

**Chair of International Organization**

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**Workshop “The Problem of Recognition in Global Politics”**  
**21-22 June 2012, Frankfurt University**

**General outline of the workshop**

Our workshop “The Problem of Recognition in Global Politics” will explore the intersubjective processes of claiming, granting and withholding recognition in international relations. These dynamics of recognition will be analysed in a variety of different contexts, ranging from violent political conflict to the constitution of transnational and supranational forms of political order. We understand dynamics of recognition to be closely linked to processes of legitimation. Legitimacy is not an absolute standard that comes naturally to certain actors as soon as they fulfil specific criteria. Similarly, recognition is often granted or withheld irrespective of formal eligibility. While some criteria of recognition have become widely accepted – e.g. territory, people and government as criteria for the recognition of statehood –, they have been interpreted and applied in dramatically different ways. Subject to a *politics* of legitimacy, their meaning has changed over time and is constantly re-negotiated in the practice of international relations. There is no consistency in the (inter)national politics of (state)recognition.

Recognition and the politics of legitimacy are located at the intersection of political theory, theory of society and international relations and are of central importance to the formation as well as contestation of normative orders. And yet, the vibrant strand of social theorizing (among others, Nancy Fraser, Axel Honneth, Charles Taylor) has still remained largely detached from empirical research on recognition and legitimacy in international politics. Social theorists have traditionally focused on recognition struggles within states and societies and have often privileged debates on philosophical foundations over empirical investigation. At the same time, social theoretical concepts of recognition have hardly been received at theoretical depth by International Relations (IR) scholars. Despite a recent re-orientation of the discipline towards research on international norms, discourses and social practices, IR scholars have just begun to explore the narratives and practices of recognition from this new

theoretical angle (see, for example, the contributions in *The International Politics of Recognition*, edited by Thomas Lindemann and Erik Ringmar, 2011). In the past, the subject has been left mainly to legal scholars, based on a formalistic understanding of “recognition” as international legal act.

Against this background, our workshop seeks both to elaborate these “missing links” among different disciplinary perspectives on recognition and to develop a new perspective on the dynamics of (non-, mis-)recognition. The workshop invites theoretical and empirical contributions from Political Theory/Philosophy, International Law and International Relations as well as from practitioners. The aim is to establish a multi-disciplinary perspective on what recognition implies as a social theoretical concept in the international arena and as a formal/social mode of constituting/performing actorness, inclusion and membership.

The debates in Social Theory can inspire innovative research designs for theoretical and empirical research in international politics. In particular, constructivist studies focusing on rules, norms and identities (of states, of non-state actors) can strongly benefit from a transfer, but modifications and new perspectives are also required: First, by conceiving of recognition not as the goal of struggles in international politics, but as a means to achieve a goal or as something that emerges (unintendedly) out of relationships. Second, by closely examining the referents of recognition, that is, recognition as *what* is at stake each time? This would enable a more refined view of the manifestations of recognition in relation to legitimacy and power, e.g. as a mutually agreed-upon currency, as a unilateral act of subordination, or as a form of emancipation. Furthermore, since recognition is a scarce and contested resource, indiscriminate inflation risks devaluating it and rendering it useless as a tool of conflict regulation.

## **Theoretical foundations**

### **Social Theory/Political Philosophy**

Modern social theories of recognition, which reached a peak in the 1990s reflecting on the various manifestations of “identity politics” and “struggles for recognition” of minorities and social movements in multi-cultural societies, have drawn our attention to the paramount significance of recognition in social as well as political relations. Drawing on Hegelian ideas, social theorists regard recognition by other individuals/by the society as a vital human need: only if an individual is appreciated by others for certain qualities of his or her self, he or she will be able to develop self-esteem as well as an ‘intact’ personal identity, enabling him or her to pursue autonomy and self-realization. Individual subjectivity depends on inter-subjective relations. With regard to society, recognition operates as a mechanism of constituting a

normative status (of equals) allotting rights and duties within a society. Acts of misrecognition constitute acts of injustice in that they violate an individual's personal integrity and impede it from becoming a full member of a social collective. The question of which claims for recognition can be justified as being 'worthy' of recognition remains a matter of normative controversy, since not all claims for recognition, e.g. of group rights or cultural peculiarities, seem to 'deserve' recognition. Criteria for such an (il)legitimacy of claims and struggles have differed empirically across societies and have changed throughout history, also in terms of their normative content.

It should be stressed that recognition and non-recognition are not clear-cut alternatives but typically occur in complex and entangled forms. In addition, recognition does not necessarily imply the granting of equal status: Kings recognize dukes, parliaments recognize presidents, states recognize minorities – and sometimes they do not/refuse to do so. Hence, recognition is also a technology of social differentiation that establishes layers of legitimacy and social hierarchies. "Recognition as", i.e. the granting of qualified membership, is a both theoretically and empirically underexplored issue.

With regard to the political aims of (new) social movements, the struggle for recognition has often been associated with emancipation and social progress. Yet, a striving for recognition by the dominant, hegemonic culture of a society can also imply the 'assimilation' and conformism of a group struggling for recognition instead of overcoming the ruling ideologies, as authors such as Fanon, Althusser and Sartre have argued in particular. The result can be a misconstrual of the selves, a reification of a fixed and putative identity, but not liberation or progress.

### **International Relations/International Law**

While *formal* modes of recognition/diplomacy have traditionally been a significant topic of state-centred international relations and, of course, a well known topos in traditional international law, recognition has hardly been taken seriously as a social theoretical concept. The idea of recognition was reduced to something states do or have legal claims to. Instead of problematising and historicising processes of recognition, IR scholars either conceived of states as naturalised entities that were simply present in different forms and guises or focused on the Jellinek criteria of territory, people and effective government and thus on material factors that lend themselves to operationalisation as variables in the context of positivist theorizing.

With the advent of new actors in world politics, which ranged from transnational civil non-governmental organizations to terrorists and other violent groups, this naturalised view of the state is no longer sustainable, highlighting the importance of recognition in world politics. Formal recognition can refer to the recognition of states, but also to the recognition of governments as legitimate or to the recognition of (violent) non-state actors as negotiating partners. Beyond formal modes of recognition, there are informal, social modes of recognizing someone as 'equal' or as a 'legitimate' member of a collective. In other words, recognition is also a social practice that manifests itself in different shapes. And, as should be emphasized, it often exists in degrees, not in absolute terms of recognition/non-recognition.

Hence, the recent turn to recognition is related to broader debates in IR. Given the long-standing relative dominance of rationalist approaches in IR (in particular in the United States), social practices and narratives of recognition have only more recently attracted more attention in the wake of a "constructivist turn" and a "practice turn" within International Relations. In contrast to some rationalist approaches, an alternative perspective on the role of power in international politics could consider legitimacy and recognition as mechanisms that generate power – such as mobilization power in the case of non-state actors. However, acts of recognition may have ambivalent outcomes or they may even backfire. First, the problematique of recognition highlights the tension between a juridically understood legality and a more politically understood legitimacy. Second, one should closely examine whether the recognition acts confirm and conform to established rules and norms or rather break with traditions and initiate new practices. Third, if the latter is the case, are these violations momentary acts of recognition, or do they create precedence and open new paths to legitimate power?

### **Workshop goals and structure**

In bringing together scholars working on international aspects of recognition from a variety of theoretical and empirical backgrounds, our workshop pursues a double aim. First, it reviews and compares contemporary perspectives, debates and research trends related to global processes of (non-, mis-) recognition. Second, it seeks to advance and structure the dialogue between diverse approaches to the topic so as to develop a multi-disciplinary perspective and joint research agenda on recognition in global politics.

The envisioned product of the workshop will be a peer-reviewed edited volume. We expect that such a volume will be of interest to top academic publishers in making a number of important additions to the existing literature on the subject. Due to its multidisciplinary

composition, the volume offers the most comprehensive stock-taking yet of theoretical approaches to the subject. By structuring the dialogue between these multiple perspectives around a number of central themes – the relationship between recognition and the concepts of sovereignty, legitimacy and identity, systemic and actor-centred perspectives, symmetrical and asymmetrical processes of (non-)recognition – the volume lays the groundwork for genuinely multidisciplinary theory development. Empirically, it broadens the research agenda beyond dynamics of recognition among *state* actors and in the field of international security, which still constitute the focus of much present research and debate on the topic.

### *Workshop Structure*

The workshop will be structured around five panels. The proposed topics for the panels should be read as an open list of suggestions which takes into account the potential interests of invited participants and the underlying volume concept – alternative ideas are welcome. We envision the following panel themes:

The first panel could assemble broad introductory contributions which map the “state of the art” as well as the metatheoretical foundations of contemporary theorizing about recognition (in domestic as well as global politics). The second panel could be dedicated to more specialized theoretical contributions that discuss recognition as a legal and as a social process and explore potential links between these different disciplinary perspectives. Within these specialized theoretical contributions, all authors are invited to reflect on the themes we identified as central to the debate, particularly the relationship of recognition to the concepts of sovereignty, legitimacy, and identity, and potential differentiations between systemic and actor-centric approaches to (or uses of) recognition theory.

Panels three, four and five should address empirical cases that focus on dynamics of recognition among state actors. Both contemporary and historical cases are welcome. Empirical studies might include classical issues in the field of state recognition such as (changing) criteria for legitimate statehood or the problem of unrecognized states (de-facto-states), but should also deal with phenomena of the – temporary – withdrawal of social and political recognition among state actors (one example is the current European financial crisis, which impacts on the social/political recognition of highly indebted eurozone countries). Empirical studies on dynamics of (non-)recognition among state and non-state actors should deal with violent non-state actors such as terrorists and civil war parties, but also with NGOs. Which NGOs are granted admission to international negotiating tables by whom and which are labelled as problematic and deemed unworthy of inclusion in governance arrangements, merits our special attention.