Recognition, Suffering and Refugees

Gottfried Schweiger

Centre for Ethics and Poverty Research, University of Salzburg, Salzburg, Austria

ABSTRACT

Based on Honneth’s distinction of recognition in love, respect and social esteem, the social suffering of refugees is criticized in this contribution as an experience of disrespect. In the first part, I will address the fact that moral claims to recognition have a temporal dimension. Then I will ask what role the duration of their flight, the waiting in camps and until admission play for the social suffering of refugees. I will highlight the particular vulnerability of refugees during this time and distinguish different forms of disrespect – with regard to love, social esteem, and respect and rights - faced by them. In the final section, I pose the question which individuals and institutions are responsible for enabling conditions of recognition for refugees.

KEYWORDS

Recognition; Refugees; Axel Honneth; Disrespect

Introduction

Recognition is not a static, but a dynamic process. It is dynamic in two respects. First, because recognition takes place between two or more persons or institutions that recognize each other. Second, it is dynamic because it is in time. Recognition has both a time when it takes place and a time span. It is the second aspect in particular that interests me in this article and that I want to explore in relation to the question of the moral claims of refugees.

Refugees are a particularly vulnerable group and before, during and after their flight, their well-being is at risk. They are endowed with special rights to protect them from these dangers, but their rights are often not respected. From the perspective of a theory of recognition, the thesis that the social suffering of refugees is a form of disrespect and therefore unjust can be put forward. Under the premise of Axel Honneth’s early theory, which distinguishes between three modes and forms of recognition, it is necessary to explicate the forms of disrespect they experience regarding their claims to love, respect and social esteem, and which demands for recognition refugees can legitimately put forward.¹ This is the topic of this paper.

What distinguishes such a perspective of recognition theory from other normative theories that are used to critique the situation of refugees and to explicate their normative claims (Miller and Straehle 2020), such as the capability approach or the human rights
approach? I can only make some sporadic remarks on this without presenting a more detailed analysis of the differences and similarities between these and other normative approaches.

While human rights refer to and protect fundamental interests, recognition theory is broader in scope and has a closer connection to the social configuration of a society. Not all suffering generated by a lack of recognition constitutes a human rights violation, and not all claims to recognition that refugees have can be meaningfully explicated as human rights. This has to do, above all, with the fact that recognition theory, while formulating universal moral claims at its core, is always context-sensitive as well. It is also true that human rights have to be applied and implemented in certain contexts; nevertheless, they always formulate minimal claims (for example, to health or standard of living). Recognition, however, takes place as a social process in which it is not sufficient that people or groups – like refugees – are only minimally recognized but that they each have access to the relations of recognition that are important for a good life in that society. Another difference is that some goods of recognition, such as love or social esteem, cannot or can only with difficulty be formulated as human rights, also because their addressees are not the state or supranational institutions, but people or groups and social institutions. Recognition is aimed much more at social cohesion and solidarity in a society and its social fields, as well as the social norms and practices established therein, than human rights, which refer to the individual as a subject of legal rights.

Therefore, in Honneth’s theory, human rights and rights in general are also only one particular form and mode of recognition. A theory of recognition is equally distinct from such theories of justice that focus on goods or capabilities as what should be distributed justly. Martha Nussbaum again, focuses on minimal claims, which can be understood from her tying the capability approach more closely to issues of global justice and development than to issues of social justice. Recognition theory will agree that refugees are deprived of specific capabilities and that they lack certain freedoms and opportunities to be or do something. But this does not say everything normatively relevant about the situation of refugees and other victims of injustice from a recognition theory perspective. While Honneth has over the years detached recognition theory from its close ties to psychology and developed it in the direction of a theory oriented toward freedom and agency, nevertheless the experiences of subjects and how they can understand themselves remain central here as well. The suffering and experience of disrespect continues to be an important anchor for recognition theory. Honneth’s earlier writings focus on psychological suffering and the experience of exclusion and not belonging, while later emphasizing primarily the unfreedom and lack of agency that occur as a result of social processes of disrespect and non-recognition in specific social fields (such as employment, the family or the law). However, these are not only questions of a fair distribution of capabilities, goods or rights, but questions of social interaction and the joint shaping of recognition relations. The subjects of recognition theory are also to be understood as agents who are jointly making their own life-worlds and engage in struggles for recognition that take place within them. They are not only recipients of recognition, but always also givers of recognition or disrespect. This also implies for recognition theory to take the victims of injustice – such as refugees – seriously as active agents of justice.

It is also important to emphasize that the perspective on the temporal dimension of flight explicated here, and the extent to which looking at the timing and duration of
experiences of disrespect can help us to better understand them, is not sufficiently con-
sidered in many ethical discussions of refugees, their suffering, and their rights. In this
sense, the reflections in this paper are also relevant beyond the theory of recognition.

**Recognition and Time**

In the first systematic formulations of Honneth’s theory of recognition (Honneth 1996),
the three modes of recognition – love, respect and social esteem – which are reflected in
the three forms of care, rights and solidarity play a special role. They represent the nor-
mative core of the project of outlining a normative theory of a just society. Recognition
is intrinsically valuable and instrumentally important for the development of positive
self-relations. Without recognition a good and self-determined life in society and
social relations is impossible and those who lack or are denied recognition suffer as a
result.

Honneth conceptualizes the three modes of recognition in a time-dynamic way, since
he understands them to be the result of historical and ongoing struggles for recognition.
He thus assumes that these three modes and their forms have developed in the course of
the recent history of modernity and can probably be further modified. They are basically
open in two respects. Firstly, they are open to socially differentiated forms, which means,
for example, that what is considered a form of social esteem in a society can change.
Whereas salary used to be more important, today it seems that many who can afford
it are more interested in a good work-life-balance, which is why they can demand it as
recognition for their work performance.

Secondly, the modes of recognition are open to future changes. It is not entirely clear
whether and how the basic modes and forms of recognition might change in the future,
i.e. whether or not a fourth basic form might be added, but in some important respects
they are open to modification and adaptation. For example, it is not clear what the future
relationship will be between these three modes of recognition or whether one of them will
become more important than the other two. Although Honneth speaks of an anthropo-
logical foundation to the three modes and forms of recognition, their historical formation
already shows that some important aspects of human nature are themselves changeable.
Honneth cannot exclude regressions either, even if he has to regard them as unlikely and
also undesirable on account of his teleological model.

A theory of recognition is also temporally dynamic because it assumes that subjects
change and develop through the recognition they receive. This is again most explicit
for the experience of recognition in the mode of paternal love, since here a child is
addressed as a subject who needs such loving experiences in order to develop self-con-
dience and other central characteristics of an independent identity. Honneth introduces
the recognition mode of love specifically with regard to early childhood needs – a child
needs parental love in order to develop self-confidence and a positive understanding of
him or herself. Childhood is a phase of dynamic physical and psychological growth that is
initiated, guided and supported by recognition processes. In addition, for the other two
modes of recognition, respect and social esteem, it can be similarly assumed that their
experience over longer periods of time is necessary for adults to develop into indepen-
dent and mature individuals. In addition to positive developments, however, negative
ones are also possible; regression can occur and acquired self-confidence and self-
respect can be lost again through the experience of disrespect – the self can sometimes be irreparably damaged, which has a lasting effect on the further course of life. The pathology of an addiction to recognition, which can express itself, for example, in the pursuit of a constant expansion of material goods and power, also shows a deformation of the individual over time and does not occur suddenly. It can lead to burnout or alienated forms of self-realization.8

In principle, recognition happens in time in two respects. Recognition has a temporal extension and it takes place at a certain point in time, whereby this second aspect can again be split into the point in time when recognition is given and the point in time when recognition is experienced. All three aspects are relevant to whether recognition experiences succeed or fail. If love is a mode of recognition that takes the form of caring in a relationship, then it is understandable that its duration is important. Parental love, an important form of love for Honneth, is probably only valuable if it lasts not just a few minutes but extends throughout childhood or even beyond. A child cannot develop trust and feel loved if the love the child experiences and the care that is based on that love only lasts for a very short time. That is the main reason why Anne Alstott argued for a parental duty to stay.9 It is equally easy to see that the timing of recognition can be crucial, as recognition can be given too early or too late. Love shown too late can evaporate, rights granted only after the injustice has long since occurred can come too late. In extreme cases, due recognition is not acknowledged at all until after death. The time between giving recognition and experiencing recognition can be a few seconds or many years. Institutionalization can separate certain forms of recognition in time. Salaries as a form of social appreciation are usually paid monthly rather than daily. Public pensions, which can be understood as recognition for past contributions, are only due at the end of a person’s working life.

There are, therefore, many components that determine whether recognition is successful and time can play a decisive role here. This temporal structuring of recognition is itself modifiable and expectations can be adapted to it. While the length of time a child needs to experience love and care in order to develop well is strongly determined by natural needs, many other forms of recognition are more strongly influenced by conventions, such as the acceptable or expected duration between a job and the payment for it.

In addition to the three modes of recognition, love, respect and social esteem, it is useful to introduce two further distinctions, which in turn have a temporal dimension. The first distinction is that between social, material and symbolic goods of recognition. All three modes of recognition can be expressed in these goods and it is usually the interaction of these goods that constitutes a successful experience of recognition. Let us stay with the example of parental love and care. Caring is realized in social goods, i.e. in relationships such as listening, encouraging, being there for each other. Material goods will certainly also play a role here, toys or other gifts, even the provision of basic goods can be understood as an expression of love and care. Finally, symbolic forms of recognition such as praise are equally important. It should be noted here that these three forms of recognition goods are interwoven. Material goods are usually exchanged within the framework of social relationships, and often have a symbolic character. It is clear that social, material and symbolic goods of recognition each exist in time and space. Praise that is given too late can be worthless and gifting money to a small child...
who does not know what to do with it means the recognition cannot be utilized and perhaps not even understood by them.

The second useful distinction refers to disrespect, which Honneth introduces as the opposite of recognition. In Honneth’s work, disrespect is emphasized above all as the opposite of recognition, which expresses itself in violence or humiliation. Equally important, however, is ignorance or non-recognition, which has a certain proximity to invisibility. The dividing line between recognition, disrespect and non-recognition can also be drawn between the two components of activity and passivity on the part of the person giving recognition. Recognition as well as disrespect would then be active actions to cause either positive or negative effects. Non-recognition, on the other hand, would be passivity, it would be simply doing nothing. The matter becomes more complicated if activity and passivity are not only related to external actions, but to the intention. In this way it can very well be a conscious decision not to recognize someone, whereby one consciously decides against recognizing or disrespecting this person. One wants to remain neutral towards this person. On the part of the person seeking recognition, an ignored demand for recognition, i.e. the experience of non-recognition, is sometimes perceived as equally hurtful as an act of disrespect. This experience can come close to becoming invisible, to being ignored and to being looked through.

**Recognition, Time and Flight**

What role do recognition and time play in the situation of refugees? Different aspects can be differentiated here. Firstly, there is a temporal structuring of the flight, which can be divided into the stages before, during and after the flight. Using a very rough classification it could perhaps be said that the demands for recognition in all these stages are the same, namely demands for the experiences of love, respect and esteem. Much more intriguing, however, is the question of in which concrete goods these demands for recognition should be realized and how do they differ with regard to the position of the refugee on this timeline. It is also not the case that all refugees manage all three stages, some die on the journey or never reach their destination but remain in refugee camps for years. Let us take as an example the mode of recognition of respect, which translates into rights, or rather, which should translate into rights. Certainly, some rights must be guaranteed at all times before, during and after flight, and refugees are entitled to these. However, there are certainly specific rights they can claim during each of these stages, as they are faced with specific violations and vulnerabilities. During the flight, for example, the right to be admitted to another state or to return safely to one’s home country is crucial. This is probably connected with the demand that this admission should take place as quickly as possible and a longer stay in a camp without the possibility of entry will then also be experienced as disrespect for these demands. After reaching the desired destination, new rights come into play: the right to care and protection when one cannot care for oneself, the right to be heard and asylum, the right to integration, the right to equality under the law. These and numerous other demands for recognition, which relate to the modes of love, respect and social esteem, can be distinguished based on the temperol structuring of flight and refuge seeking.
It has already been pointed out that the duration of the flight plays a decisive role. This can be explained by the fact that for the negativity of experiences of disrespect or non-recognition, their duration plays a decisive role – this can be said for very many forms of damage and suffering. The state of hunger and deprivation is the more harmful the longer it lasts. The deprivation of recognition in a refugee camp unfolds more negative potential the longer it lasts. Analogous to a concept developed within the framework of the Capability Approach, one can say here that certain, especially long-term, forms of disrespect are corrosive and have ever stronger negative effects on the body and minds of refugees.13 Traumatization can also occur quickly, through experiences such as severe sexual violence, torture or separation from one’s own family, but many traumas deepen the longer the negative experience lasts, the more frequently it takes place. Trauma can also become more deeply ingrained if left untreated for a long time or ignored and belittled. The time of flight is a time of danger and vulnerability. The longer it lasts, the more likely a refugee is to experience such harms to the self, to become a victim and to be subjected to forms of severe violations of his or her physical and psychological integrity.

Finally, there are also claims for recognition which relate to the future and the further course of the refugee’s life. The experience of recognition is not only important for the positive experience and confirmation of one’s own identity in the present, it also prepares the ground for the future. A mode of analysis must be found for this. It is clear that if children have not been able to experience sufficient love and care due to the trauma of fleeing, the fragmentation of their families and the hardships they and their parents have had to cope with, this can have an impact on the whole future path of life. Some children are more resilient than others, some can escape the deepest trauma and develop a healthy identity – but many cannot. Above all, they cannot do so if they do not receive sufficient support and if they are not recognized later on as suffering and traumatized. The lack of love during childhood cannot be made up for by later care and love, an injustice is always left behind, but the experience of recognition after the trauma suffered and the disrespect suffered, can at least help to overcome and process it. Thus, time is also important for healing, overcoming and processing the experiences of disrespect. Some forms of disrespect leave such profound traces that many victims can only process them with intensive and long-term support. Some, unfortunately, will never recover. Some traumas are also passed on to the next generation.14 It is important to acknowledge this temporal dimension of social suffering and to understand recognition dynamically in order to appreciate what experiences of disrespect refugees endure and how these unfold.

**Vulnerability**

I would now like to elaborate on two normative concepts in order to explicate and better understand the situation of refugees from the perspective of recognition theory: Vulnerability and suffering. Both relate to the central normative concepts of disrespect and recognition already mentioned. I begin with vulnerability.

Vulnerability is normatively relevant as a condition and as an experience. Although all people are vulnerable in certain respects, some are more vulnerable than others. This increased vulnerability may be due to natural differences, but it may also be due to
social ones. The situation of flight is a socially generated situation of vulnerability. Second, it is important to distinguish whether someone is more vulnerable or whether someone is at higher risk of being injured compared to people who are equally vulnerable. All children are more vulnerable than adults, but refugee children are clearly more vulnerable than children who are not refugees but are at home with their parents in Germany. Refugee children are more vulnerable in the sense that they have a higher risk of being hurt.

In the literature a distinction has been made between inherent, situational and pathogenic vulnerability. The need to be recognized by others constitutes an inherent vulnerability, as it refers people to relationships and structures that they cannot create on their own. This vulnerability is especially eminent in the first years of life, when love and care are of existential importance, but even in later life recognition is not completely controllable for most people – on the one hand because they are dependent on social and institutional forms of recognition but do not control them, on the other hand because they depend on the recognition of other people, whose reactions they cannot control. In this respect, the human body and the psychological and social status always remain insecure and vulnerable through experiences of disrespect, violence, disenfranchisement and degradation. The social structure in which people live constantly produces new forms of situational and pathogenic vulnerability. The dependence on gainful employment makes many people in capitalist societies vulnerable to unemployment and poverty, while patriarchal dominance makes women and girls vulnerable to male violence and oppression. Both situational and pathogenic vulnerability are thus embedded in the social norms and practices of respect and social esteem and their counterparts. Disfranchisement renders people defenceless and vulnerable by exposing them to the arbitrariness of other people, organisations and the state.

Flight can be understood as a situational vulnerability in which high risks, suffered deprivation, lack of protection and lack of rights come together. This often continues even after the flight and the arrival in an apparently safe country. There it is both legal shortcomings and forms of humiliation that refugees have to endure when confronted with socially accepted norms and practices of racism and xenophobia. But as I mentioned already not all refugees are equally vulnerable. Children are more vulnerable than adults, women are usually more vulnerable than men, and people with a low socio-economic status and few networks are usually more vulnerable than people with money, education, power or networks.

The risk of refugees to suffer experiences of disrespect is disproportionately higher than that of other social groups. They are therefore more vulnerable in this respect. From a normative perspective, two things can be distinguished here. On the one hand, vulnerability is unjust when people are more vulnerable than others for arbitrary social reasons. Flight represents such a situation in which people have to suffer through no fault of their own and in which they are existentially dependent on others to offer them protection and care. On the other hand, vulnerability is socially constituted. If we understand vulnerability as the possibility of experiencing disrespect, then it becomes clear that recognition can reduce vulnerability because it both strengthens some inner factors – self-confidence and self-respect – and can build social relationships that can protect against harms and disrespect – such as close relationships and support networks, legal protection and solidarity.
Vulnerability, this seems trivial, is also in time and there are times when people are more vulnerable; for example, when they are ill or unable to care for themselves. Flight is one such temporal extension of vulnerability that provides many entry points for suffering and disrespect. Three things are important to note here. First, vulnerability does not decrease continuously over the life course, but changes. Even though children are in principle more vulnerable than adults, traumatic experiences during childhood or lack of education because children had to live in a camp for months are such suffering that propagates through the life course and makes these children into more vulnerable adults. Second, certain vulnerabilities only emerge over time: girls are more vulnerable than boys – based on sexualized violence and hegemonic masculinity – but the specific risks of (unwanted) pregnancy, childbirth, and care for a child do not occur until puberty. Each phase of life holds specific vulnerabilities that can also be expressed as needs or the dependence on certain forms and goods of recognition. Third, suffering is often contrasted with vulnerability, so that vulnerability describes the possibility of suffering. However, the situation of vulnerability can itself also be experienced as harmful and as a situation of disrespect and non-recognition. It can be painful to know oneself vulnerable and especially to know oneself more vulnerable than others. The situation of defenselessness is already painful as an experience of disrespect, not only the situation when this defenselessness is exploited by others to be physically or psychologically abused.

Suffering

Flight is in several respects a phase of the experiences of suffering from disrespect and non-recognition. I am guided here by the three forms of recognition – love, respect, and social esteem – but I assume that these three are highly variable and encompass whole sets of material, social, and symbolic goods and different forms of social relations. Goods such as health care, food, shelter or clothing that are often mentioned in the debate about the moral rights of refugees are included here. I want to make this explicit using health as an example. According to human rights, all people and thus also refugees have a right to health, but this right is often violated. The right to health refers to recognition as respect. This includes all goods that express that people are respected for their mere humanity as moral agents. So when refugees are denied the right to health, it is a form of disrespect and creates social suffering. From the point of view of recognition theory, there are three points to consider here:

First, the question of whether and how health is institutionalized as a right. Do people have a right to health in the form of health insurance that is largely tied to employment? Do people have this right only as a humanitarian right granted in times of need? The state of being sick is not yet a state of disrespect, but the state of being denied a right is. However, it is also a state of disrespect if a good is granted but in the wrong way. From the perspective of modern societies, rights can be degrading in two ways: Firstly, it is degrading when rights are used to distribute goods that should actually belong to a different sphere of recognition. People should be able to provide for themselves on the basis of their work and social esteem and not be dependent on state aid, although one should not downplay the suffering involved in work under capitalism. From this point of view, this makes the distribution of food to refugees degrading in itself,
because it clearly marks refugees as dependent and needy – and thus infantilized. Of course, it is better for refugees to receive private or state aid than for them to receive none at all, but this still does not satisfy their demands for recognition and justice. Some aspects that are closely related to the right to health, such as the provision of food, clothing, housing, are also closely related to practices of recognition through social esteem or love. Adult refugees should be able to support themselves and their children and not be kept in a state of dependency where they rely on private or government assistance for food, clothing, housing. Recognition implies empowerment as a social subject and in modern societies this means participation in work and social production of goods. Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator (free version) Secondly, it is degrading when people receive goods to which they have rights as charity and thus fall into the position of dependency, because they then cannot experience themselves as proper subjects of rights. If there is a right to health, it makes a difference whether this right can be demanded as a right from a state or state institution – which then constitutes a particular relation of recognition – or one is dependent on private charity from a NGOs for it. Private charity is not the adequate relation of recognition for rights.

Second, the right to health is bound up in struggles for recognition. From a human rights perspective, it might seem that this right and its content do not arise from social struggles – but they do. Do girls have access to contraception and abortion? Are refugees entitled to receive vaccination against COVID-19 as early as everyone else? Regardless of whether such rights are already enshrined, their implementation requires that people claim them, demand them, and, if necessary, change structures and social norms and practices that oppose them. This is the core of recognition struggles.

Third, and finally, health is of course not exhausted in a right – this is also clear in the human rights discourse. There is a social determination of health that is more difficult to grasp in legal terms, but is clearly linked to structures of recognition. In this respect, health plays a role for all three forms of recognition – love, respect and social esteem. Health is tightly knotted with working conditions that can either protect or destroy it. Again, this is an issue that goes beyond rights, as social struggles against bad, dangerous, exploitative, unhealthy or precarious work also target the dimension of social esteem. Likewise, health is maintained, restored, or harmed in families and social relationships. The family is both the safest and most dangerous place for violence and abuse for children and women, with many practices of disrespect embedded in social structures of poverty, fear, stress, toxic masculinity, and misogyny. For the situation of refugees, this means understanding the right to health, in its complexity and connection to all forms of recognition and disrespect and the social structures that produce them. Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator (free version).

Life as a refugee does not make the experience of recognition - of love, respect, social esteem - impossible. However, refugees live in social spaces that make it more difficult to make these experiences of recognition and that increase the risk of experiencing social suffering and disrespect. Refugees are thus more vulnerable to being excluded from the experience of recognition. Love in times of flight is possible and so is care. However, it will be more difficult to experience love and care while fleeing or living in a camp than in times of peace and secure existence. Love is not only an emotion, but also a relationship and a set of particular acts. The emotional component of love as well as its expression in acts and goods of love are affected by the situation of flight,
and can even become almost impossible. Fleeing means stress, it means fear and insecurity. Fleeing traumatizes, creates psychological disorders and destroys trust. All these negative experiences make it more difficult to love and to let oneself be loved, that is, to be able to accept love from others. Acts of love can become difficult under such conditions. This starts with the fact that lovers may have been separated, that families may have been torn apart by flight, or that family members may have been separated before the flight by war, poverty and persecution. Love needs space and privacy and it is expressed in material, social and symbolic goods. This applies to romantic love as well as love between children and parents. The phase of flight does not always and completely make this impossible, but it makes it much more difficult to build and maintain a stable family life or loving relationships. Poverty and material deprivation, which is common among refugees, makes it more difficult to provide goods of love, be these small gifts, romantic gestures or the care of children. This precariousness of love is also present when refugees succeed, despite all adverse circumstances, in establishing love and family relationships and in recognizing each other in them.

The legal situation of refugees is precarious in principle and so is the possibility of making experiences of recognition in the mode of respect. Respect requires both the recognition of the refugee as an equal human being and his or her recognition as a person in need of special protection. The state that would be primarily responsible for respecting the refugee and granting and guaranteeing him or her rights has abandoned this role, otherwise there would have been no need to flee. In the case of persecution, the state has gone from being the guarantor of law to an actor of disrespect itself; in the case of war, hunger or poverty, the state is at least incapable of action to the extent that the person can no longer be guaranteed an adequate livelihood. This can at least be interpreted as a form of non-recognition, since this state, for whatever reason, is no longer capable of maintaining structures of respect and justice. It can no longer prevent the experiences of disrespect caused by war or poverty, even if it does not carry them out itself. When the primary structure responsible for the experience of respect and the establishment of rights breaks down, however, and no other agent steps in, this leaves refugees without adequate protection of their rights and makes them vulnerable. These spaces of disrespect, which manifest themselves in disenfranchisement and rightlessness, are often present before, during and after flight. For example, when refugees find themselves in the hands of traffickers or accept illegal labor or are subjected to violence. After all, it is not enforceable contracts that refugees sign with traffickers, nor can they hold those traffickers responsible if they are not brought to their destination. Refugees are often not recognized as full legal entities in the many countries they pass through and in the countries where they end up in camps or live illegally, meaning they are displaced, sent back, economically exploited, have no (social) rights and no lobby. This often does not change when they reach Europe or the USA. Many refugees live illegally in their destination country and this excludes them from many rights while they try to make their existence as refugees invisible. The duration of asylum procedures makes this a time of control and uncertainty as to whether they will receive legal recognition as refugees and many refugees are kept in the dark about their legal rights.

Finally, social esteem, as an interpersonal event, is also integrated into social structures, which makes it reliable and plannable. Such structures are so self-evident for the everyday life of people in modern capitalist market societies that they often only stand out when they
become fragile. Of course, social esteem can be demanded and experienced for very
different characteristics and achievements, but the basic mode is the appreciation of per-
formance in gainful employment and other economic activities. This social esteem is
strongly regulated by law, which increases its predictability. One can assume that one is
paid for one’s work, because otherwise one can sue. The commodification of work is a
key to reducing dependency and vulnerability of the employed and unemployed. Refugees
are largely excluded from these institutions and structures of social esteem. Refugees are
often not allowed to work at all or are unable to find work. As a result, they are marked
as useless and worthless and receive no social appreciation for their knowledge, skills
and performance. If they work they often enjoy no legal protection to assert and enforce
their claims, and they are often in such a weak social position that they are unilaterally
dependent on the goodwill employers. Dependence on the arbitrariness of others is in
itself an experience of humiliation, as it undermines the reciprocity and relational equality
in these social relations. This only describes the economic side of social esteem; the social
and cultural side is equally precarious. Experiences of social exclusion, discrimination and
stigmatization are widely present for refugees.20

Unfortunately, many of these experiences of non-recognition and disrespect that refu-
gees have to go through are not short episodes or isolated events, but extend over longer
periods of time. These periods of time range from a few weeks and months to sometimes
years and decades, which people have to spend in camps, illegally or on the margins of
society. This is of great importance because these experiences can have a cumulative
negative effect. The status of being a refugee can become the defining characteristic of
a life lived in precariousness and without a home. In this respect, the situation of
many refugees shows some similarities to that of people who are chronically poor or
who repeatedly fall back into poverty after short periods of economic prosperity.21
Time is thus a factor that describes the moral harm of the refugee’s precariousness.
The longer the flight lasts and the longer after the flight the status of being a refugee is
not replaced by the status of a recognized member of a new society and a new state, the
worse such a life can be, since it will be marked by a chain of experiences of disrespect.
Although many people manage surprisingly well to find their way within such a challeng-
ing life and to make many experiences of recognition, we should not overlook the funda-
mental injustices that characterize the lives of refugees.22 Even in abject poverty and long-
term unemployment, experiences of love, respect and social esteem are possible, but in
principle these phases make people in many respects vulnerable and these phases are
often marked by suffering and disrespect. Most people are harmed and feel powerless, help-
less and ashamed under such conditions of exclusion and disrespect.23 For the refugee, this
is compounded by uprooting, separation from home, social relations and the family, and
the trauma often suffered through violence, war, expulsion, hunger, torture, prison or
persecution.24

In such a critical description of the situation of flight, which always proceeds in a
strongly generalizing manner, it is important that both the experience of the refugees
and the distanced view from the outside should be taken into account. The normative
core of disrespect, i.e. the lack of love, respect and social esteem, and its expression in
violence, humiliation, denigration or rightlessness can be described based on the experi-
ences of refugees and the reflection on the situation. The subjective interpretation of their
situation by refugees themselves is important, but normative critique also rests on
Intersubjective standards. It should also be pointed out that refugees, for whatever reason, do not always perceive their precarious situation or suffering as such. There are different reasons and explanations for this gap between subjective experience and criticism from outside. It may be that successful experiences of recognition, by which one can measure one's own suffering could never be made at all. Or it may be due to the epistemic injustice that one lacks the hermeneutic means to understand one's own situation. Or it may be a form of alienation that makes one's own situation seem better than it actually is. If the cumulative experience of recognition is necessary to form a self-determined identity, then the lack of recognition can also lead to giving up on oneself and having no more expectations. If this is the case, then resignation and coming to terms with one's own situation can be an effective means of not despairing. For these reasons, it is necessary to criticize the social suffering of refugees and their experiences of disrespect according to intersubjective standards, even if refugees perceive their own situation differently. Only then is it also possible to criticize certain forms of disrespect that are established between refugees or in camps and, above all, to protect the most vulnerable refugees, including women, children, people with chronic illnesses or disabilities.

**Recognition, Justice and Flight**

In order to explicate the just claims of refugees, it is necessary to go beyond the description of the experiences of vulnerability and disrespect. The justice claims of refugees are also not only negative – they have a right not to be disrespected – but positive – they have a right to recognition. I would like to pick out four aspects of this.

Firstly, demands for recognition must be considered with a view to the refugee's past, present and future. A look at the past reveals injuries and disrespect suffered. It is important to take the subjective experiences of refugees seriously and to give them the opportunity to reflect and process their biography, both to understand their situation and to provide them with a voice. Looking into the past is also important to understand the refugee's present and future and to form realistic expectations. It is unrealistic to expect a traumatized person without sufficient educational biography to be able to find his or her way in modern working societies without help and support. To see this is also a form of recognition.

In the present, secondly, it is necessary to consider at what point in his or her life and in what (social and geographical) place a refugee is located. This results in different demands for recognition and which goods are needed to support this person. Minor refugees, for example, who have been separated from their families are particularly vulnerable and in need. They need love and care, which aims to compensate and make up for the lack of parental love. Childhood is a sensitive phase of development and what is missed during this time can often not, or only with difficulty, be made up for later in life, which is why the phase of flight for children should be kept as short as possible. They should therefore be admitted and cared for as quickly as possible. While with children, especially young children, the aspect of love and care is of primary importance, with adults the striving for social esteem and economic independence has greater weight. Both aspects, dependency as a child and independence as an adult, can be protected and promoted by corresponding rights. Another example, are the different needs of
middle-aged (healthy) adults and older people. Age and life stage - childhood, adult, elderly - thus play an important role in determining what forms of recognition refugees need to live a good life.

Which possibilities of support can realistically be implemented is often determined by the location of the refugee. A camp cannot provide a sufficiently good infrastructure, even though it is often better to live in a camp than outside, since the supply of the most necessary goods is ensured there by external organizations. However, the refugee’s actual destination should be a host society that tries to integrate him or her into its existing social, legal, political, cultural and economic structures. This integration is itself already an act of recognition, but above all it enables the refugee to enter into other relations of recognition and to realize him or herself within them.

Thirdly, the future is a decisive horizon. Recognition is always also related to the future, because through its experience the recognized subject can feel confirmed on his or her path. This can be seen in both small and large experiences of recognition. Those who are praised for their work have good reasons to continue doing it in this way and those who are loved in their uniqueness are encouraged not to suppress it but to accept and live it. Legitimate expectations of future recognition are an essential part of a good life, as they reduce uncertainty and arbitrariness. Therefore, the long waiting period during the flight or during the asylum procedure is stressful because it does not allow planning and building a life. Social relationships, work, political commitment or cultural participation are influenced by the outlook into one’s future. It is important to know if one will still be in the same place in a few weeks or months. The uncertainty of not knowing what will happen next is stressful.

The experience of recognition is by no means unconditional. Successful participation in capitalist market societies is based on legal and social conditions, the acquisition of education, the building of networks and the adoption of conventions that are expected of one. Behind this, therefore, lie learning processes that have to be enabled and facilitated in order for them to be successful. This also applies to such seemingly “natural” things as love or friendship. Like all modes of recognition, love and friendship have an inner side that expresses itself as an emotion. But they are also expressed in actions, gestures, goods and relationships, which are socially shaped. Successfull social relations of love and friendship require cultural know-how and knowledge to avoid misunderstandings and to form realistic expectations. To be able to acquire such knowledge - that is, to be supported in this process - lays the foundations for experiences of mutual recognition.

Fourthly and finally, the integration of refugees is certainly often connected with conflicts that are inflamed by different expectations, fears and prejudices on both sides, i.e. on the side of the host society as well as on the side of the refugees. These are also, but not only, conflicts about the recognition of cultural differences and ideas of a good life. Both sides claim recognition from each other. The power and force with which these claims can be made, however, is distributed very unequally. The host society not only is in the majority, but can also mobilize the state and its institution to enforce its expectations. As a last consequence, the host state can deport or imprison refugees. The situation of the refugee, on the other hand, is characterized by vulnerability and weakness. This diagnosis changes little even if parts of the population of the host society feel themselves powerless and helpless and express these feelings in resentment towards refugees and xenophobia.
Agents of Justice for Refugees

In the philosophical literature, three central questions are often distinguished for any theory of justice: What is the currency of justice—what kinds of goods are people entitled to and why? According to what principles should these goods be distributed and who receives how much of them? Who are the agents of justice—what individuals, collectives, or institutions are responsible for ensuring that people receive justice? If one follows this rough classification, which still leaves some questions open—how are the subjects and contexts of justice to be determined?—then potential answers to the first two questions have been provided so far in this paper. Recognition functions both as a currency and as a principle of justice, whereby as a principle it aims at equality with respect to some goods (respect is universal), and at inequality with respect to others (love and social esteem have a differentiating effect). So far, however, I have said very little about the question of the agents of justice, that is, who bears the moral responsibility for ensuring that refugees are protected from disrespect and non-recognition and have access to positive recognition. I can only sketch a first answer here, which certainly leaves some details open, as this question deserves a detailed answer.

The first addressee for improving the situation of refugees is states that can admit them or at least provide for them. States are also central to funding and equipping international institutions and organizations that serve refugees. What does a theory of recognition have to explicitly add and morally demand here—also in comparison to other normative theories? Certainly, the state plays a significant role insofar as it provides structures and institutions that reduce refugees’ vulnerability and enable them to access experiences of recognition. After all, state protection and acceptance into its structures is itself a matter of recognition and takes place as a process of recognition (for example, through recognition as a refugee, recognition as a human being with rights, recognition as a citizen). The theory of recognition, however, is interested precisely in the social fabric in which recognition happens and through which state recognition is also mediated. The state cannot sufficiently replace interpersonal recognition—it is thus limited in terms of its influence to love, social esteem, and also respect. The state can create conditions, which make relations of love and social esteem possible, but itself can not adequately provide love and or esteem.

But why states bear moral responsibility towards refugees in the first place is not yet made explicit. Recognition theory offers at least four answers. The first answer refers to the social struggles for recognition. Moral responsibility arises where it is demanded. States will thus fulfill their responsibility to refugees primarily when victims of injustice manage to make their voices heard and assert their demands at the political level. Just as the working class, through a long struggle, has won its recognition demands for social protection, higher wages, trade unions, etc., social and moral progress that respects and enforces refugees’ recognition claims will be the result of social and political movements. Moral and social progress cannot be dictated from above, it emerges from below and likewise the content of this progress is in motion. Of course, Europe is far from this at present. The second answer refers to the relations of states to refugees and to what extent states act here as agents of disrespect and thereby have responsibilities. Refugees address demands for recognition to states, even if they do not always do so explicitly. They are in a relationship with states, both to the states they flee and to those states they seek to reach.
or in which they live after fleeing. And, of course, they are also in relationship with those states that they are passing through or in which they are living in camps. The first form of disrespect that often occurs here is that of not recognizing and ignoring the suffering of refugees. Their voices are not heard, and they are made invisible.

The second form of disrespect is that of helping to create the suffering by deliberately maligning the situation in order to deter or expel refugees. It can be demanded that states, even if they do not want to help, not minimize, create, or become accomplices in the suffering of refugees. That is a minimal demand. The third answer relates to what Honneth and others have called immanent critique. States explicitly and implicitly express and institutionalize values. An example of this is the value of merit: pseudo-meritocratic societies are to be criticized precisely for superficially upholding meritocracy, while in fact goods and recognition are not awarded on merit at all and disadvantage people on the basis of their skin colour, gender, or origin. Similarly, all states that have implicitly or explicitly institutionalized values such as human rights, global justice, or equal opportunity can be criticized for contradicting them in their treatment of refugees. The fourth possible answer relates to the universal core of recognition theory. Even if the particular forms and modes of recognition are context-specific, that is, arise from social relations, the moral theory of recognition is not exhausted therein. Accordingly, every human being has a moral claim to experiences of recognition, which are necessary for a good life. Whether and to what extent the theory of recognition can be global – and it must be, if it wants to explicate moral responsibility for refugees universally – is, however, controversial and requires further argumentation, which I cannot elaborate here.

The temporal dimension of recognition or disrespect and non-recognition also plays a major role in the question of the agents of justice for refugees. It has already been mentioned that support is time-sensitive, that is, it depends on when and how long recognition is granted or when and how long the state and its institutions provide the conditions of recognition. However, it is equally important to see that the recognition relationships between the state and refugees themselves change over time. Children become adolescents and adolescents become adults. People who do not have asylum status become recognized refugees and perhaps later citizens. Sick people become, hopefully, healthy; educational deficits are caught up. People without children become parents. These and many other changes each create new demands for recognition – as well as new vulnerabilities and the potential for suffering from disrespect. If one moves away from the superficial view of the state as a monolithic agent, then one recognizes that through these changes, new agents are also involved in the process: Administrators, teachers, judges, employers, colleagues, social workers, police officers, and many more who interact with refugees in these roles and either approach them with recognition or disrespect. It has also already been mentioned that the state and its institutions – but also other institutions such as the labour market, companies, NGOs, the family – change over time, as do their norms and practices. The positive hope is that they will evolve progressively driven by struggles for recognition, but this is not guaranteed. Recognition goods for which private agents were previously responsible can be brought under public control and juridified, but socialized recognition goods can also be entrusted to other non-state actors. To take one example, basic services for refugees in a camp are mostly provided through the state, international organizations, or
private aid, but the goal—and a claim of recognition—would be to empower refugees to be able to provide for themselves through work and labor, for which they can claim social esteem. This process of becoming independent involves new agents of recognition, for example that they can demand a fair wage from an employer or claim solidarity from one’s co-workers. The process of becoming independent from assistance creates relations of recognition, but they do not arise immediately, but develop, consolidate and deepen over time. It is clear that besides the state, other agents, have obligations of recognition towards refugees, for example, companies, organizations or all citizens. Since recognition is created and maintained in social relationships, it is important to shape these relationships and keep them free from disrespect. This will also lead to conflicts about recognition, because on the one hand refugees bring with them different interpretations of recognition and demand recognition, and on the other hand citizens can feel threatened by refugees and politics stirs up these conflicts. Finding answers to this is an important challenge that affects all forms of recognition, i.e. the shaping of family, social relationships, work, politics and the law.

Conclusion

The transition from the critique of the social suffering of refugees to the explication of positive claims for recognition is not linear. It is determined by the social situation and the availability of resources as well as by the individual and collective struggles for recognition of refugees and social groups in the potential host society. It is evident that poor societies and states in the Global South, which have to shoulder the main burden of global refugee care, have fewer opportunities to care for refugees than the rich societies and states of the Global North, and therefore there is more potential for conflict there. Struggles for recognition are often also struggles for resources and the distribution of material goods and the position of the refugee is a weak one in all these conflicts.

Notes

1. Honneth, The Struggle for Recognition.
2. Nussbaum, Creating Capabilities.
3. Honneth, Freedom’s Right.
4. Deveaux, “The Global Poor as Agents of Justice”.
5. Pilapil, “Psychologization of Injustice?”
6. Heidegren, “Anthropology, Social Theory, and Politics”.
7. Mullin, “The Ethical and Social Significance of Parenting”.
8. Thunman, “Burnout as a Social Pathology of Self-Realization”; Honneth, “Organized Self-Realization”.
9. Alstott, No Exit.
10. Honneth, “The Social Dynamics of Disrespect”.
11. Voswinkel, “Admiration without Appreciation?”.
12. Herzog, “Invisibilization and Silencing as an Ethical and Sociological Challenge”.
13. Wolff and de-Shalit, Disadvantage.
14. Sangalang and Vang, “Intergenerational Trauma in Refugee Families”.
15. Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds, “Introduction”
16. Schweiger, “Should States Prioritize Child Refugees?”
17. Smith, “Work and the Struggle for Recognition”.
18. Braveman, “Social Conditions, Health Equity, and Human Rights”.
19. Horn, “Exploring the Impact of Displacement and Encampment on Domestic Violence in Kakuma Refugee Camp”.
20. Moagi et al., “Mozambican Immigrants to South Africa”.
21. Shepherd and Brunt, Chronic Poverty.
22. Carlson, Cacciatore, and Klimek, “A Risk and Resilience Perspective on Unaccompanied Refugee Minors”.
23. Chase and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, Poverty and Shame.
24. Taylor, “Refugees, the State and the Concept of Home”.
25. Kauppinen, “Reason, Recognition, and Internal Critique”.
26. Fricker, Epistemic Injustice.
27. Cabot, “Refugee Voices”.
28. Fazel, Karunakara, and Newnham, “Detention, Denial, and Death”.
29. Schweiger, “Should States Prioritize Child Refugees?”
30. Kohli, 2007. “The Institutionalization of the Life Course”.
31. Turnbull, “Stuck in the Middle”.
32. Illouz, Consuming the Romantic Utopia.
33. Borneman and Ghassem-Fachandi, “The Concept of Stimmung”.
34. Gibney, “Refugees and Justice between States”.
35. Stahl, “Immanent Critique and Particular Moral Experience”.
36. Heins, “Realizing Honneth”.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Note on Contributor

Gottfried Schweiger is a Senior Scientist at the Centre for Ethics and Poverty Research of the University of Salzburg. He works in social and political philosophy. His latest publications include the edited collections Poverty, Inequality and the Critical Theory of Recognition (Springer 2020) and Recognition and Migration. Perspectives from Ethics, Political Philosophy and Critical Theory (Springer 2021).

ORCID

Gottfried Schweiger @ http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5456-6358

Bibliography

Alstott, Anne. No Exit: What Parents Owe Their Children and What Society Ows Parents. 1st ed. Oxford / New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004.
Borneman, John, and Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi. “The Concept of Stimmung: From Indifference to Xenophobia in Germany’s Refugee Crisis.” HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory 7, no. 3 (2017): 105–135. doi:10.14318/hau7.3.006.
Braveman, Paula. “Social Conditions, Health Equity, and Human Rights.” Health and Human Rights 12, no. 2 (2010): 31–48. doi:10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031210-101218.
Cabot, Heath. “Refugee Voices: Tragedy, Ghosts, and the Anthropology of Not Knowing.” Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 45, no. 6 (2016): 645–672. doi:10.1177/0891241615625567.
Carlson, B. E., J. Cacciatore, and B. Klimek. “A Risk and Resilience Perspective on Unaccompanied Refugee Minors.” Social Work 57, no. 3 (2012): 259–269. doi:10.1093/sw/sws003.
Chase, Elaine, and Grace Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, eds. Poverty and Shame: Global Experiences. 1st ed. Oxford, UK; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Deveaux, Monique. “The Global Poor as Agents of Justice.” Journal of Moral Philosophy 12, no. 2 (2015): 125–150.

Fazel, Mina, Unni Karunakara, and Elizabeth A Newnham. “Detention, Denial, and Death: Migration Hazards for Refugee Children.” The Lancet Global Health 2, no. 6 (2014): e313–e314. doi:10.1016/S2214-109X(14)70225-6.

Fricker, Miranda. Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing. 1st ed. Oxford / New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Gibney, Matthew J. “Refugees and Justice between States.” European Journal of Political Theory 14, no. 4 (2015): 448–463. doi:10.1177/1474885115585325.

Honneth, Axel. The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts. 1st ed. Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996.

Honneth, Axel. Freedom’s Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life. 1st ed. Cambridge: Polity, 2014.

Horn, R. “Exploring the Impact of Displacement and Encampment on Domestic Violence in Kakuma Refugee Camp.” Journal of Refugee Studies 23, no. 3 (2010): 356–376. doi:10.1093/jrs/feq020.

Kauppinen, Antti. “Reason, Recognition, and Internal Critique.” Inquiry 45, no. 4 (2002): 479–498.

Kohli, Martin. “The Institutionalization of the Life Course: Looking Back to Look Ahead.” Research in Human Development 4, no. 3–4 (2007): 253–271. doi:10.1080/15427600701663122.

Mackenzie, Catriona, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds. “Introduction: What Is Vulnerability and Why Does It Matter for Moral Theory?” In Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy, edited by Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds, 1–29. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Miller, David, and Christine Straehle, eds. The Political Philosophy of Refuge. Cambridge / New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Moagi, Miriam, Gail Wyatt, Maboe Mokgobi, Tamra Loeb, Muyu Zhang, and Mashudu Davhana-Maselesele. “Mozambican Immigrants to South Africa: Their Xenophobia and Discrimination Experiences.” Journal of Psychology in Africa 28, no. 3 (2018): 196–200. doi:10.1080/14330237.2018.1475485.

Mullin, Amy. “The Ethical and Social Significance of Parenting: A Philosophical Approach.” Parenting 12, no. 2–3 (2012): 134–143. doi:10.1080/15295192.2012.683339.

Nussbaum, Martha Craven. Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach. 1st ed. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011.

Parker, Samuel. “It’s Ok If It’s Hidden: The Discursive Construction of Everyday Racism for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Wales.” Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology 28, no. 3 (2018): 111–122. doi:10.1002/casp.2344.

Pilapil, Renante. “Psychologization of Injustice? On Axel Honneth’s Theory of Recognition Justice.” Ethical Perspectives 18, no. 1 (2011): 79–106.
Sangalang, Cindy C., and Cindy Vang. “Intergenerational Trauma in Refugee Families: A Systematic Review.” *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 19, no. 3 (2017): 745–754. doi:10.1007/s10903-016-0499-7.

Schweiger, Gottfried. “Should States Prioritize Child Refugees?” *Ethics & Global Politics* 12, no. 2 (2019): 46–61. doi:10.1080/16544951.2019.1649958.

Shepherd, Andrew, and Julia Brunt, eds. *Chronic Poverty: Concepts, Causes and Policy*. 1st ed. Rethinking International Development Series. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Smith, Nicholas H. “Work and the Struggle for Recognition.” *European Journal of Political Theory* 8, no. 1 (2009): 46–60. doi:10.1177/1474885108096959.

Stahl, Titus. “Immanent Critique and Particular Moral Experience.” *Critical Horizons* (2017): October: 1–21. doi:10.1080/14409917.2017.1376939.

Taylor, H. “Refugees, the State and the Concept of Home.” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2013): 130–152. doi:10.1093/rsq/hdt004.

Thunman, Elin. “Burnout as a Social Pathology of Self-Realization.” *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 13, no. 1 (2012): 43–60. doi:10.1080/1600910X.2012.648744.

Timshel, Isabelle, Edith Montgomery, and Nina Thorup Dalgaard. “A Systematic Review of Risk and Protective Factors Associated with Family Related Violence in Refugee Families.” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 70, no. August (2017): 315–330. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.06.023.

Turnbull, Sarah. “‘Stuck in the Middle’: Waiting and Uncertainty in Immigration Detention.” *Time & Society* 25, no. 1 (2016): 61–79. doi:10.1177/0961463X15604518.

Voswinkel, Stephan. “Admiration without Appreciation? The Paradoxes of Recognition of Doubly Subjectivised Work.” In *New Philosophies of Labour: Work and the Social Bond*, edited by Nicholas H Smith, and Jean-Philippe Deranty, 1st ed., 273–299. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

Wolff, Jonathan, and Avner de-Shalit. *Disadvantage*. 1st ed. Oxford Political Theory. Oxford / New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007.