



The Sociology of Recognition: From Philosophical Roots to Social Challenges

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Abstract:

This article addresses the concept of recognition as a sociological entry point for understanding social relations and human experiences in light of the philosophical transformations the concept has undergone from Hegel to Axel Honneth. It begins by critiquing anthropological conceptions that view the human being as a selfish creature concerned only with survival, asserting instead that human conflict is a moral struggle rooted in the need for mutual recognition.

The article reconstructs this concept within a sociological framework by analyzing Honneth's three components of recognition: love as the primary form of emotional recognition, rights as legal recognition ensuring freedom and equality, and solidarity as social recognition based on mutual esteem. It also discusses the epistemological dimension of the concept between social philosophy and sociological description, highlighting its levels of operation: mental representations, objective reality, and the struggle for recognition.

Furthermore, the article examines the debate between Honneth and Nancy Fraser on the relationship between recognition and distributive justice, concluding with the necessity of combining the moral and material dimensions in any social approach. The paper ends by emphasizing the importance of moving from philosophical theorization to sociological field analysis, exploring empirically how recognition is achieved or denied – as a condition for human dignity and social justice.

Keywords: Recognition, Axel Honneth, Rights, Love, Social Justice, Solidarity.

La sociologie de la reconnaissance : des racines philosophiques aux défis sociaux

Résumé :

Cet article aborde le concept de reconnaissance comme point de départ sociologique pour comprendre les relations sociales et les expériences humaines, à la lumière des transformations philosophiques qu'il a subies de Hegel à Axel Honneth. Il commence par critiquer les conceptions anthropologiques qui considèrent l'être humain comme une créature égoïste, uniquement préoccupée par sa survie, affirmant au contraire que le conflit humain est une lutte morale ancrée dans le besoin de reconnaissance mutuelle.

L'article reconstruit ce concept dans un cadre sociologique en analysant les trois composantes de la reconnaissance selon Honneth : l'amour comme forme principale de reconnaissance affective, les droits comme reconnaissance juridique garantissant la liberté et l'égalité, et la solidarité comme reconnaissance sociale fondée sur l'estime mutuelle. Il aborde également la dimension épistémologique du concept entre philosophie sociale et description sociologique, en soulignant ses niveaux d'application : les représentations mentales, la réalité objective et la lutte pour la reconnaissance.

L'article examine également le débat entre Honneth et Nancy Fraser sur la relation entre reconnaissance et justice distributive, concluant sur la nécessité de combiner les dimensions morale et matérielle dans toute approche sociale. Il conclut en soulignant l'importance de passer de la théorisation philosophique à l'analyse sociologique de terrain, en explorant empiriquement comment la reconnaissance est obtenue ou refusée, comme condition de la dignité humaine et de la justice sociale.

Mots-clés : Reconnaissance, Axel Honneth, Droits, Amour, Justice sociale, Solidarité.



Introduction:

The concept of *recognition* is one of the philosophical and cornerstones that opens broad avenues for understanding the relationship between the individual and society. Its roots go back to Hegel's philosophy, which reinterpreted social conflict as a moral struggle—moving beyond traditional theories that portrayed humans as selfish beings driven solely by self-interest. In this light, the philosophy of recognition emerges as an intellectual project aimed at exploring the mechanisms through which self-consciousness is shaped through the “mirror of others,” making self-realization contingent upon the individual's attainment of mutual recognition that establishes them as an active citizen within multiple social spheres.

In contemporary studies—particularly in the works of *Axel Honneth*—the concept has evolved to redefine recognition within an empirical social framework based on three normative forms: *love*, *legal rights*, and *social solidarity*. Together, these constitute a complex structure that plays a vital role in building social identity and resisting the negative experiences associated with the loss of recognition, such as contempt and injustice.

This article proceeds from this theoretical framework to offer a detailed sociological reading of the concept of recognition, examining the intersections between its philosophical dimension and real social issues. The focus is placed on understanding how the loss of recognition manifests in different social contexts and how diverse

relationships between individuals and groups unfold according to their cultural and social distinctions.

In our attempt to reconstruct the concept of recognition within sociology, we pose methodological and epistemological questions designed to examine this notion from a sociological perspective. The goal is to deconstruct and clarify the multiple dimensions of recognition and to understand the mechanisms through which relations of recognition—or their absence—are produced in contemporary societies. This, in turn, enriches the debate surrounding methodological gaps between social philosophy and sociology and provides a solid foundation for more precise and realistic theoretical and field-based approaches.

1. Overview of the Concept of Recognition

Hegel is considered the first philosopher to employ the concept of *recognition* to describe interactive relationships between individuals, which is why he is often regarded as the founder of the philosophy of recognition. Through this concept, he sought to reconstruct the prevailing social and political thought developed by Machiavelli and Hobbes during the modern era—an intellectual tradition grounded in the model of “inevitable conflict among humans.”

Machiavelli, through his ontological reflections on political life, concluded that “man is by nature selfish, spiteful, deceitful, and cowardly, driven solely by his own interests” (Mohamed & Abdel-Moati, 1984, p. 115). This view was later developed by Hobbes, who portrayed early societies as existing in a state of perpetual war—“a war of all against all” (Kavka, 1983, p. 291). For Hobbes, the human being is an egocentric and malevolent creature who delights



Soumission : 05/04/2025 Acceptation : 02/06/2025 Publication : 15/08/2025

in the misfortune of others, seeking to satisfy his instincts for pleasure and to avoid pain. He is, therefore, naturally inclined toward self-love and egoism—a condition Hobbes famously summarized as “man is a wolf to his fellow man” (Rossello, 2012, pp. 255–258).

Thus, both Hobbes and his predecessor Machiavelli rejected the idea of a “social nature of man,” viewing him instead as an inherently selfish being who perceives the world exclusively through his own self-interest and continually engages in struggle to achieve his goals and satisfy his desires, without regard for moral or ethical values.

In contrast, Hegel *reintroduced the model of social struggle (la lutte sociale)* between human beings as previously developed by Machiavelli and Hobbes, but within a completely different theoretical framework. His aim was to provide a conceptual formulation that attributes human conflicts not to the mere preservation of the self, but rather to a set of moral motivations (Boumenir, 2018, p. 80).

Consequently, Hegel considered that the struggle among humans is not a natural or instinctive one—as viewed in the earlier model—but a *moral struggle* rooted in the human need for social belonging and the desire for self-consciousness through *mutual recognition* among individuals. This is what he termed the *ethical spirit (Sittlichkeit)*, an element that transcends individual identity and emerges from the intersection of mutual recognition and self-denial. Hence, the human being does not struggle merely to satisfy natural instincts but to fulfill his inherent social need and realize self-consciousness (Deranty, 2015).

Hegel's model of conflict therefore stands in total opposition to that of Hobbes and Machiavelli. However, his conception remained largely a *metaphysical* representation of political and social life that lacked empirical grounding. This limitation necessitated a re-examination of the concept through the lens of the empirical sciences—particularly social psychology and sociology—beyond purely speculative philosophy. This is precisely what later philosophers such as Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser undertook.

Among them, Axel Honneth stands out as one of the foremost philosophers to reconstruct the concept of recognition within an *empirical sociological* framework. Drawing upon the Hegelian heritage while transcending its metaphysical dimension, Honneth relied on the social psychology of George Herbert Mead. The following section presents the key components of his theory.

2. The Concept of Recognition According to Axel Honneth

The concept of *recognition* is one of the core notions in sociology whose meaning remains deeply rooted in social philosophy. Among the philosophers who have reinterpreted it is *Axel Honneth*, who rebuilt the concept based on Hegel's early works—while distancing it from Hegel's systematic and metaphysical categories such as the “absolute spirit,” “universal reason,” and “alienated essence,” which have been subject to extensive philosophical critique (Boumenir, 2018, p. 44).

Honneth sought to give recognition a *material and empirical* character by drawing on *social psychology*, particularly the work of *George Herbert Mead*, who in his own theory of social formation made the “struggle for recognition” the guiding



Soumission : 05/04/2025 Acceptation : 02/06/2025 Publication : 15/08/2025

principle in explaining the moral evolution of society (Honneth, 2015, p. 132).

Accordingly, Honneth integrated both the philosophical and empirical approaches to establish a *normative theory of society* centered on the *paradigm of the struggle for recognition*. Within this framework, individuals and groups seek to achieve self-consciousness through the perception of others—a process that can only be realized through three normative forms of recognition: **love (L’amour)**, **rights (Le droit)**, and **solidarity (La solidarité)**.

2.1 Forms of Recognition in Honneth’s Theory

a. Love (L’amour)

According to Honneth, *love* constitutes the first form of *mutual recognition* between individuals. It does not merely refer to intimate relationships between men and women but encompasses all primary emotional relationships—such as familial bonds, friendships, collegial relations, and neighborly ties—that entail strong affective connections regardless of their nature or intensity (Honneth, 2015, p. 175).

The mother–infant relationship represents the first stage of mutual recognition and takes on “a special form of recognition linked to the way successful emotional relations depend on early childhood experiences, balancing interdependence with self-assertion” (Honneth, 2015, p. 180).

The emotional care provided by the mother allows the infant to acquire what Honneth calls *emotional security*, which fosters a sense of self-confidence and a need for affection granted by the other—in this case, the mother.

Empirical studies conducted by *René Spitz* have shown that “deprivation of maternal care causes severe behavioral disturbances in the child, even when all physical needs are met” (Honneth, 2015, p. 117).

From the earliest moments of life, therefore, the infant develops a readiness to engage with others, making him inherently a *social being* in need of affection and attention. Any deficiency in fulfilling these emotional or physiological needs leads the infant to employ primary strategies – crying, shouting, or laughter – to attract attention and secure care, nourishment, and affection. Studies in developmental psychology have demonstrated that social laughter begins around six weeks of age when all basic needs are satisfied (Soussignan & Schaal, 2001, pp. 240–242).

These early interactions constitute the first strategies through which the infant achieves recognition, reinforcing his sense of value and belonging within the close familial circle. Over time, these experiences enhance social skills that evolve and become more complex as the individual grows and expands the network of relationships – both *romantic* and *non-romantic* emotional relations.

Romantic Emotional Relationships (Love)

Romantic love is considered one of the most essential human needs that individuals continually strive to fulfill and realize through establishing an intimate emotional or physical relationship with another person. Such a bond provides them with vitality and well-being and enhances their self-awareness and sense of existence within the fabric of human relationships as significant social beings of great value (Honneth, 2015, p. 234).



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However, any disruption in the satisfaction of this fundamental need can lead to psychological distress, unhappiness, and a sense of social injustice or emotional deprivation resulting from the other party's refusal to enter into such a relationship. To understand the feeling of social injustice stemming from rejection from a sociological perspective, two essential questions must be addressed: First, does every rejection necessarily make the rejected individual feel socially wronged? Second, is it possible to differentiate between the reality as perceived by the rejecter, the reality perceived by the rejected individual, and the objective social reality?

It is first necessary to distinguish between two models of rejection. The first model is based on reasons related to the individuals themselves rather than on cultural or social grounds. For instance, a woman may reject a suitor because he is shorter than she is, because she refuses the idea of marriage altogether, because she has not yet considered it, or simply because she does not find him attractive. Most of these reasons are based on personal incompatibility between the suitor and the sought person.

The second model, however, is based on cultural and social reasons such as ethnic and racial differences, geographical disparities, linguistic, cultural, and religious variations, among others. Most of these causes are rooted in social representations and stereotypes held by both parties. This increases the complexity of the rejected person's situation, who may find themselves, often unconsciously, categorized within a social group that collectively perceives itself as victimized. In this case, injustice ceases to be a purely psychological issue and becomes a form of social

injustice affecting an entire group or class to which the individual belongs. Consequently, solidarity among the members of this group may intensify feelings of anger, resentment, and social frustration.

Thus, the feeling of social injustice is significantly lower in the first model but markedly higher in the second, depending on the nature and recurrence of rejection, which play a key role in distinguishing between the two. For instance, consider a young man from a rural area who admires a girl from the city and tries to express his feelings to her, hoping to start a romantic relationship. He may be rejected once or twice and accept it. However, if he repeatedly faces rejection from several urban girls, he may unconsciously begin to form a stereotypical explanation that attributes his rejection to his rural origin. As a result, he constructs a subjective reality in which his geographical belonging becomes the direct cause of rejection, intensifying his sense of inferiority and marginalization.

On the other hand, individuals may form stereotypical perceptions in their minds about what they consider a lack of recognition due to ethnic, religious, or geographical differences, even if these perceptions do not correspond to the actual reality in which they live. In this regard, sociology seeks to identify the social and cultural mechanisms through which individuals construct and develop such representations from their own perspectives. Examples include stories commonly circulated about a particular region, the negative or distorted portrayal of religious individuals (such as bearded men) in films, or jokes mocking the dress or speech of people from specific areas.



Non-Romantic Emotional Relationships

Non-romantic emotional relationships refer to all forms of emotional connections individuals establish with others within the same social space—such as family members, neighbors, classmates, or coworkers—or with people they meet through social media, regardless of their religion, ethnicity, or nationality. Individuals may sometimes form temporary emotional interactions with strangers to satisfy a social need at a given moment, such as chatting with someone while using public transportation or waiting in line.

Thus, the social instinct of individuals constantly drives them to fulfill and satisfy this emotional need through various forms of interactions differing in depth and duration—ranging from enduring, meaningful relationships to temporary, situational ones.

The Right (Le Droit)

According to Axel Honneth, the concept of “Right” (*Le Droit*) represents the second form of mutual recognition among individuals. Legal recognition, in his view, ensures the fair distribution of opportunities, wealth, and advantages among members of society so that every individual has equal access to success and well-being, free from any discrimination based on gender, race, religion, or social class. This form of recognition strengthens individuals’ autonomy and self-determination, as “the justification for the existence of individual rights lies in achieving this fundamental goal. However, the law makes this possible only within the framework of mutual recognition, since we can understand ourselves as bearers of

rights only if we simultaneously acknowledge the normative duties we owe to others” (Boumenir, n.d., p. 110).

Therefore, this type of recognition refers us to a set of individual rights, the very existence of which is justified by achieving this essential goal. The law allows this to occur within a system of mutual recognition, wherein individuals cannot comprehend themselves as right-bearing entities without, at the same time, recognizing the normative obligations they have toward others (Boumenir, n.d., p. 110)

B. Respect

In this context, Axel Honneth, drawing on the studies of Stephan Darwall and Rudolf von Jhering, distinguishes between two forms of respect. The first form is based on the equality of individuals in their inherent human value regardless of their differences, viewing them as ends in themselves—free and autonomous beings. This is embodied in universal human rights such as the right to work under just and favorable conditions, the right to social protection, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and the right to education and to benefit from the achievements of cultural freedom and scientific progress (United Nations, n.d.).

The second form of respect, however, is linked to individual value, which is determined by personal abilities and predispositions in accordance with the principle of division of labor—such as promotion in economic or political positions based on competence and skill. On this basis, two types of legal rights can be distinguished:

1. **Formal Legal Rights:** These consist of the recognition and acceptance of a set of fundamental rights granted



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to all individuals, such as the right to life, liberty, and personal security; freedom of expression and assembly; and the right to a fair trial, among other universal human rights shared by all people regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or gender. This form of recognition reflects the principles of dignity, equality, and social justice, which are ensured through a complex network of constitutions, laws, and decrees, all functioning within a framework that seeks to organize social life based on respect and mutual recognition among individuals.

2. Informal Legal Rights:

This refers to the moral system that regulates ethical interactions among individuals within societies and communities, guaranteeing them a range of legitimate human claims and rights as morally integrated beings within society who enjoy dignity and mutual social respect. This is achieved by fulfilling their social and psychological needs, especially the need for recognition. At the same time, it subjects the individual to symbolic sanctions, holding them accountable for their actions and duties toward others, and fostering awareness of the moral and ethical norms arising from their perception of themselves as recognized members of society (Boumenir, n.d., p. 112).

Accordingly, this form of recognition reinforces individuals' identity as autonomous and free beings who enjoy mutual respect, while granting them a sense of social security derived from the realization of legal recognition. Conversely, the absence of this recognition provokes feelings

of humiliation, contempt, and social injustice, weakening personal identity and social resilience, and potentially leading to struggles for the attainment of such legal recognition.

Nevertheless, legal recognition may at times experience tensions and fractures resulting from conflicting expectations among individuals concerning the nature of the rights they aspire to as respected and recognized social beings on the one hand, and the duties they are expected to fulfill toward others according to their social status or position on the other (Boumenir, n.d., p. 112).

Herein lies the epistemological challenge in any empirical attempt to understand individuals' perceptions of their rights and obligations, especially since "self-respect can, so to speak, only be grasped through a negative experience – when individuals clearly suffer" (Honneth, 2015, p. 220). Therefore, sociological research requires adopting **Max Weber's Ideal Type Methodology**, which builds abstract theoretical models used as analytical tools for understanding complex social phenomena. Rather than being confined to the purely philosophical description of the three forms of recognition—love, rights, and solidarity—proposed by Honneth, the researcher can construct an *ideal model* of a "complete recognition relationship" that includes its theoretical attributes (such as reciprocity, continuity, and mutual respect). Empirical cases can then be compared to this model to determine their degree of conformity or deviation. In this way, the study of recognition becomes an empirically measurable field rather than a purely speculative philosophical reflection.



C. Solidarity

Honneth adds a third form of recognition – **solidarity** – to the two previously discussed. He argues that when individuals engage in continuous relationships with others, they do not merely seek love and social respect; they also aspire to attain **social esteem**. This “enables them to form a positive relation to their concrete abilities and attributes” (Honneth, 2015, p. 221). In other words, individuals perceive their self-worth through the appreciation of others, which is often based on their societal role, professional contribution, social standing, or the skills and qualities that society – through complex mechanisms – judges as noble and valuable.

Accordingly, “it has become clear that solidarity, according to Honneth, is what allows individuals to realize themselves through relations of mutual recognition” (Boumenir, n.d., p. 117). This form of recognition produces a positive and fulfilling relationship with the self, grounded in the experiences of social appreciation granted by the community. Consequently, it nurtures a positive relationship with society itself – the very society that provides such satisfaction and esteem – thereby strengthening individuals’ sense of citizenship and motivating them to engage actively in social life.

Conversely, the loss of this form of recognition – social solidarity – outside the pre-established norms of appreciation – leads to the development of a negative and unsatisfactory self-image and a sense of alienation from the community that denied such recognition.

For example, a professional athlete cannot truly value themselves as part of the elite in their field unless they

receive recognition from their peers or can compare their achievements to those of other athletes who have been similarly acknowledged under commonly accepted and codified conditions—legal and sporting alike—by all participants in the interaction or by the institutions governing it, such as sports federations. Thus, the athlete requires another social intermediary to obtain recognition, which Honneth—drawing on the work of George Herbert Mead—calls *the generalized other*.

In this context, the mechanisms of esteem become clearer, as they are built upon predetermined and recognized criteria. However, the athlete may find themselves excluded or marginalized for reasons unrelated to their technical competence but rather due to religious, linguistic, or ethnic differences. Consequently, the conditions of recognition shift from clear, agreed-upon legal and professional standards to ambiguous moral and value-based ones, generating an inevitable sense of injustice, marginalization, and contempt.

In the absence of formal institutions capable of guaranteeing recognition and regulating interactive relations among individuals, society tends to establish complex symbolic norms upon which social esteem relationships are constructed. This, in turn, can lead to conflicts arising from the imbalance between expected recognition and the actual rewards received (Honneth, 1995, p. 165).

Such conflicts, however, are not necessarily negative; they can function as catalysts for renewing social practices and reshaping the conditions of recognition, potentially leading to a reestablishment of social justice in more inclusive and pluralistic forms. From this perspective, one can envision the role of **intermediary institutions** that combine both formal and symbolic dimensions, capable of negotiation and of



producing viable standards of recognition among culturally and socially diverse actors.

Thus, Honneth distinguished between three forms of recognition Honneth distinguishes three fundamental forms of recognition: **love**, which represents the emotional and psychological needs that individuals seek to fulfill through their affective relationships with others—such as family members and friends; **respect**, which refers to the recognition of individuals' legitimate rights; and **social solidarity**, which arises when society appreciates individuals' qualifications and the degree to which they contribute to the common good (Schmidt am Busch, 2015, p. 102).

Hence, recognition is considered by Honneth to be of vital and essential importance, as it is difficult—if not impossible—for individuals who have not experienced situations of mutual recognition to maintain positive attitudes toward themselves, such as self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. Those deprived of recognition lose the psychological and social resources necessary for realizing themselves as social beings (Ikäheimo, 2009, p. 102). This constitutes a fundamental barrier that prevents them from active participation in social life.

After examining the three forms of recognition as developed by Honneth, it becomes evident that this concept raises numerous epistemological and methodological challenges when applied to empirical sociological research. How can recognition be studied as a social phenomenon that is observable and measurable? What analytical levels should be adopted? These questions and others call for a reconstruction of the concept within a clear sociological and

methodological framework, which we aim to explore in the following section.

3. Sociological Questions Concerning the Concept of Recognition

3.1 Is Recognition a Descriptive-Explanatory Concept or a Normative-Ethical One?

Up to this point, the treatment of the concept of recognition continues to oscillate between **social philosophy** and **sociology**. While social philosophy—particularly as conceived by thinkers such as Honneth—focuses on exploring the ethical norms that ought to govern society and seeks to establish normative foundations for justice and recognition, sociology primarily aims to describe and interpret social reality as it exists, without necessarily engaging in moral or ethical evaluation.

Although Honneth places recognition “at the heart of his ambitious project to interpret personal relations,” starting from the hypothesis that humans do not acquire their active capacities in isolation but rather through “the gaze of recognition” from others—and even employs empirical data to study the phenomenon of *denial of recognition* (Weinstock, 2008, pp. 60–62)—this does not prevent him from granting recognition a normative and moral dimension. Indeed, Honneth advocates making recognition a right guaranteed to all human beings, regardless of race, religion, or gender, thereby giving the concept a normative quality through which social life and human relations can be interpreted.

In contrast, sociology deals with the concept of recognition from an analytical and descriptive perspective, seeking to study facts and relationships without making value judgments. This distinction is reflected in the 1984 debate



Soumission : 05/04/2025 Acceptation : 02/06/2025 Publication : 15/08/2025

between Pierre Bourdieu and Axel Honneth, where it was argued that “philosophical and social critique have always been in tension: on one hand, sociology aims to establish normative standards for what can be considered a relationship open to critique; on the other hand, social philosophy requires clear and explicit criteria for what can be regarded as moral progress” (Mathiesen & Willig, 2005, p. 7).

Consequently, this tension is reflected in the epistemological divergence between the two domains’ objectives

Thus, this tension manifests in the difference between the epistemological goals of the two fields: **social philosophy** seeks to establish ethical rules and moral standards for social life, whereas **sociology** aims to observe and analyze reality with all its contradictions and practices—even those that appear unjust or discriminatory—without making prior moral judgments.

From this standpoint, the studies related to recognition can, epistemologically, be divided into **three fundamental levels**, each characterized by its own methodology and techniques suited to the nature of the questions it addresses and the types of phenomena it seeks to understand and analyze.

(a) The Level of Mental Representations of Recognition

At this level, individuals construct **mental images** of being recognized by others, and of recognizing others in return. On this basis, they build their social attitudes and representations. However, it is important to note that these mental representations do not necessarily correspond to objective reality; rather, they may be shaped by cultural and

social mechanisms that differ significantly from those that structure recognition in real life.

Accordingly, sociology at this level seeks to **deconstruct the social and cultural mechanisms** that produce these mental conceptions of recognition. For example, some rural migrants living in cities may feel deprived of recognition by urban society. In this case, the focus is not on the objective reality itself, but on the mechanisms that contribute to the construction of **feelings of misrecognition**, and on how these perceptions generate emotions of **injustice, contempt, or self-denial** among those individuals.

(b) The Level of Objective Reality

At this level, the analysis moves from subjective representations to the **study of the social conditions and realities** through which society produces mutual recognition among individuals. Although, as in the previous example, rural inhabitants in cities may *feel* deprived of recognition, this level raises questions about the **correspondence between perception and reality**: Are they truly deprived of recognition? To what extent does the feeling of misrecognition match the objective social facts?

Sociologists can employ **quantitative methods and statistical techniques** to measure the objective reality of recognition—for instance, by assessing the proportion of rural-origin individuals in prestigious positions, their level of integration into urban society, and the degree of social interaction between rural and urban populations. Comparing these objective indicators with **dominant social representations**—such as stereotypes that portray rural people as less educated or less professionally competent—allows us to understand the **social mechanisms that generate the gap** between objective reality (e.g., rural elites



Soumission : **05/04/2025** Acceptation : **02/06/2025** Publication : **15/08/2025**

holding prominent positions) and negative perceptions of them, or that may lead to a convergence between the two.

(c) The Level of Struggle for Recognition

This level examines **conflict** as a central element in the dynamics of achieving recognition. Recognition is viewed as a **right that requires continuous struggle** for its realization and preservation. Sociology thus studies the **strategies and practices** adopted by individuals and groups—both symbolically and practically—to gain or maintain social recognition. It also analyzes how **social and cultural resources** are mobilized for this purpose, and how these interact with existing **institutional and symbolic structures**.

3.2 Is Recognition Singular or Multiple?

Through their social interactions, individuals may seek to achieve a wide range of recognitions, as they live within **multiple social spheres** and adapt to each by adopting different **social faces**. The social identity one adopts as a family head at home is not the same as the one expressed in the neighborhood, workplace, or other social environments. These distinctions can be observed through differences in language, emotions, and behavioral expressions.

The use of multiple social identities corresponds to the pursuit of **diverse forms of recognition**. For example, in his neighborhood, an individual may seek to be recognized as **respectable, educated, or courageous**, proud of the personal qualities that define him. In the workplace, he may strive for recognition as a **competent employee** deserving of promotion and professional advancement. As a citizen, he seeks recognition as an **equal individual** entitled to the same rights and obligations as others. In sports settings, he may

aspire to be recognized as a **skilled or professional athlete**. Thus, as the individual navigates different social arenas, his **demands for recognition** multiply accordingly.

However, the question arises: **Does the theoretical approach to recognition aim to encompass all these diverse claims**, or does it focus primarily on the fundamental ones—such as the right to citizenship and a dignified life as a free human being?

In reality, as previously discussed, the mechanisms of recognition rest on **two main foundations**:

1. The first is **individual**, linked to the person's character and psychological disposition;
2. The second is **social**, based on **cultural, ethnic, gender, and religious differences** among individuals.

If the theoretical approach to recognition proves insufficient to fully explain the first foundation, it nonetheless remains fundamentally concerned with analyzing the **second foundation**, regardless of its diversity, form, or intensity.

When **loss of recognition** occurs in contexts such as the workplace, sports, or residential environments—and when this loss stems from **cultural and social differences**—sociology becomes not only capable but **obliged** to interpret and understand these phenomena. Through the **theoretical and conceptual framework of recognition**, sociology can uncover the mechanisms and expressions of **injustice, contempt, and exclusion**, and explain their multiple manifestations within contemporary societies.

3.3 The Right to Recognition or Social Justice Based on Redistribution?

A significant intellectual debate has arisen between the philosophers **Axel Honneth** and **Nancy Fraser** regarding



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their differing conceptions of *recognition* (Testenoire, 2010, p. 86). Fraser argues that both **Charles Taylor** and **Axel Honneth** regard recognition as an issue related to *self-realization*. In contrast, she views recognition as fundamentally tied to *justice*:

“I do not agree with Honneth’s so-called ‘formal conception of ethical life,’ based on the theory of ‘intersubjective conditions’ for an undistorted practical relation to the self... The objective condition, rather, affirms the concerns associated with the theory of distributive justice.” (Boumenir, 2019, pp. 31–35)

Fraser therefore developed a **critical theory of society** grounded in the **redistribution of wealth and resources**. In her view, the appeal for recognition has gained particular prominence—surpassing that of redistribution—due to the **collapse of communism**, the **rise of free-market ideology**, and the **emergence of identity politics** in both progressive and fundamentalist forms. These shifts displaced or silenced the earlier calls for equitable distribution (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 8).

Accordingly, theories of justice should **integrate recognition and distributive equality** as *complementary dimensions* that cannot be understood in isolation. Moreover, Fraser’s approach stresses the need to **embed redistribution within the framework of recognition**, as proposed by Honneth, in order to achieve a **balance between the moral and material dimensions** of social justice.

In reality, the controversy between these two thinkers—and a broader circle of social and political philosophers—is extensive. However, this paper holds that they largely agree on substance while differing in terminology and emphasis.

Honneth's focus on **recognition as self-realization** does not negate the **right to fair distribution of resources**; rather, it implicitly includes it within his concepts of *respect* and *solidarity*. Similarly, although Fraser emphasizes *social justice*, she does not deny *recognition as self-realization*—she merely calls for a **balance between the two**.

This theoretical tension can be illustrated by real-world examples. Many public and private corporations deliberately **ignore certain employees**—those with open-ended contracts—to pressure them into resigning voluntarily, thus avoiding legal penalties. Although such employees receive their full wages—achieving *economic equality* in terms of wealth distribution—they experience a **loss of respect and social recognition** within the organization. This deprivation leads to intense **psychological distress, feelings of contempt, and social injustice**, prompting many to resign in pursuit of mental well-being. This highlights the centrality of **recognition as a means of self-realization**, independent of material or economic aspects.

Conversely, an employee may receive **esteem, affection, and respect** from both colleagues and superiors, yet earn a **lower salary** than peers of lesser rank. Such disparity generates **feelings of injustice and humiliation**, making the individual feel **deprived of recognition**. Therefore, as Fraser rightly argues, the **absence of distributive justice** in the equitable sharing of wealth constitutes a fundamental issue that cannot be ignored. However, Honneth's supporters might counter that **economic redistribution** belongs to the realm of *legal rights*, which he includes within the broader framework of **recognition**, as the *denial of such rights constitutes a form of misrecognition*.



3.4. Labor and the Concept of Recognition

Recognition is often associated with the concept of **labor** and the role an individual plays within the group or society, as previously discussed. Yet, a question arises: *Is labor a necessary condition for achieving recognition?*

In responding to critiques concerning the **normative and critical capacity** of his theory of recognition, Honneth distinguishes between **two forms of recognition** (Hanifi, 2020, p. 81):

1. **Genuine recognition**, which rests on sustained respect for individuals' autonomy; and
2. **False or ideological recognition**, which occurs publicly with the primary function of integrating individuals and social groups into the **dominant social order** by granting them a positive image of themselves—thereby compelling them to internalize and reproduce the system's desired values. This process ultimately leads to the **production of administrative forms of subordination** and the **reproduction of hegemonic relations**.

From this distinction, it follows that **labor plays a crucial role** in establishing relations of recognition, as individuals are recognized in proportion to their contribution and role. However, in reality, these processes are far more complex. The **social mechanisms that generate recognition** often extend beyond effort or performance, and they frequently produce **unequal opportunities** among individuals performing similar tasks.

For instance, two individuals with comparable academic qualifications and social contributions may receive vastly different levels of respect and recognition simply because

one belongs to a **socially prestigious group**. Here, **symbolic domination and social hierarchies**—as theorized by Pierre Bourdieu—play a decisive role. Society’s mechanisms of **symbolic violence** divide people into two broad categories:

- those who **possess power, authority, and the means of domination**, and
- those who, consciously or unconsciously, **submit** to the ideologies, beliefs, and values imposed by the dominant class.

This domination is sustained through **cultural and ideological institutions** such as media, cinema, schools, theater, and the arts, which collectively produce **shared symbolic frameworks of thought, perception, and memory**. As Chevalier and Chauviré (2013, p. 157) explain, these frameworks become “**social structures of perception and evaluation of action.**”

In this sense, Bourdieu’s concept of **symbolic power** offers valuable theoretical tools for understanding how societies produce recognition. He defines symbolic power as “**an invisible form of power that can only be exercised with the complicity of those who refuse to acknowledge that they are subject to it—and who, in turn, reproduce it**” (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 48).

To illustrate, consider a real case observed at the **University of Algiers 2**. Two professors of roughly the same generation, both with recognized academic competence, differ in social recognition. The first has long held the title of *Professor*, while the second remains at the rank of *Assistant Professor A*. Surprisingly, the latter enjoys greater admiration, as evidenced by frequent photo requests, compliments, and expressions of enthusiasm during lectures.



Soumission : 05/04/2025 Acceptation : 02/06/2025 Publication : 15/08/2025

Upon inquiry, no respondents could identify substantial **intellectual or academic differences** justifying this disparity. Closer analysis revealed that the second professor's distinction lay in his mastery of a **socially prestigious language**—French—whereas the first, though equally fluent, conducted all his lectures in Arabic.

Despite their comparable intellectual levels and the higher academic status of the first, **recognition was socially constructed** based primarily on **cultural and linguistic criteria** produced through mechanisms of **symbolic domination** (Boularaf & Aouijia, 2023, p. 59), rather than on the intrinsic scientific value of their work.

Conclusion:

This study concludes by emphasizing the importance of re-examining the concept of *recognition (reconnaissance)* from a sociological perspective. The research has offered a multidimensional reading that connects social philosophy with the tangible reality of social interactions. This approach has allowed us to deconstruct the lived experiences of recognition deprivation and to highlight how cultural and social differences shape the formation—or denial—of recognition within contemporary societies.

The study makes a concrete epistemological contribution by raising new methodological questions that go beyond traditional theoretical frameworks. It underscores the need for more flexible and comprehensive approaches that account for the complexities of social reality and the multiplicity of individual and collective identities.

Furthermore, the study opens significant research prospects, suggesting the necessity of conducting in-depth field investigations to explore how the concept of recognition can be applied in various local and global contexts.

In conclusion, this study clarifies that recognition is not merely an abstract philosophical issue but a vital *social phenomenon* that affects the balance of social relations and the organization of coexistence. Therefore, studying recognition is essential for a deeper understanding of social justice and human dignity. This research thus represents a foundational step toward advancing scientific inquiry and developing more precise and realistic analytical and applied models.

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