washington. Innovations in institutional design can always be seen as pragmatic responses to the demands of particular circumstances and often a variety of considerations will have to be balanced in making judgements about the appropriateness of a particular set of institutions for a given polity. The power-sharing provisions for the assembly in Northern Ireland, for example, can be justified as necessary to guarantee members of the nationalist minority an equal say in self-government, and as a pragmatic response to the dangerously low levels of trust between the nationalist and unionist blocs, without implying any endorsement of the claim that the value of these arrangements lies in any supposed symbolic recognition of the worth of nationalist or unionist *identities*.

This reading of demands for the recognition of difference may be regarded as simply missing the point of the politics of recognition, namely that there is a symbolic magic associated with the public adoption of group-specific policies and institutions and to reconstruct these claims in more pedestrian egalitarian terms simply ignores this dimension at best, while at worst, it simply dismisses out of hand the very real recognition needs of group members. In the Northern Ireland case, for example, there is a real practical difference between these accounts insofar as the pragmatic account supposes that it would be ultimately desirable to eliminate institutions such as the formal 'designation' of political parties as 'nationalist' or 'unionist' for the purposes of assembly voting, a feature often criticized as institutionalizing sectarian division, while a 'culturalist', group recognition reading of this institution must regard it as inherently desirable.¹⁶ Can we trace this disagreement back to a more fundamental clash between two social ontologies, a crude atomistic individualism and a more sophisticated group centred notion of intersubjectivity? On balance, I think not.¹⁷ Rather, it reflects a substantive ethical and political disagreement about the force of different *sorts* of recognition claim. What is at stake is not whether or not to view recognition as a

good, or as an essential component of personal identity, but rather whether there are tensions between different versions of the politics of recognition and if so, what view we might take of them.

The Complexity of Recognition: Esteem and Respect

Where Taylor presents the politics of recognition as primarily concerned with the affirmation of particular identities, Honneth's tripartite model of recognition as love, respect and esteem, underlines the way in which equal respect is itself a key mode of recognition. This complex model is a useful corrective to Taylor's one-dimensional account, which has hitherto dominated debates about recognition in Anglo-American political theory. In particular, Honneth stresses the way that the morality of universal rights itself centrally involves a demand for intersubjective recognition.¹⁸ Second, Honneth rejects the view that 'identity' politics is defined by the struggle to affirm the value of particular identities; rather, he suggests, they often turn out to centre around demands for equal rights.¹⁹ This can be illustrated by reflection on the UK's Civil Partnership Act. Welcomed by many as a step towards an equal right to marry, it is nonetheless clear that many gay people are unhappy with the idea that they must be accorded a special institution which marks a difference between civil partnership and heterosexual marriage, rather than being accorded an equal right to marry. If Honneth is right we must expand our understanding of the politics of recognition and its dynamics to allow for the possibility of distinct types of recognition demand, and of complex interconnections between different, and possibly even opposed, demands for recognition within a political movement or campaign.

Critics of the politics of equal respect suggest that it is premised on the idea that only our common humanity is important and that our differences are consequently of no real value. They suggest, with some plausibility, that this stance can be oppressive insofar as it requires people to disregard or even repress their particular features. Further, amnesia about the universality of difference leads to unfair policies of assimilation, which seek to deliver homogenization in terms of cultural, gender or sexual norms. That assimilation can be oppressive is not in question, but is it coherent to suppose that the solution to this problem is for the *state* to engage in recognition of particular identities, i.e. to affirm or esteem them in some way, rather than simply maintaining a legal order which aims at guaranteeing equal respect for them? We need to look more closely at the difference between respect recognition and esteem recognition.

Respect is a thin concept: we qualify for respect simply in virtue of our humanity. All who meet this minimal condition are *entitled* to an equal share of respect. One important difference between esteem and respect is that while esteem is clearly an important good, we are not *entitled* to it. We cannot *demand* it of others, rather, it must be freely given if it is to be genuine.²⁰ To enjoy it, we must feel that we have earned it, and our enjoyment of it would be ruined if we thought others

were merely going through the motions and making outward expressions of an esteem they didn't really feel for us. Worse: we would not only have failed to be esteemed, we would be aware that we were thought vain and self-regarding. The deeper reason for this is presumably that to judge someone worthy of esteem is to hold a belief about them and we cannot simply choose what to believe – it is not simply that esteem cannot be demanded of us because we have a right to make up our own minds, but that it is not a coherent demand because no one could *choose* to grant it in the first place.

Significantly, the grammar of respect focuses on redressing imbalances, i.e. it comes into play when people have been denied their entitlement to equality because they simply don't count.²¹ Respect recognition is a threshold concept marking membership of the moral community. To be disrespected is not so much to be thought ill of, but not to be thought of at all – when one lies outside the moral community one is simply invisible. The grammar of esteem is concerned rather with hierarchies: to be esteem, it must be dished out on an unequal basis. It is, as Rousseau saw, inextricably linked to the 'rage of distinguishing ourselves'.²² When I esteem you, I judge you superior to others in some respect: you stand out from the crowd. The others who form the backdrop for this judgement are not invisible – they count but they are just not as good as you are. You are special, relative to others. The requirement that public bodies must strive for 'parity of esteem' between nationalists and unionists under the terms of the Belfast Agreement is, therefore, a puzzling one, for where there is parity, there is no esteem at all (although, there can, of course be respect – a term which, fortunately, also appears in this passage in the Agreement).²³

If esteem recognition is necessarily unequal, it is not clear that any liberal democratic state can consistently provide this sort of recognition. It cannot consistently offer positive evaluations of the practices of opposed groups of citizens, e.g. gays and fundamentalist Christians. It cannot, consistent with equal citizenship, engage in an unequal distribution of esteem. While a state may distribute honours for services performed by individuals, in the form of medals, public statuary, etc., it is significant that this is tied to a notion of public gratitude for services rendered, while the politics of recognition is said to demand esteem for identities, not for deeds.²⁴ Honneth, in sharp contrast to Taylor, argues that the key distributor of social esteem in contemporary societies is the market, which, officially at least, ties differential wages and esteem recognition to differential *achievement*. Or so it is claimed. Publicly sanctioned unequal esteem of identities then would be repugnant. Taylor, to be fair, is not arguing for a return to feudalism, but simply does not seem to have fully thought through the implications of his sharp contrast between the politics of respect and the politics of identity, which on Honneth's view are not so easily distinguishable.

The liberal democratic state, then, must limit its direct involvement in the politics of recognition to ensuring equal respect for all its citizens through protecting their rights. Citizens are then free to seek, confer and withhold esteem

against these background conditions of legally enforceable respect recognition. The demand for public recognition of difference interpreted as a demand for esteem/affirmation is simply incoherent. This does not mean that the state should be insensitive to 'difference' – as indicated, many of the claims associated with the politics of recognition or of 'difference' are ones which egalitarians will be keen to grant – but rather that we should be wary of viewing the politics of recognition, in all its complexity, through the lens of esteem recognition. That said, I want to suggest that, however necessary, it may often be very difficult to disentangle demands for respect and esteem, for although the latter can be politically corrosive it is nonetheless a necessary feature of the ethical landscape.

Contesting Injustice and Competing for Esteem

Fraser's contrast between demands for material equality and for recognition wrongly centres on the currency of justice rather than on its principles and she therefore fails to grasp the centrality of the idea of respect recognition to egalitarian justice – why after all are individuals entitled to material equality if not because we recognize them as equal members of the moral community? That said, her contrast between transformative and affirmative struggles for recognition is at least suggestive and we might plausibly think of struggles for equal respect as egalitarian, transformative, struggles aimed at rectifying an injustice, while struggles for esteem recognition aim at affirming a particular identity, which, as I have suggested, cannot be regarded as a matter of justice.²⁵ Note that these struggles can be concerned with securing economic benefits such as those protected by rights to equal pay, but also with symbolic struggles, which have no direct redistributive dimension. Curiously, Fraser's discussion of these issues is structured around the concepts of culture and economy, while the state is almost entirely absent. It is clear however, that law must be the central locus of transformative recognition struggles, as it is the legal system which distributes the relevant rights, whether these turn out to be claims to material resources, liberties or opportunities. The recognition of rights not only secures goods, but also manifests respect for the status of the rights-bearer as someone in a position to make claims upon us as an equal.

Many sorts of demands, whether about equal pay and conditions, access to healthcare, freedom of expression and association, including participation in minority cultural practices, can take the form of demands for equal respect. This includes demands which at first blush appear to be not only 'symbolic' but which also seem to involve the public recognition of particular group identities. Take for example the objections of black citizens to the flying of the confederate flag over some state legislatures in the Southern states of the US. Certainly conflict over this issue is an example of identity politics, but there is no symmetry here, i.e. it is the defenders of this practice who seek to have their identities affirmed in public institutions, who seek to symbolically *capture* common institutions by freighting

them with the symbols of the confederacy. By contrast, those who regard the flag as symbol of slavery and the flying of it as a denigration of black citizens do not want an equivalent affirmation of their particular group identity, but only the elimination of this public symbol of disrespect for their equal status. It is the concept of equal respect which enables us to identify the wrong here, while the idea of affirming particular identities does not have any purchase in this case. Erecting some equivalent symbolic recognition of the evil of slavery, a statue perhaps, alongside the confederate flag would simply fail to remedy the wrong involved.

In practice, participants in struggles over recognition may not themselves distinguish sharply between demands for respect and demands for esteem and this may be true even where demands for esteem are in significant tension with the particular respect demands being made. This internal tension is exemplified, I think, in the politics of Irish-language activism in Northern Ireland. Activism in this area centres on a number of demands: that adequate public funding be provided for Irish-medium education and for Irish-language programming on the state broadcasting service; that Irish be granted official status of some sort, such that official documentation might be provided in Irish, and speakers would have the right to interact with state institutions through Irish, and translation services, might, for example, be provided within the Northern Ireland Assembly, facilitating Irish-language contributions to debates, etc. Some of these demands clearly fall into the category of demands for equal respect – for example those relating to an equitable share of resources for Irish-medium education and broadcasting, equivalent perhaps to the sorts of funding available elsewhere in the UK for Welsh and Scots Gaelic provision. Such funding would also have significant practical value in helping to sustain linguistic diversity, so we might conclude that equal respect recognition can help, contra Taylor, to support minority cultural practices. If the Irish-language community in Northern Ireland spoke Irish as a first language, as some communities in the Republic do, we might also suppose that to fail to grant Irish official status might also impose unfair costs on Irish speakers, as this might well disadvantage them significantly in their dealings with the state. However, this is not the case here – Irish speakers in Northern Ireland typically speak Irish as a second language, in many cases with less fluency than they speak English (the same is largely true of the Republic). So the demand for translation services etc. is clearly of symbolic, rather than practical, value, and in particular it involves an assertion of Irishness as a cultural and political identity, one which resonates with the nationalist population more widely, regardless of ability to speak Irish.

Clearly, the claims of Irish-language activists in Northern Ireland are different from those made on behalf of many minority language communities, including *Gaeltacht* communities in the Republic and, I believe, weaker, to the extent that the disadvantages incurred in each case are significantly different. Be that as it may, I want to suggest here that the demand for symbolic esteem recognition in this case is problematic with respect to the pursuit of equal respect. Sinn Fein, the

majority nationalist party, actively pursues the symbolic recognition of Irish by the state as part of a wider goal of securing equality for the Irish nationalist population within Northern Ireland, and ultimately creating a united Ireland founded on equal citizenship for all. The pursuit of *symbolic* recognition for Irish, however, as a proxy for 'Irishness' is at odds with their official goal of 'Building an Ireland of Equals', as it affirms an ethnically exclusive vision of Irishness which can have little appeal for the British population of Northern Ireland, the would-be citizens of this putative united Ireland. In addition, many language activists would prefer to decouple the language issue from the wider question of political identity, seeing it as undesirable in itself and also as provoking unnecessary resistance to and resentment of their aims.

It is thought by many in both communities that the emergence of parallel demands for similar recognition for the dialect of 'Ulster Scots' amongst a minority of loyalists and unionists is prompted in no small measure by the reactive desire to affirm a parallel Ulster Scots identity and thwart the attempts of nationalists and republicans to achieve a symbolic victory in the cultural conflict within this divided society. On one level this is a matter of deliberate strategy, while at another level it also represents an attempt to respond to nationalist taunts that the unionist community do not have a 'real' identity, i.e. that they are not 'really' British at all and that their 'culture' is ultimately inferior to that of Irish nationalism. The resulting cultural tit for tat is, I suggest, a clear consequence of the inappropriate pursuit of esteem recognition, which is quite distinct from any concern with the survival of minority language and culture, or with the achievement of equal citizenship. As one recent study has indicated, the very language of 'parity of esteem' has itself come to play a central, legitimizing role in competition between elements of nationalism and unionism. Unionist cultural insecurity, prompted by perceived loss of official esteem, then drives hostility to the attempts by bodies such as the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to construct a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, as these are seen as serving the nationalist goal of undermining the symbolic standing of the unionist community.²⁶

It is important to recognize, however, that the demand for esteem recognition is deeply rooted and, if we should resist its political expression, we cannot, and indeed, should not, eradicate it. Honneth argues that not only are there three distinct modes of recognition, but that the creation of a stable personality requires all three: love, respect and esteem. The pursuit of esteem is plausibly connected to each individual's need to find some worthwhile project to endow his or her life with meaning. We want to be assured, of course, that our lives have real value, even if they are primarily of value to those actually leading them, and this prompts us to attend to the judgements of others, for it will be difficult, if not strictly impossible, to sustain confidence in one's judgement of the value of one's projects in the face of widespread, and perhaps vociferous, disagreement. This unavoidable existential concern, then, prompts a legitimate, reasonable, concern with social esteem on the part of the individual.

There is a potential pitfall however, for a life lived in direct pursuit of esteem itself, rather than one directed at some other value which may happen indirectly to produce esteem is one which will not only seem to be largely without value to most well-adjusted people, it is also one which is likely to fail in its own terms, to the extent that one will not win esteem by leading a life obviously directed solely at that end. At best such a person may secure deference, if they enjoy a powerful position, but not genuine esteem. Such a project would be fundamentally misconceived and perhaps so obviously so that we may think that few people, celebrities aside, really make the mistake of deliberately pursuing it.

However, while few will commit themselves purely to the direct pursuit of esteem, many more may find themselves being caught up in it unintentionally, through the pursuit of genuinely valuable ends. What is more natural than to resent the low status given to pursuits which one views as of fundamental value: the leading of a particular sort of religious life for example, or a devotion to some arcane academic discipline? This sort of recognition claim has an impersonal quality to it: I demand recognition not for myself, but for my particular God, my art, my community. While my own sense of self-worth is implicated, the pursuit of esteem for my religion or nation is likely to be sincerely altruistic in motivation. The religious often seem particularly sensitive to fluctuations in the social recognition barometer, and believers' ardour in this regard is plausibly motivated by the sense that they have a solemn responsibility to secure the requisite social deference to the deity in question. Angst over the extent to which one has discharged such responsibilities, as Weber famously argued, can be a powerful social force.

Where Taylor's account rather one-sidedly presents the misrecognized as victims, damaged by negative social judgements, Honneth sees a possible dialectic between negative social judgements and the reactive attitudes of resentment and anger, which can in turn motivate the misrecognized to mobilize against injustice.²⁷ Often this is a dialectic between disrespect and legitimate resentment, but there can also be a role for collective esteem recognition in this dialectic. For many groups on the receiving end of social denigration, the resolve to engage in struggles for respect recognition may itself be a product of a prior struggle for esteem recognition *within* the group itself. Where marginalized groups internalize the dominant group's view of themselves as worthless or at least of little value, the first step in the process of igniting a struggle for justice is that members of the group concerned re-evaluate *themselves*. This is an internal process of revaluation and recognition which addresses the problem that internalizing dominant judgements gives rise to the formation of adaptive preferences, which must first be revised if a struggle for equal rights is to be commenced.²⁸ The conscious-raising activities of second-wave feminism, for example, were concerned not simply with identifying injustices but also with re-evaluating women themselves, the value of their work, the nature of femininity, etc. Esteem, on this view, plays an important role at the start of this process of developing a political challenge to inequality, without necessarily functioning as the direct goal of such struggles.

If Rousseau is right, however, then there is always an inherent risk in the pursuit of esteem recognition; it has a dynamic that always risks turning a reasonable concern with *amour propre* into an unreasonable compulsion to hierarchically distinguish ourselves from others. This is simply built into the concept of esteem: the necessary inequality that it presumes must prompt competition with its attendant hazards. The more I press my claims for recognition, the more difficult it may be to secure it because once I go beyond demanding that others respect my right to engage in practice X, there is a slippery slope down which I may slide as the demand that others recognize X as having *some* value, can become embroiled in the claim that it is more valuable than W, Y and Z too, and hierarchical judgements of this sort can only provoke a potentially dangerous competition for social esteem amongst interested parties, i.e. most of us.

This is, perhaps, downplayed by a communitarian-inflected multiculturalism which has underestimated the potential for conflict present within even ostensibly innocuous struggles for recognition. This is, possibly, because multicultural model has been developed around questions of the survival of certain sorts of minority, typically indigenous peoples, or certain varieties of inward-looking religious sect like the Amish, whose concern is with *survival*. As I have argued, however, these sorts of claims can be read in terms of the politics of equal respect. The competitive pursuit of esteem recognition will often play a larger role in struggles where the groups concerned are more closely integrated with the society in question, religious, and ethno-national groups in particular, who will, in consequence be more difficult to accommodate to the extent that their concerns extend beyond survival to expansion into social life more generally and greater control over public institutions. In responding to these struggles, the need for a more nuanced grasp of the dynamics of recognition seems to be indispensable.

Conclusion

This has not been an argument for dismissing the politics of recognition and for a return to some golden age of class politics conducted against the backdrop of cultural homogeneity and simple majoritarian democracy. On the contrary, much of the 'politics of recognition' is rightly viewed as important, both morally and politically. The concerns of minority groups about their social and political exclusion are legitimate and warrant the engagement of greater institutional imagination. What is being argued here, however, is that because of the complex relations that pertain between self-esteem and self-respect, and the ever present risk that a concern for competitive esteem may come to dominate what began as a legitimate interest in securing equal respect, we need to take a more critical view of certain aspects of the politics of recognition. In particular, it is clear that the links between structural inequality, group-differentiated public policies, a more inclusive democratic politics and the collective esteem of social groups, particularly, those of a religious or national character, are more complex than the

standard model of recognition as esteem/affirmation of identity suggests. Often the recognition struggles of marginalized groups turn out to be struggles for equal respect rather than for social esteem, and by the same token, struggles that are concerned with establishing social esteem can turn out to have dangerously sectarian and chauvinist dimensions. This is a product of the nature of esteem recognition itself, which is essentially hierarchical. While the pursuit of esteem may be relatively harmless at the individual level, and indeed may have a useful regulatory function to the extent that concern to enjoy a good reputation provides a strong motivation to act well, at the collective level it risks pitching us into a morally unacceptable and politically destabilizing politics of competition and hierarchy.²⁹ This pathological current in the politics of recognition is one that must be contained and managed rather than embraced and celebrated, while the demand for equal respect recognition is centrally implicated in claims on economic resources, the struggle to democratize social and political institutions, and the conduct of a cultural politics which contests domination rooted in inequality. As such, it represents a politics of recognition that is at the same time a politics of respect and equality.

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Notes

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13. A. Sen (2006) *Identity and Violence*, pp. 167–9. New York: Norton.
14. A. Kuper (2005) *The Reinvention of Primitive Society*. London: Routledge.
15. W. Kymlicka (1995) *Multicultural Citizenship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Kymlicka, of course, stresses the continuity with liberal theory and does not in fact make significant use of the concept of 'recognition' in his argument.
16. Under the Agreement, parties elected to the Assembly must officially designate themselves 'Unionist', 'Nationalist' or 'Other' for the purpose of voting on those issues deemed to require cross-community support.
17. C. McBride (2005) 'Deliberative Democracy and the Politics of Recognition', *Political Studies* 53: 497–515.
18. A. Honneth (1995) *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 92–130. Cambridge: Polity.
19. A. Honneth (2003) 'Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser', in N. Fraser and A. Honneth (eds) *Redistribution or Recognition?*, pp. 163–6. London: Verso.
20. *Ibid.* p. 168.
21. P. Pettit and G. Brennan (2006) *The Economy of Esteem*, p. 20. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
22. J. J. Rousseau (1913) 'Discourse on the Origins of Inequality', in G. D. H. Cole (ed.) *The Social Contract and Discourses*, pp. 174–246, p. 233. London: Dent.
23. The Agreement sets out a commitment to establishing a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland which will contain, 'principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem'. Strand One, 'Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity', para. 4.
24. Pettit and Brennan (n. 21).
25. Fraser, N., 'Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: redistribution, recognition, and participation' in Fraser and Honneth (n. 19), p. 74.
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27. Honneth (n. 19), p. 136.
28. J. Cohen (1997) 'Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy', in J. Bohman and W. Rehg (eds) *Deliberative Democracy*, pp. 67–92. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
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