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THE 'US' OF DEMOCRATIC WILL-FORMATION AND GLOBALISATION

The last part of Honneth's *tour de force* is about the 'us' of democratic will-formation. This part of the book consists again of three parts. In the first section, Honneth reconstructs the transformations of the public sphere in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He then traces the public sphere's relation to the democratic constitutional nation-state and analyses the influence of processes of globalisation and Europeanization on the possibility of 'public will-formation'. In a third section on political culture, Honneth summarises the intentions and conclusions of the first two sections. I'll concentrate on what Honneth has to say about the relation between democracy and globalisation (especially in the third section, Honneth 2011: 612-625).

Regarding the realisation of social freedom in the course of modernity, Honneth contends that new freedoms have mostly resulted from social struggle and social movements. The energy necessary for such struggles beyond the limits of political equality is, he argues, bound up historically with a shared 'background culture', a 'national community' guaranteeing the 'political integration' that is needed for such struggles (Honneth 2011: 610, 619). The solidarity for the pursuit of more than individual freedoms and political equality emerged from such a shared background culture and its affective dimensions. This analysis leads Honneth to argue that globalisation is fundamentally a problem for democracy, especially as migration increases, which is one of globalisation's central features (e.g. Honneth 2011: 609). Because a shared background culture is increasingly lacking, the conditions for a shared public sphere are also lacking. The inevitable outcome of globalisation, which we see happening at the European level, is what Honneth calls a 'lightening of citizenship': citizenship tends to concentrate more on the liberal and less on the social dimensions of freedom, and thus to impoverish democracy. Therefore, Honneth argues, the hope for an integrated democratic public sphere is caught in a vicious circle between capitalism on the one hand, and nationalism on the other hand (Honneth 2011: 611). The 'constitutional patriotism' that has been famously proposed by Habermas to counter this vicious circle is as yet too abstract, too 'affectless', to be able to compensate for the lack of solidarity. At the European level, the idea of a European *demos* seems to be increasingly off the table altogether (Honneth 2011: 621), and Europe can only bet on liberal freedoms – with the risks of further increasing democratic deficits and the possible emergence of new forms of populism and nationalism.

Honneth's more or less last hope for democracy under conditions of globalisation is based on the idea that the protest and freedom movements in European history were not exclusively nationally oriented. And while a constitutional patriotism concentrated on law cannot form a basis for European democracy, the historical narratives of these freedom movements themselves, and the shared norms that have resulted from these movements, could be a source for a European political culture of 'shared sensibilities and expanded solidarities' (Honneth 2011: 624).

My comments are about the essential role that Honneth gives to several unifying levels of solidarity for the possibility of social freedom and democracy. My intuition is that Honneth thinks that we need more 'na-

tional solidarity' and more political integration of 'all citizens' for democracy than we actually do. This leads him to see problems where they don't arise (especially with migration), and to fail to overcome modernity's strong, unity-oriented concepts of citizenship and the historical as well as the actual exclusionary dimensions inherently connected to them. I intend to ask questions about the form that democratic will-formation, the *demos*, receives in Honneth's argument, contrasting these constructions with the emerging tradition of critical social systems theory. Finally, I will argue that Honneth should have further sociologised and historicised his analysis of the emergence and limits of social freedom, and that he should have adopted a more modest and deconstructed notion of 'democratic will-formation' itself.

I. The Nation

Honneth does not fully clarify whether the source of solidarity for social struggle is the cultural nation and its affectivities, or shared citizenship in the sense of 'state-membership'. Sometimes he refers to state-membership, but via concepts like *Einbürgerung* (naturalization/'citizenization') and affectivity, he comes close to identifying the cultural nation as a near indispensible source of solidarity. So while having identified the nation, earlier in the book, as dangerous when it loses its mediation through citizenship and the state (with reference to the Dreyfus Affair), Honneth seems to argue that the possibility of democratic will-formation is relatively dependent on a pre-political, cultural solidarity. In any case, solidarity is to be found somewhere on the nation-state level, in a national 'background culture' able to free the energies necessary for social struggles for equality (Honneth 2011: 609).

To my mind, this brings Honneth's problem analysis of globalisation too close to those nationalists (liberal or not) who argue that globalisation (and Europeanization in the first place) mostly works to the advantage of neo-liberalization and international elites, while causing a lack of solidarity and a hampering of struggles for social equality. An inevitable outcome of such a framing is a problematization of migration, and we can

find this in slightly nostalgic and fearful formulations such as the following: 'When, a little later, the stream of immigrants from the liberated colonies to the former mother countries swelled, and, as a consequence, totally different cultures and lifestyles began to feel at home in them, state institutions and the political public had to confront the question whether in the future the political integration of citizens could still be fed from the old sources of fundamentally nationalist attitudes.' (Honneth 2011: 602).

Although this phrase is formulated in the midst of a passage about the emergence, in the 1950s and 1960s, of self-criticism within the old colonial nations, it displays a rhetoric of migratory reaction, problematizing migration in terms of 'swelling streams' of immigrants from 'totally different cultures', disturbing the 'political integration' that existed thanks to the 'old' nationalist sources. It is not so evident from historical sources that the 'nation' has been such an 'old' and exclusive source of solidarity and social struggle for any extended period of time, if it ever was even for a short time. Isn't this one of the myths that a more historical-sociological orientation could have helped to criticise? Honneth himself does not tell the story of social freedom in terms of national solidarity, let alone in terms of achieving democratic consensus on a national level. Struggles for freedom and equality have often been local, regional or transnational, rather than national. Moreover, such struggles have been taken up by various ethnic and sexual minorities, by women, by classes, in sum by all those who were not yet recognized as full citizens and who *claimed* their citizenship in the first place, rather than effectuating it, and whose solidarity was not primarily dependent on their shared nationality.

The historical relativization of the 'nation' as a source of solidarity could counter the idea that a shared solidary 'background culture' had forcefully existed at all in European nation-states 'before the migrants came'. This is a chimera, as critical historians will be able to tell us (see e.g. Lucassen 2005). Especially in France, where the myth of national solidarity at some point is still alive and kicking, historians such as Michel Winock and Gérard Noiriel (2001) have highlighted the internal violence inherent to the *fièvre hexagonale*, measurable by the amount of deaths alone which have occurred during the French social struggles. This historical narrative is at least in tension with the idea that a shared 'background culture', a

political-cultural *demos* and a unified 'public sphere' of national debate and consensus-formation, had done the crucial work.

II. Political Integration, Will-Formation and the *demos*

Honneth writes that the *demos*, in many regards, has been swept from the table because there is no transnational public sphere where equality could become the object of deliberation or negotiation (Honneth 2011: 621). The history of freedom movements in Europe is not enough to remedy this lack, but it is a source for some kind of political-cultural integration, which would actually be the only hope for a Europe that would be more than a purely neoliberal or capitalist project. This implies that rather strong political and cultural integration is necessary for the *demos* to function, or even to exist. Here again, Honneth seems affiliated to the older functionalist sociologies of Émile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons, to whose works he also often refers in an affirmative way, rather than to the more recent pluralistic social systems theories of, e.g., Niklas Luhmann, Roberto Unger, Veit Bader or Günther Teubner, or to the French Republican-Marxist tradition, elaborated by, e.g., Jacques Rancière or Étienne Balibar. I would like to draw out some consequences of that affiliation or indebtedness, and from the neglect of these other, more recent traditions.

To relate the focus on the *demos* back to my earlier remarks about the *nation*: from Honneth's own historical reconstruction, I argued in the above that it emerges that democratising social energies often do not result from deliberation- and consensus- oriented political will-formation, but from social struggles and claims that have their origins in specific social spheres. These are quite often struggles by those whose inclusion is contested, and whose inclusion *transforms* our conception of who we recognize as citizens. My question now is whether Honneth's emphasis on political integration and his too-undifferentiated concept of the *demos* can account for the role and meaning of those struggles? The classical notion of the *demos* as 'the whole people', the ideal of the 'political integration of all citizens' (Honneth 2011: 593), seems to be underlying Honneth's ideal, formulated in the very last words of the book, of a 'transnational,

engaged public sphere' (Honneth 2011: 624). Yet this raises the question of whether this ideal of a transnational public sphere in the singular is not inhibiting rather than stimulating more realistic opportunities for democratization at the many levels that exist in a context of globalisation (see Bader 2006). Moreover, Honneth even seems to use the ideal of one relatively unified transnational public sphere as a yardstick with which to evaluate social movements for democratization in diverse societal systems, and I doubt whether this is still an adequate norm for today's highly differentiated societies, if it ever has been. An open question to me, then, is how Honneth's normative ideal is related to the 'seductive idea that a unified political collective represents society and that other social spheres participate therein' (Teubner in Teubner/Negri 2010: 12), and whether it wouldn't be more realistic – and also more democratic – to acknowledge that 'no social sub-system, not even democratized politics, can represent the whole of society' (Teubner in Teubner/Negri 2010: 12). I am not sure what Honneth's position is in this regard, but I do think that clarification is needed about how exactly he sees the relation between democracy, in the state- and public sphere-related sense, and the struggles for democratization in other social systems, for which he seems to have much less attention. In any case, the notion of a 'transnational public sphere' would have to be pluralised more rigorously, in contrast with the 'grand narrative' of European emancipation that Honneth seems to want us to start telling again. To quote Teubner once more: '"Public" in this new sense would not refer to the one body politic of collective deliberation and decision but to a multiplicity of public spaces, which make possible communicative reflection processes within each of the formerly "private" spheres of society. In each of these public sites, conflicts, struggles, deliberation and decisions are directed to finding a balance between the site's relation to the whole society and their contributions to individual and collective actors.' (Teubner in Teubner/Negri 2010: 4)

Can one avoid the trap of overestimating majoritarian and consensus-oriented politics if one sticks to an almost Rousseauian notion of the *demos* as an integrated political level for 'all citizens'? It is questionable that what we really miss is political integration, if we want to pursue an ideal of the public. What we do miss are strong, democratic civil society actors and organisations, associations *between* economy and politics, or-

ganized democracy from below. Their possible contributions remain severely undertheorized in *Das Recht der Freiheit*, which becomes evident even from the structure of the last part of the book, which is about the 'reality of social freedom' (part C). This is by far the largest part of the book and it thematizes, subsequently, the 'us' of personal relations, the 'us' of economic relations and the 'us' of political relations over more than 400 pages, without reserving a systematic place for the 'us' of civil societal associations, or of activism, and of their democratising powers and the powers inhibiting them (see e.g. Bader/Hirst 2001; Isin 2008).

My final point is connected to this one. Honneth pleads for understanding social freedom not as a result of law-formation but of social movements and struggles for freedom. Law comes after the fact. Therefore, Honneth thinks that the current focus in political philosophy on law and justice (in the juridical, abstract sense) should be abandoned. Instead, political philosophy should become more historically and sociologically oriented. That would help to remain faithful to the normative 'guideline' of social freedom while at the same time keeping in check the role of the nation-state, where it has historically not been the 'intellectual organ' for the realisation of the democratic will as was its promise, but an end in itself as an organ of power and power-distribution.

I hope Honneth will found a school based upon this thought, for it is dearly missed in philosophy (and the humanities more broadly) today. It would be a way of bringing critical cultural studies, social philosophy and political philosophy closer together, and I think that this is where critical theory has to go. But I have two reservations. The first one is connected to my previous criticism about the lack of attention to the civil spheres of society, and perhaps particularly – ironically – for the potential of law. Honneth seems to remain caught in the framework that both liberalism and Marxism have shared by having 'assisted in creating legal institutions which stress, albeit in different forms, the conflicts between the political and the economic sector, but at the same time […] they have neglected or instrumentalised the wide array of other spheres of civil society' (Teubner in Teubner/Negri 2010: 3). The point is to liberate the law from the simplistic public/private divide, which means simultaneously not only to de-economize it, but also to de-politicize it; to distance it not only from the

private sector, but also from the public sector (Teubner in Teubner/Negri 2010: 3). And so, perhaps, we should bring the law back in … but then differently, socially.

My second point is that the critical sociological focus should have led Honneth to problematize the concept of democratic will-formation itself. Honneth sometimes seems to suggest that if only there were no 'bad' (foremost capitalist or nationalist) powers standing in the way of democratic will-formation, we could collectively determine our fate or future. But the feasibility of this idea, even its logic, has been thoroughly questioned, not only in history and sociology but also in philosophy, already by Hannah Arendt, but especially in poststructuralism. Honneth's idea of democracy seems to remain dependent on scarcely relativized notions of autonomy and subjectivity. When he claims that democratic will-formation and social freedom do not imply idealism, but only an interpretation of the norms that have been inherent in European modern history since the French Revolution, I would submit that there is still a strong residue of idealism in how he understands those norms themselves, insofar as he makes them dependent on a modernistic scheme of collective autonomy.

This again is connected to Honneth's view of migration, integration and globalisation. A central problem in the current context of the securitization of a 'Europe' that defines itself as a would-be integrated realm of 'freedom' – and that needs to be protected from erosion from the outside – is that the idea of political integration goes rather seamlessly together with the idea that certain persons are much more capable than others of guaranteeing the maintenance of this 'Europe' of freedom. Honneth's ideal citizens, 'the free market participant, the self-conscious democratic citizen and the emancipated family member' (Honneth 2011: 611) seem to be members of a rather elitist club, and there is a strong moral and cultural dimension to this norm of democratic citizenship. In today's European context, this norm has exclusionary effects in itself: it tends to be invoked to define the migrant, especially the Muslim, in terms of the 'not yet' full citizen, which is a reminder of the colonial waiting room for full citizenship analysed by Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000), and which, as it has been argued, has been extended to Europe itself (Mezzadra 2006). If we do

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not reflect on and criticize the modernist scheme of citizenship as such, we not only keep up an idea of Europe, and of democracy, that cannot be realized, but also one that undergirds a cultural image of Europe as superior, more modern, than other regions and cultures, and of the European citizen as quite different from, (to speak with Rushdie's Saladin Chamcha), the 'poor riff-raff' on our borders, in our asylums and detention centres and in our *banlieues*. In that sense, I am missing, in Honneth's book, not only the dimension of civil associational freedom, but also a relativisation of the European narrative of modernity, finishing with (or terminating) the endless and nearly exclusive fascination for European intellectual history.

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