

**THE SITUATED POLITICS OF RECOGNITION, ETHNIC
MINORITY, YOUTH AND IDENTITY WORK**

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The Situated politics of Recognition: Ethnic minority youth & identity work

Mette Andersson, June 2000

Contemporary discourses on multiculturalism, race, youth, identity and ethnicity do, in spite of the typical programmatic insistence on the need for interdisciplinary research, often remain happily uninformed by each other. In this paper I argue that the 1990s-debates in political theory on multiculturalism will gain from a more context- and level-sensitive approach to identity theory as well as from a closer reading of critical research on different identity positions within ethnic minority youth aggregates. A main argument in this paper departs from a critique of a much debated essay written by one of the most influential, and, in my opinion, also one of the best, proponents of a dialogical identity theory, Charles Taylor. Whereas Taylor's essay on "the politics of recognition" (1994) argues that the lack of political recognition of ethno-cultural minority identities represents the core problem for minorities, I argue that a critical perspective on the politics of recognition must be based on a more open, process- and context-oriented social epistemology. In proposing what I here call a theory of "a situated politics of recognition", Taylor's argument about the necessity of recognition for identity work is untied from the (imperative) status of ethnicity. It is instead argued that the common statuses provided by specific social contexts of interaction, such as the status of a pupil, an athlete, a member of a local friend group, is a preferable departure for theorising about ethnic minority youth, recognition and identity work. This perspective, tying recognition and misrecognition to the moral repertoires provided in specific contexts of inter-ethnic interaction avoids the unfortunate consequences of giving ethnicity an a priori imperative status as informer of human identity. Instead, a theory on the situated politics of recognition implies attention to how stereotypical notions of ethnic, religious and racial identity violates the possibilities for recognition as provided by different contexts of inter-ethnic interaction. In drawing upon my own research on identity work among ethnic minority youth in Oslo, Norway (1999), I show how ethnic Norwegians' assumptions of ethnicity as the prime informer of identity for minority people, is made into an explicit moral issue for minority men and women in late adolescence and early adulthood.

Political theory and multiculturalism

Although some of the recent theorising on multiculturalism is recognised by interdisciplinary approaches (see for instance many of the contributions in Goldberg 1994), it is political theory and normative philosophy that in recent years have dominated this field of studies (cf. Gutmann 1994, Willett 1998, Appiah and Gutmann 1999).ⁱ The contributions of philosophers and political theorists such as Charles Taylor, Jurgen Habermas, Will Cymlicka, Nancy Frazer, Iris Marion Young, K. Anthony Appiah, and Amy Gutmann, have set the agenda for debates and discussions within the field.

Although the connections between political movements and theories in this field in many respects are close, multiculturalism theory is here understood as a field of academic interest energized by an increasing recognition of earlier and contemporary forms of oppression of ethnic and racialized immigrated minorities in Western nation states.ⁱⁱ Most theorists of multiculturalism share a critical approach to the oppression of aggregates of people by explicit or implicit reference to their ethnicity, race or culture. Most equally aim at providing tools of emancipation, empowerment, and dignity, ranging from affirmative action tools to more radical suggestions of the transformation of political and economical structures etc (see for instance the Frazer-Young debate in Willett 1998). A major line of argument in the theoretical debate on multiculturalism among philosophers and political theorists is whether political, economic, and social justice should be understood, and further granted, in terms of group membership or not. ‘Communitarians’ⁱⁱⁱ tend to hold on to the primary ontological status of social communities when it comes to the identity-shaping of individuals, and argue that being recognised as a member of another culture than the majority culture is necessary and imperative for the identity-building of ethnic minority individuals. Against this, ‘liberalists’ tend to deny the communitarian stress on socio-cultural dimensions and also the social ontology backing it. Instead, liberalists typically focus on materialist explanations for social exclusion and marginalisation of ethnic minorities, and propose a less dialogical, and more individual-centred and equality-based approach. Thus, the remedy for emancipation of oppressed groups is for communitarians to accept and embrace minority peoples’ cultural specificity and group-based rights, while it for liberalists is to free minority people from such 'supra-individual' claims to identities and instead centre the economic and material barriers for social mobility. One could speculate if

not both of these positions are located within what Richard Rorty (1993) sees as foundational ontologies, one prioritising the individual, the other the presumed common culture of ethnic and/or national groups.^{iv} Both of the positions, however, tend to see culture as 'ethnic-culture'. One argues pro and the other against recognition of ethnic culture membership as essential for both personal identity development, inclusion in the wider society and for social mobility.

Politics of Recognition as politics of 'ethnic' recognition

Charles Taylor's position in the philosophical and normative political debate on multiculturalism and justice is often seen as ambivalent. Whereas some position him as a 'communitarian' and consequently a 'culturalist' theorist, others see his work as genuinely informed by a humanist liberalism. The latter tend to stress his critique of American type identity politics and his more general theoretical argument for a dialogical identity construction of personal identity. In "The Politics of Recognition" (1994), Charles Taylor makes himself the spokesman for what he sees as a middle position in this debate. In the introduction to this essay he does not distinguish between the recognition of identity at the level of the person and at the level of "a group of people":

*The demands for recognition in these latter cases [on behalf of some forms of feminism, minority groups] is given urgency by the supposed links between recognition and identity, where this latter term designates something like a person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being. The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the 'misrecognition' of others, and so **a person or group of people** can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves (ibid: 75, my italics).*

Further in the essay Taylor criticises liberal theory for not paying attention to the fact that some groups are marginalised in the wider society, whereas 'politics of difference' (e.g. communitarian) perspectives are criticised for "overdoing" the difference between groups of people. He argues that his middle position in the debate is informed by the contribution of George Herbert Mead's dialogical approach, seeing persons as continuously involved in a politics of equal recognition.

As different from Mead who was foremost concerned with the processes of recognition in direct social interaction, Taylor seems to see no principal difference

between the struggle for recognition of minority groups at the level of political society, and processes of recognition in direct social interaction in different everyday contexts. He argues that all cultures in the multicultural society should be credited with equal worth in order to prevent that ethnic minority members develop negative self-images. Taylor thereby neglects the possibility that ethnicity may be irrelevant in the emotional identifications of individuals of minority backgrounds, and he overlooks the different interpretations and symbolic expressions of ethnicity in different social contexts. In short, he lacks an attention towards the everyday cultural production in which the ethnic status is one out of the many statuses that are negotiated in different 'microcultures' (Hannerz 1992). When Taylor draws the conclusion that all cultures should be credited with equal worth to prevent that ethnic minority members develops negative self-images, he also indicates that ethnic identity is a fundamental status for the development of positive self-images at the level of the person.^v The fact that minority groups are marginalised in the wider society can instead be understood in terms of structural inequality, reproduced and legitimised by the very reference to cultural Otherness and 'imagined cultures'. With such a departure, one cannot draw the conclusion that misrecognition of collective identities leads to deprivation of personal identities or negative self-images. One can, however, argue that because the idea of different ethnic cultures is so central in the political society, the struggle for recognition and participation from the part of minority groups, if it should have any hope of success, will have to centre the cultural dimension. The claims for recognition of ethnic distinctiveness, voiced by leaders of different ethnic minority organisations, is then to be seen as a strategic struggle in which culture is the only valid reference.

Marginality, hybridity and power

One link between the political and philosophy-dominated debate on multiculturalism and recent research on ethnic minority youth in urban cities of Europe is a stress on the cultural and ethnic dimensions. In analyses of British, (Back 1995, 1996, Hewitt 1992, Hall 1996) Swedish (Berg 1994, Aalund 1991, Lithman 1987) and Danish (Røtgilds 1992, Mørch 1998) ethnic minority youth groupings, various articulations of the relationship between ethnicity and identity are found. One dominating observation, however, is that urban multi-ethnic youth cultures are recognised by cultural hybridity and bricolage, transgressing boundaries of race

and/or ethnicity. These youth cultures are seen to produce new cultural expressions based on the principle of cultural hybridity. It is clear that the theoretical focus of these studies on cultural hybridity and bricolage is fruitful with respect to the empirical evidence. In addition, this perspective has important political gains in light of present European trends to stress ethnic primordialist arguments. The studies of the boundary-transgressing aspects of multi-ethnic youth cultures and the focus on hybridity and the Diasporic condition as opening for more flexible, situated and process-oriented approaches to identity, clearly operates with more sophisticated perspectives on culture and cultural agency than the typical debates within political theory in multiculturalism. The more recent empirical youth studies have centred cultural agency and creativity in replacing earlier theories of ethnic minority youth identities as either 'between two (ethnic) cultures' or as being totally determined by macrostructures of oppression and exclusion.^{vi}

The change of paradigm from one focusing on the structures of inequality and static ethnic cultures, to one stressing difference, fluidity, and local and aesthetic elements of identity constructions, does, however, also often bring with it a lack of attention to dimensions of inequality of a macro-character. David Harvey (1996) discusses the position of theorists such as bell hooks and Raymond Williams as drawing simultaneously upon hybridity- and power-centred post-structuralist, and materialist, perspectives. Although Harvey himself is sceptical to what he identifies as a romantic trust in that it is only those on the borders who can transcend the social order and tell us the truth, he acknowledges the critical position from the margins as a resource with which to challenge dominant ideas. David Theo Goldberg, in his theory of racist culture (1992, 1993) links the marginalization of the black population in the US to the idea of a monolithic political culture, having the power to define status hierarchies and stereotypes, which are reproduced in everyday life. In emphasising notions such as economic marginality and identifying this phenomenon as related to the political cultures of nation states, Goldberg does in a fruitful way combine a non-essentialist perspective on cultural identity with a dynamic perspective centring power processes. In England, writers such as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy have similar perspectives, combining a historical macro-approach to colonialism and nationalism with a cultural, more multidimensional post-modern perspective on identity. These theorists trace the structural parameters for present marginalization processes, but deny simple deductions of the sort that the marginalization of immigrants groups in a

society leads to frustrated ethnic identities and self-hatred at the level of the individual. Thus whereas they associate marginalization processes with nationalism and earlier colonialism, they avoid seeing the victims of racism as deprived of agency.

Identity work, social identities and categorical identities

My own approach to the understanding of marginalization and minority youth identity construction in Western nation states is partly informed by the theoretical perspectives of writers such as Goldberg, Hall and Gilroy, focussing specifically upon ethnic and racial minorities in Western nation states. The specific position advanced in this essay, however, owes most to a more general social ontological perspective, a dialogical perspective in which the person always is seen as framed in the social world. No actor is seen to have the possibility to create her/his future in isolation, and no social structure can be seen to entirely determine individual conduct or individual identity. This approach inspired by Alfred Schütz' life-world theory (1982) goes beyond the specific ethnicity, race and multiculturalism-debates. In its general attention to the life-world perspectives of actors as complex, relationally constituted and as influenced by temporal and spatial parameters, it can be seen to "open up" thematic sub-fields of ethnicity, race and multiculturalism theories, sub-fields which in various degrees have fostered their own internal discourses centring one specific identity-category. "Opening" up these sub-fields means that neither the category of ethnicity nor a perspective seeing multiculturalism as based in ethnic cultures can be seen as a theoretical departure for empirical research on ethnic minority youth and identities. It is instead assumed that critical social theory on the power of social categories and political discourse, combined with a sensitive and process-oriented focus on the identity work, taking place in direct and indirect forms of social interaction, may be more fruitful.

Inspired by the Schützian approach, *culture* or *cultures* are understood as those stocks of common knowledge that makes it possible to act competently within different contexts of everyday life. Culture is in this understanding the guarantee for that one can act within the 'natural attitude' in social contexts demanding different behaviours and different moral codes. This approach attaches the culture concept to rules of action and patterns of understanding regulating interaction within specific social contexts. Further, it implies that the life-world perspective of the person will

necessarily be bracketed into different and often contradictory patterns of meaning and understanding. ^{vii}

This approach, then, centres the various contexts of direct social interaction in every-day life as ‘microcultures’ (Hannerz 1992) fostering specific meanings and attitudes towards the world outside. These microcultures cannot *à priori* (before empirical analysis) be seen as structured around one imperative status, such as ethnicity, gender or class. Instead, they must be explored through the various positions held by individual actors or members, and through an effort to explore the inter-relatedness of the impact of different status-categories. Transferred to the study of multi-ethnic youth contexts, this entails that one cannot study these as only ethnic phenomena, and that one cannot argue that the fact that the interacting parties have different national backgrounds makes this context into a multicultural youth setting. Youth microcultures are seen as fostering specific ‘*social identities*’, which best can be studied through the way members distinguish between their microculture and other microcultures and cultural streams in society at large. This approach to ‘social identity’ differs from perspectives seeing ethnic identity as a social identity, as the concept of ‘social identity’ here is seen as open and not as *à priori* coupled to one specific identity category.

Identities related to categories such as ethnicity, gender or class are instead seen as ‘*categorical identities*’ (Calhoun 1995), central for the production and reproduction of culture at the level of macro-society, or the nation state. These ‘categorical identities’ then refers to ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1993), to collectivities of postulated togetherness (Bauman 1995). They cannot be seen as group identities, if we take the sociological understanding of the group concept as based in forms of direct interaction, seriously. The assumed collectivities based on statuses such as gender, ethnicity or class can not be directly transferred to every-day life, which will always be recognised by a more complex inter-relatedness of different concerns and cultural dimensions. Such an argument does not indicate that statuses such as gender, ethnicity or class are irrelevant for everyday processes of interaction, inclusion and exclusion, and neither that they are irrelevant for persons self-identifications. The approach advanced here does, however, make an effort to analytically distinguish between processes seen to take place in the individual mind, direct social interaction and the political society. Such a distinction is seen as necessary in order to escape fallacious conclusions indicating that misrecognition of

minority ethnic groups' cultures at the level of the nation state automatically leads to frustrated identities at the level of concrete social groups and persons. Charles Taylor's theory of recognition as advanced in the 1994-essay on the politics of recognition (Taylor 1994), draws the conclusion that the marginalization of ethnic minority cultures within a nation state, leads to identity problems among ethnic minority individuals. This argument, and the direct deduction from processes taking place at the level of the macro to consequences for the individual, does not pay sufficient attention to what I later call the 'situated politics of recognition'. In overlooking the complexities and also the creativity of identity work in everyday contexts of direct interaction, Taylor here contributes to essentialising ethnic culture and indicates that ethnic status is to be seen as the most fundamental for the development of minority individuals' identities. Instead, one can argue that the marginalization of minority groups within a nation state is to be seen as a result of structural processes, and that the production and reproduction of inequality actually may be further energised by the very reference to cultural difference. Such an argument does not mix the social processes of exclusion, marginalisation and racism, with the complex identities produced in social groups or the identities held by individuals.

Feseha's story

To illustrate the relevance of this argument, I will quote from the interview with a young woman of African background in her early twenties. She is one of the informants from a multiethnic sports club in the inner city east of Oslo.^{viii} Her attraction to this specific sports club must be analysed with respect to her experiences also from other everyday contexts of interaction. In the sequence from this interview, she implicitly raises the question of how concrete and postulated forms of togetherness implies different understandings of authenticity and identity. Feseha (a pseudonym), 21, talks about her recent experiences from entering a new class at the third grade of upper secondary school. She states that she never experienced racism in Norway before (she arrived at the age of 14) entering this new class.^{ix}

FESEHA: I have never been exposed to harassment, racism or anything of the kind. Apart from now, when I attend a Norwegian class. In our class there are five with foreign backgrounds. All of them girls, no boys in my class. The rest of the pupils are Norwegian. In the start of the semester it was OK. After some time, in the course of the election campaign [1995 - local elections], we noticed that four or five in class were

real racists. They said it out plainly, and it was terrible that they called us 'blackheads', 'foreigners' and things like that. One of these girls got very worked up, that is the one who is the leader of them, they all sit side by side in class. They are absolutely against everything that has to do with immigrants. In class we discuss these things regularly. One day, on a Friday, we worked with a group project. I worked with four of them, those girls that were racists. At that time we didn't know them very well, so we couldn't tell that they were real racists. The teacher didn't know anything; he just had to divide us into groups. In that project, a Moroccan girl, these four Norwegian girls, and I were supposed to work together as a group. We worked on this project for a week. The teacher was not supposed to join the group at all. The idea is that we shall direct the work ourselves. By and large our working together went well, we worked hard. The last Friday the others asked me to make a clean copy of the statement we produced, telling me they liked the way I wrote. They made it clear that it was up to me, and I accepted. We made a decision to sit down at the canteen, for me to rewrite the whole thing in their presence. No one was to leave until the job was done. I started writing, but the Moroccan girl said she had to leave. She had an appointment, and had to leave. The others told her OK. Then I was left with the four of them. Suddenly they started talking about Carl I. Hagen [Norwegian right-wing populist politician] like this: «Now I shall listen to Carl I. Hagen, damn these immigrants, ought to be sent home the whole pack, criminal gangsters». One of the girls said: «Do you know which is the worst day that I can remember? That was one day I worked at the home for the aged. Four monkeys came in». The other girl asked her: «Oh yeah, what kind of monkeys?» «Four blackheads». I sit with them, writing down our project. «Yes, what did they do?» «Ha, fuck, what did they do. . Think of all the elderly ladies that suffered from heartache due to this». «Why, did they behave badly?» «No, think of the way they looked! They were fucking blackheads, big and strong, I didn't sort out why they were at that nursery home». At this moment I couldn't stay quiet anymore. I knew that she actually referred to me. So I said: «You, please modify the way you speak. It is terrible to listen to you. Imagine your own reactions if I say something of the same sort to you. You cannot call people monkeys. They are just as good as you are, they are human beings. If you want to criticise on the basis of colour, the way people look like, it is OK if you call them black people or Africans or whatever they might be. You cannot call people monkeys and things like that. In that case I could call you names even more ugly than these». She answered: «Well, we are all monkeys», that was her excuse. One of the other girls added: «You know something...When I walk in the street and meet a blackhead, I feel empty, empty all through. I get goose bumps, feeling totally empty and terrible when I meet black people. Damn it, we shouldn't have had all this blackheads in Norway». After this I told them I didn't bother sit writing any more. They asked me why not, arguing that we do after all live in a democratic country. I told them: «OK, this is a democratic country. That doesn't allow you to sit talking like this in my presence». This was the time when they disclosed themselves as racists. There was no respect for people who were different. Even though they were racists, they should respect other people. You cannot say things like that.

INT: So what happened, did you finish the work?

FESEHA: Yes, and after this I went home. On Monday I told the others.

INT: Which others?

FESEHA: The other foreigners in class. All of us agreed that it was a terrible episode, but we kept it to ourselves.

From what Feseha recounts of this episode, her interpretation of these girls as racists is based on their use of discriminatory labels for immigrants in her presence. Even though they didn't direct the labelling towards her person, they used negative

expressions and metaphors («monkeys», «blackheads» etc.), aimed at characterising immigrants in general. Feseha tells about several episodes of the same kind in her class. She states that the same girls “went mad” when their teacher told the foreign pupils they were allowed to get extra classes in Norwegian language. The girls claimed that this was unfair, shouting that immigrants demand too much and that Norway no longer was their country. They also used to laugh whenever one of the foreign born girls in class was to read aloud. After an episode in which Feseha states that she was wrongly accused of not having done her part in a group work, and where the conflict ended with a quarrel in class, she tells me she had had enough:

FESEHA: Between classes I approached the leader of the girls, telling her I wanted to talk to her. I didn't want to fight her, but told her: «If you go on with this, remember that we might strike back on you. It is better to have a nice social milieu in class than a bad one. If we do nothing but quarrel, the whole school year will be ruined». Second, I told her that if she was a racist she ought to keep it to herself, learn to hide it. «If you keep on saying blackhead and worse things to us, it will end with me going after you. One of these days I will loose control, and I wouldn't like you and me to fight over this. I'm not asking you to be my friend or something like that. All I ask for is that you stay calm in class and show due respect to others». I told her things like that. She was taking it pretty well, and today we are kind of friends. She is not my best friend, but a friend.

INT: That was nice...

FESEHA: Yes. The problem now is that the other foreign girls figure me to be very stupid, hanging around with this girl. But I don't give a damn of what they think of me. They don't even talk to me, we who were very close before. They reckon me to be stupid as I am talking to a racist. We knew all the way that she didn't like foreigners. She has told the Moroccan girl this face to face. This Moroccan girl argued that she was a Norwegian citizen, born in this country. Even though they at that time sat side by side in class, and were kind of friends, the Norwegian girl answered by telling her those foreigners are too confident, that all boys are ugly etc. Once she said about the brother of the Moroccan girl, she didn't know it was her brother: «Oh, he is too cute to be a foreigner». That was one of those days my Moroccan friend hated her. That episode stopped the kind of friendship they had had. Today this Moroccan girl regards me to be stupid, as I talk to the Norwegian girl. The foreign born girls in class want me to exclude her and not to talk to her. They want me to be mean towards her. I don't like that. The reason is that I see this girl in another way. I found out that she had family problems. Moved away from home at the age of 15, living with an older guy. From primary school and onwards, she's been exposed to harassment.

INT: Has she told you this story herself?

FESEHA: The Moroccan girl told me. And she [the Norwegian girl] once told it herself in class.

INT: Do you think that people with that kind of history more easily will end up as racists?

FESEHA: Not racists. It is more the trouble they experience at home and outside, mobbing and lack of love. Maybe such an experience fosters a motive for revenge - which is directed towards other persons.

This case illustrates that when first constructed as an imperative interpretation frame, the distinction between ‘racists’ and foreign-born pupils in class became conditional for the further interpretation of enemies and friends. After Feseha had transgressed the boundary between the two groups, she was excluded from her earlier group of friends. Her relationship with the other foreign born girls is seen as exhausted unless she shows overtly negative attitudes towards the racists. She must publicly express her guilt for having transgressed the border, as a symbolic gesture allowing the other girls to take her back into their circle. As long as Feseha is unwilling to do this, she states that she will in the future be regarded as one who is friendly towards racists. Her position turns into an either-or position, one that disables her to be maintain friendly relations across the boundary.

The situated politics of recognition

These interaction processes within one central child and youth arena, the classroom, is typical for most ethnic minority informants’ school experiences. Very few report a dominating experience of being excluded or discriminated against by native youth, although most can tell of one or more instances in which they have been excluded on the basis of colour, minority position or assumptions of ethnic culture. Almost everyone does, however, tell of school class boundaries structured by majority-minority status, boundaries that when first established were hard to transgress. What is of specific relevance to the on-going argument, is Feseha’s comparison between the sameness provided by the frame of the school class – the social identity related to the pupil status, and the sameness provided by reference to ethnic minority versus ethnic majority status. The social identity related to the pupil status is in this context an inclusive identity, while the categorical ethnic identity is exclusive. While the pupil status relates to the context of immediate interaction, the difference produced by reference to ethnicity refers to postulated togetherness transcending presence here-and-now. What we have in this situation is a competition between two claims of belonging, of togetherness: One based in manifest togetherness, the other based in postulated togetherness. It is from these different claims of what kind of actor and person one is - one situated and one imaginary - that a more subtle analysis of the politics of recognition must start. This point of departure differs from other perspectives, such as Taylor’s, in that it situates the politics of

recognition at a level of the social in-between that of the macro-society and that of the individual. In contemporary theory on multiculturalism as in discussions of the identity construction of ethnic minority youth, there is a need to address exactly this in-between level of the social. It is here that youth cultures are constructed, and it is in these arenas where the collective negotiations of different identity categories take place.

It is necessary to clarify how the concepts of ‘recognition’ and ‘misrecognition’ can be used in regard to these instances of situated politics of recognition in which conflicting claims of difference and sameness are posed. *Misrecognition of social identities* (defined as in the previous) means that the agency of an individual taking part in direct social interaction within one specific social context, is judged by other standards than those normally associated with the context itself. If the categorical identity of ethnicity comes to be seen as imperative to the social identity associated with the context itself, this social identity is misrecognised. Conduct is not judged from individual abilities to perform according to the demands of a specific contextual moral frame, but from assumptions that makes the individual into an Other, instead of a fellow actor. Misrecognition of social identities, thus, can be understood as a form of ‘symbolic violence’, through which individuals are made inferior on the basis of the ascribed to them Otherness.^x In the case of ethnic minority youth, misrecognition of social identities can be seen if their behaviour in inter-ethnic contexts such as sports clubs, rock bands or the classroom, is judged according to assumptions of ethnicity as an imperative identity dimension. In such cases, the categorical identity of ethnicity is given legitimacy as the imperative interpretational frame, and the identities related to the pupil, athlete or musician statuses are made secondary. Recognition of a social identity, then, takes place when persons are judged with reference to the moral frame relevant to the activities and practises taking place within this specific context.^{xi}

In the analysis of the retrospective reflections of my informants, I find three dominating strategies for recognition in school classes where the boundary between majority and minority had been firmly established as an imperative interpretation frame. These strategies do in different ways try to minimise the degradation following from being denied an equal status in terms of ethnicity. The three strategies are here identified with reference to three ideal types of actors: The Mediator, The Compensator and The Real Man. These three types are built from typical processual

patterns delineated in the analysis of the full material from the interviews, and not from the story of one or two single informants.

A) The strategy of the *Mediator* is marked by unwillingness to recognise the legitimacy of the ethnic boundary, and he/she demonstrates this in public. He/she views him-/herself as a person not willing to judge others according to ethnicity or religion as imperative identity markers. The mediator has a broad network of acquaintances with different backgrounds, and he/she underlines the positive effects of having such a network in terms of that it broadens ones mind. Her/his willingness to face unequal treatment and mediate, together with the surface signs of Norwegian-ness (such as clothing), makes the mediator vulnerable to exclusion from groups of minority pupils. In his/her striving to neutralise ethnicity as a valid boundary for the judgement of pupils, the mediator is in continuous danger of being stigmatised as «over-integrated» by other minority pupils.

B) The *Compensator* does not face misrecognition by protesting against it in public. Instead, he/she cultivates roles and statuses acceptable within the moral frame of the school class. The male compensator tends to cultivate his capacities in sports, while the female compensator cultivates the role of the good pupil. Typical for the compensator is, in retrospect, to find different ways of rationalising misrecognition. He/she may claim that exclusion or ignorance from majority pupils is a result of their jealousy of his/her capacities in different respects, or that these offenders have more problematic backgrounds than him/herself. The compensator has typically none or only a few good friends among the native pupils, but earns some respect due to his/her Excellency as one of the best sportsmen/ pupils in class.

C) *The Real Man* is recognised as a troublemaker in class/school, and this is the focus for his respect. He reacts immediately whenever ethnicity is seen as the reason for unfair treatment or exclusion. The real man views himself as a defender of equal treatment, and he tends to confront other real men, rather than those he regards as 'chickens'. Sometimes, but not always, the real man makes use of the anti-racist rhetoric. His social network typically stretches far beyond the frames of his school-class, and he tends to hang around with the toughest guys at school. It is important for the real man that he is recognised as a man of respect. He acknowledges that the ethnic boundary makes minority pupils inferior, and his strategy is to turn the power balance upside down by re-defining the boundary so that he comes out as the stronger party.

Youth microcultures and future perspectives

The perspective on the situated politics of recognition outlined above contradicts the implicit (and often explicit) theoretical assumption in political theory on multiculturalism about homogenised ‘ethnic’ cultures as imperative informers of identity for youth of minority background. In this it asks us to look for common statuses, common practises related to distinct social places and contexts of interaction as an alternative way to approach questions of identity work. This perspective is *not* based in universal notions of human sameness and/or uniqueness, but in a social ontology stressing the fragility of human identity as always intersubjectively constituted. Processes of misrecognition and recognition in direct (face-to-face) and indirect (media, politics, social institutions, societal debate in general) forms of social interaction are seen to be central drives in identity work and the construction of life stories for ethnic minority youth in contemporary western nation states.^{xii}

In which ways do such situated politics of recognition in the school-class and other types of inter-ethnic interaction contexts in childhood and early adolescence inform identity work and community building among youth at a later stage of their life-courses? In my research, I have studied the life histories of young people who at the time of interviewing took part in three urban youth contexts where ethnic minority youth were in majority among the participants. These three contexts, an inner city sports club, a student association and the inner city street culture context, offer different forms of belonging for ethnic minority youth. In all three contexts, the forms of belonging exemplify hybrid youth cultures. The young people taking part in them engage actively in a de- and re-construction of the meaning of ethnicity, gender and generation in respect to identity. They select what they consider are the best elements of Norwegian and own minority traditions respectively. They criticise traditional gender codes in the parental generation, stereotypical notions of immigrants and ethnic minorities in the ethnic majority, and they are of the opinion that their identity construction is of a different and new kind when compared to that of their parents and also Norwegian youth. In order to explain and understand how this cultural hybridity comes about, it is not enough to see it as a result of the bricolage of different ethnic cultures, or see it as a nice example of the multicultural society in a micro-setting. The extreme reflexivity and cultural creativity of these young people must be understood in regard to their common position as minority individuals and Others in the Norwegian setting. This to them ascribed Otherness is already from early childhood

handled in creative ways. The cultural hybridity recognising multi-ethnic youth cultures in late adolescence, therefore, cannot be read as a clear example of the post-modern condition and/or as a consequence of cultural globalisation. It must also be viewed in terms of how Western nation states of today operate with essentialist understandings of ethnicity and identity, and how these understandings further are reproduced through essentialised approaches to multiculturalism and through political and media portrayals of sensational and problem-oriented stories of immigrants and immigrant youth.^{xiii} My research indicates that the strategies for recognition developed in regard to different inter-ethnic contexts in childhood and early adolescence, constitute central references for identity work later on.^{xiv} In childhood and early adolescence, these strategies were often developed on an on-going Here-and-Now- basis, exploiting the possibilities for recognition inherent in the context in question. In late adolescence, earlier experiences of misrecognition are translated to a wider interpretational frame, connecting context-specific experiences to a wider societal frame. Now, the simplified images of immigrants and their identities in the media come to be at the centre of critique, and the wish to be recognised as complex and capable human beings and not only as objectified ethnic representatives, becomes a dominant theme. A new temporal dimension related to the to them ascribed position as Others in Norway comes to structure identity work and reflection in late adolescence. Their inscription into the category of Other in the country where they have been raised turns into being a question of a normative character, and the basis for imaginations of the future as well for a re-reading of the past.^{xv} Along with their increasing attention to immigrants and immigrant youth as being in the same situation with respect to the ethnic majority, a search for including forms of belonging is intensified. A growing sense of solidarity with other minority individuals and a wish to contribute to improve the situation for ethnic minority youth guide reflections on the future. Whereas some start orienting themselves toward religion, others take on a public responsibility for other youngsters, engaging themselves in voluntary youth work; anti-violence work and student organisations aimed at recruiting other minority youth to studies. The common vision guiding these various endeavours is to see oneself and others crucial role models engaged in the same type of community building as crucial role models to which younger children can aspire. There is a strong awareness of own choices and actions as of crucial symbolic importance for the fates

of new generations of children of minority background growing up in Norway. They view themselves as the Heroes of the times to come.

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ⁱ The central 'empirical' focus of multiculturalism debates in the USA is related to the field of education: school curricula and affirmative action remedies (Glazer 1998, Solomos & Back 1996).

ⁱⁱ We shall in this connection keep the specific issues of the oppression and rights of aboriginal and first nation peoples out of the discussion, and focus specifically upon the minority aggregates produced by global migration

ⁱⁱⁱ I will in the continuing refer to the two positions 'communitarian' and 'liberalist' in ideal-typical terms, meaning that the complex arguments and insights of different theories will be suppressed for the purpose of argument.

^{iv} A post-modern critique of both of them, therefore, will typically focus on essentialist notions of man and of culture. What is characteristic of debates on difference and sameness in the late 90's is that postmodernism is seen as the first critique of essentialist notions of Man and of culture. It seems as though none before have raised critical comments to the associations of 'groups' with categories such as 'ethnicity' or 'gender', and as if none ever has criticised the ideal of the self-creating and free western human being. Much of the earlier 20th century critique of rational choice theory, positivism (both in the qualitative and quantitative sense), and of functionalism and structuralism within sociology, brought attention to some of the same issues that now are in centre of attention. Parsonian functionalism, for instance, shares many basic ontological premises with present-day culture-communitarianism, although Parsons operated within an assimilationist model and present-day communitarians within differentialist models. Likewise, earlier sociological critiques of rational choice theory and utilitarianism have many parallels to recent day critiques of liberalism and Modernism with a capital M. Most sociological theories, however, insist that social groups, communities, societies are something else than mere aggregates of individuals, and can out of this reason easily be associated with a communitarian strand of thinking.

^v See Blum (1998), Habermas (1994) & Caws (1994) for similar critical arguments.

^{vi} See for instance Mac an Ghail (1998) for a historical analysis of the scientific discourses on race, ethnicity and racism in the British context.

^{vii} Without relating this argument too heavily to the present focus on reflexivity and multiple identifications as following the empirical changes in the Western societies (as in the macro-narrative on modernisation presented by Giddens and Beck), a similar type of attention to multiplicity and contradictory meanings is requested.

^{viii} The research project drawn upon here includes life history interviews with 39 young persons between 18 and 26 years. Interviews (conducted in 1995-1996) were with young people of different

ethnic backgrounds (including Norwegian) connected to three youth arenas in Oslo: the inner city youth gang scene, an inner city sports club and a student association.

^{ix} She is one of the informants that arrived to Norway late, at the age of 14. At that time she and her family were placed in a small municipality outside of Oslo, and she attended an ordinary Norwegian class in lower secondary school. Feseha reports her satisfaction with this solution, stating that she was very well welcomed both in class and in her neighbourhood. After half a year the family moved to Oslo, and Feseha was placed in a foreign language class. Later she has attended ordinary classes in lower secondary school.

^x 'Symbolic violence' is in Bourdieu's definition: "violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:167). Here, I understand symbolic violence as the structural reproduction of misrecognition based on categorical identities. I do not, however, regard as definitive the criteria that actors themselves comply to, or are unaware of the fact that they are exposed to, domination as definitive. This means that, in my understanding, ethnic minority individuals may be exposed to symbolic violence also when they become aware of being misrecognised on the basis of minority status. Many of the strategies developed to cope with misrecognition on a situational or a long-term basis, may, however, in consequence contribute to reproducing the structure of domination.

^{xi} It is also necessary to discuss what the term 'context' is taken to mean in regard to a life-world perspective centring individual experience of the social. Elsewhere (Andersson 1999), I suggest an analytical distinction between two ideal-types of social contexts of direct interaction: the 'restricted context of interaction' and the 'total context of interaction'. With regard to the politics of recognition in inter-ethnic interaction these two types of social contexts are seen to offer different possibilities for being recognised as an equal participant. The empirical case described above refers to inter-ethnic interaction in a school-class, a context that in my typology is seen as an example of a 'restricted context of interaction'. The central defining criteria of the ideal type of the 'restricted context of interaction' is that it displays its own rules of interaction that are relatively independent of relations between participants: rules that have no moral imperative status in the life-world perspectives of participants. This definition binds individual experiences and meanings to how different interaction contexts are given priority as normative guide lines also with respect to a person's actions within and interpretations of other contexts of direct and indirect interaction. With this understanding implicitly follows that restricted contexts of interaction can change their status to total contexts of orientation dominating a person's actions and plans also in regard to other spheres of everyday life.

^{xii} Norway, in which the empirical material informing the perspective on the situated politics of recognition is produced, is of course a special case in many instances. The population only amounts to about 4 million people, and the first massive wave of immigration from non-western countries started as late as the late 1960's/early -70s. This means, that as opposed to countries such as France and England with immigrants coming from the earlier colonies in the 19th and 20th century, Norway has only recently got a population of youth with minority background who has grown up in this country. In addition Norway has a short history of national independence (from 1905 in which the union with Denmark was put to an end). The Norwegian population also had little experience with ethnic pluralism in the last century except for the Sami people in the North, who during the major parts of the two last centuries were exposed to a massive assimilation pressure from political authorities and local people. In one sense it can be argued that Norway resembles a similar case to Germany in terms of ethnic nationalism, although the rules for applications for citizenship are less "blood"-oriented than what is the case in Germany. In course of the 1990's there has been an increasing support for a right wing populist party (FRP) which has scrutinised the "immigrant card" for what it is worth. In 1995, this party got as much as 15% support on average in municipal elections. Throughout the 1990s "the problems of "bogus asylumseekers", "integration problems among the Muslims", "youth gangs" and "forced marriages" has been major headline topics in nation-wide media. The increased centrality of a culturalised immigration debate in the political and national discourse more generally, seems, thereby to indicate a similar development as in other countries such as Germany, France and Denmark. The growth in cultural racism and ethnic and religious absolutism in Western nation states, making the ethnic minority populations even more vulnerable than before, can as such be seen as a more general European phenomenon.

^{xiii} In Norwegian media and politics these stories of sensation are typically gendered. The dominating image of the young immigrant women is that of a victim of forced marriages, of male and ethno-cultural power. The corresponding image of young men with immigrant backgrounds is coupled to criminality, youth gangs, and patriarchy.

^{xiv} The strategies for recognition developed in primary and lower secondary school seem especially important for later careers. The Negotiator typically ends up as a member of a youth culture centred

around individual reflexivity and denial of the impact of categorical identities. The Compensator becomes a serious student engaging her/him in a youth culture that has as one of its central goals to motivate parents to let their children be educated. The Real Man typically is, or has been, a member of an inner city youth street culture.

^{xv} For instance, girls who in primary school insisted on a distinction between themselves as ‘modern Pakistanis’ and others as ‘typical Pakistanis’ do now begin to reflect over their earlier boundary construction in moral terms. Whereas the public use of this symbolic distinction was a strategic means to hold on to ones position as similar to ethnic Norwegian pupils in primary school; it becomes a symbol of cowardliness and of having given in to the stigmatisers in late adolescence.