

Exploitation re-visited: New forms, same ideologies?

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Abstract

The current economic crisis proves how deep the contradictions inherent in contemporary capitalism really are. At the same time it is evident that the financial crisis goes hand in hand with a social crisis, since an increasing number of people lost trust in governments, trade unions and other representative institutions.

A main reason why the European Left faces severe challenges in attracting supporters seems to be an experienced loss of what has been called ‘working class identity’ in earlier times. This development has been fuelled by the continuing debate on “identity constructions” as proposed e.g. by post-modernist scholars referring to “fluid” and ambiguous concepts of identity and strictly denying any social categorization. So there is a gap between the loss of working class identity on one hand and the focus on merely social identities on the other hand. To bridge this gap both trajectories have to be linked. Thus, it is proposed to reflect the whole discussion on “working class identity” in the light of *exploitation* referring to the topic of economic standard, and additionally to integrate social identity constructions.

Keywords: diversity, exploitation, identity, working class

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1. Introduction

The current economic crisis goes hand in hand with a social and political crisis since an increasing number of people lost their trust in government and established forms of representation such as trade unions. As a consequence more and more right wing parties gain increasing power all over Europe while the left wing parties are facing decreasing numbers of voters¹.

¹ John Roemer (2010) points to the fact that also in the US the economic crisis goes hand in hand with an upswing of right wing ideology.

A main reason why the European Left faces severe challenges in attracting supporters seems to be an experienced loss of what has been called ‘working class identity’ in earlier times. This development has been fuelled by the continuing debate on “social identity constructions” stating the importance of other than economic self-categorization systems and shifting the focus from the material development to the self-expression of people. A rather extreme and even politically dangerous (in the sense of sticking to self-hypnosis rather than political activism) position is proposed e.g. by post-modernist scholars referring to “fluid” and ambiguous concepts of identity and strictly denying any social categorization.

This means that basically there are two extreme positions on what is considered as being relevant for people nowadays: *the traditional working class concept* refers to the material existence (and the role of exploitation) and the *social categorization concept*, which highlights the role of diversity, a term discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Fraser (1995) points out already that one has to distinguish between the different topics meant by those concepts: While the topic of material existence is related to the mal-distribution (leading to economically disadvantaged people), diversity and identity regard misrecognition (stigmatizing non-conform groups). These two concepts refer to different aspects of capitalism (see Hanappi-Egger 2011) – which clearly has to be kept in mind when discussing new forms of addressing social groups (see also Fraser and Honneth 2003). With respect to *misrecognition* the paper will show that in particular postmodern identity concepts by reducing contradictions to interpretative arbitrariness serve as handyman of capitalist ideologies (see Zizek 2011). Thus, the whole discussion needs to be reflected in the light of *exploitation* (Hanappi and Hanappi-Egger 2003).

As this revitalizing of traditional arguments of political economy, namely exploitation (see Hanappi 2006), shows, the concept of working class is still useful. The new context of a *global crisis* – involving diversity in many dimensions - clearly highlights how important the discourse on ideology as a substantial part of the class concept itself is. Nevertheless diversity has to be incorporated, so a synthesis of both – working class identity and social categories – has to be developed to come up with more adequate and more sophisticated ideas of how to fight exploitation.

Thus our contribution will be structured as follows: Firstly, a brief overview of the historically most relevant milestones in the development of the concept of “working classes” will be given showing the influential political and economic streams responsible for defining an according understanding referring mainly to the material level of human existence.

As next step it will be discussed when and under which circumstances the ideological framework of capitalism subtly transformed the idea of working class identity to the social and socio-psychological level. This finally led to the distinction between the economic living circumstances of workers (now called employees) and the social self-understanding of people as citizens, as men or women, as white or colored people, as conformists or non-conformists etc. The constantly occurring mixture of the material living circumstances in society and the belonging to groups of specific social categories finally resulted in postmodern concepts of “fluid” identities denying any categorization and thus neglecting the naming of groups. Hence, in a fourth chapter the ideological kernel of the scholarly work on diversity will be discussed. Finally, the paper will outline an updated concept of working class identity – called *social class* – bridging the topic of economic background and the social hierarchization of people in modern societies.

2. The classical class concept of political economy

Since the French enlightenment social science has aimed to explain the evolution of society by the dynamics inherent in its structure. Instead of a given destiny determined by a supernatural being, history was assumed to be man-made. Moreover the classical authors of the 18th and 19th century thought that the driving elements of this process were the forces of interaction between *classes* of people². They rather innocently assumed that each physical person could easily be assigned to one of the handful of classes constituting a certain society during a certain period of time. Indeed the respective legal superstructure of the respective era under consideration made its class structure rather obvious. From the feudal class down to the class of slaves political, economic, and cultural conditions followed a strictly hierarchical sequence. The classics saw society's progress not only as a process of reshuffling of class relations but took into account disappearance and emergence of classes³. To understand mid- and long-run developments not only class struggle has to be analyzed, there also has to be taken care of the possibility of extinction and birth of new classes.

The focus of classical political economy obviously was on the emergence of a bourgeois class and a working class, which were thought to overcome the fading feudal class. Some theoretical effort was spent to explain on how classes constitute themselves. A straight forward proposition was to assume that class emergence proceeds in two subsequent stages: First the primary social reproduction process (primary metabolism) experiences a break, second the newly emerging classes become conscious of their role and strategically promote their rise to political and economic power (see also Hanappi 1989).

The classics distinguished four sub-processes of the primary metabolism: primary distribution (ownership structure determined by the political regime), production (generating output of services and commodities), secondary distribution (assigning output shares to classes), and consumption (inputs to immediate human reproduction)⁴. To theorize a break of an existing structure needs the introduction of an internal dynamics of this primary metabolism, which in turn leads to the idea of increasing *contradictions*. With intensifying contradictions their re-occurring temporary solutions become more systematic and a new group involved in these solutions can be identified as class, though in this first stage the members of this new class are not aware that this class exists and that they are part of it (see also Lukács 1971). The burden of explaining social evolution thus came down to a concise description of the contradictive forces at work⁵. And it is in this context that the concept of *exploitation* started to play a central role for classical political economy. It is the mode of how the growth of plants and animals via a human

² The major authors of classical political economy considered here are Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, David Ricardo, and to some extent Karl Marx. They mostly were writing their theoretical works having in mind the development of the English economy between 1750 and 1848, a period labeled industrial revolution by economic historians (compare Landes D. 1969).

³ With respect to progress the classics differed from the earlier group of economists, the physiocrats (e.g. Francois Quesnais), which laid emphasis on the regularities of the circular flow of commodities in a country. For the latter the understanding of reproduction of society and its class structure was the object of study (they were part of the feudal class), while the classics were about to study change. It is interesting to see how John-Maynard Keynes in troubled times updated physiocratic flow analysis to understand how to maintain capitalist class structure by state intervention (Keynes 1973 (1937)).

⁴ An appraisal and some critique of this structure of classical political economy can be found in Marx (1964).

⁵ The idea that contradictions are the productive force behind evolution can be traced backed at least to the scientific revolutions of the 17th century, e.g. Descartes, and later was brought to German-speaking scholars by Hegel.

class structure is transformed into the reproduction of this structure that has to be understood as the exploitation structure of an era. The pulsation of the primary metabolism thus is a repeated sequence of exploitation regimes, which first flourish and then - due to their own success – falter until they finally have produced so many and so deep contradictions that they have to give room to the emergence of a new exploitation regime.

The four sub-systems mentioned above are just the ensemble necessary to maintain a certain exploitation regime. Note also that in the time of classical political economy, agriculture was the central economic activity, the political entity under consideration coincided with the territory under the control of a given still feudal class. Exploitation could be stylized as the appropriation of corn and cattle on this territory by the ruling classes.

Certain theoretical shortcomings with respect to global economics and monetary evolution can be traced back to these perception constraints. Only with Marx, arguably the latest representative of classical political economy, the importance of the latter became more prominent. In his account of the capitalist mode of production (Marx 1964) he carefully distinguishes between the world of the primary metabolism - where use values, the labor theory of value and the emergence of the social net product are discussed – and the world of monetary appearance (prices of production, market prices, and social net value)⁶.

Nevertheless at the time when the classical economists Malthus, Smith, Ricardo, and Marx tried to grasp the core of the break in the primary metabolism of a feudal society to a capitalist society the second stage of the transformation was already well on its way: the new classes were actively building up their self-consciousness. Immediately after the French revolution the importance of this field was recognized and a specialized task force of intellectuals, called ‘ideologues’, was assigned to work on it⁷. For the working-class Marx and his followers thought it necessary to form an international group of revolutionary intellectuals (the 1st International) to act as a catalyst for the transformation of the ‘Klasse an sich’ (materially existing class) to the ‘Klasse für sich’ (self-conscious class)⁸. But the 19th century turned out to be the heroic period of the capitalist class in its economic triumph over feudalism, which finally manifested itself in the breakdown of the feudal political state system in World War I. While some coalition building between bourgeoisie and working class against the feudal class occurred around the 1848 revolution, the second ideological front of capitalist ideology fighting the communist ideas of revolutionary intellectuals gained momentum in the last decades of the 19th century. Most of the conservative ‘peoples parties’ still existing today have their roots in these early ideological battles.

Interesting enough the major theoretical thrust of bourgeois ideology was to fight the concept of exploitation by *the destruction of the concept of class*: Society was conceptualized as a homogeneous set of human atoms, of physical individuals. In stark contrast to classical political

⁶ A concise treatment of Marx’s approach from the point of view of modern mathematical economics can be found in Morishima (1973). It shows how a consistent framework for his view could look like, and it also contains a precise definition of the rate of exploitation. In Hanappi and Hanappi-Egger (2003) Morishima’s framework is extended to include gender exploitation and exploitation of the 3rd world.

⁷ The feudal class, of course, already had a long-standing and well organized ideological task force: the Catholic Church.

⁸ In this respect Marx still is a proponent of French Enlightenment. ‘All you have to do to make petrified circumstances dance is to confront them with their own tune’, he wrote. For further discussion see also Vester (2008).

economy the newly founded marginalist economic theory⁹ propagated that its final goal is to discover the innate economic properties of ‘economic man’ (see Persky 1995, for a feminist critique see Cohan 1982, Nelson 1995, England 2002, Hanappi-Egger 2011). Aggregating these individuals via free markets would lead to optimal welfare. This ideological project could be used on both class frontiers:

- Vis-à-vis the feudal class it emphasized markets and market participants, which all only had to be distinguished by their endowments (given primary and secondary distribution), and not by nobility. The nobility was invited to join the bourgeoisie if it only would give up any special status derived from feudal ancestors.
- Vis-à-vis the working class it stipulated the idea that membership in classes does not exist since classes do not exist. If the endowment of a worker consisted only of its labor power, then this state of affairs was a mix of bad luck at the moment of birth and personal inability to make a career. Note that this argument is not only a manipulative statement directed at workers but at the same time could serve as a self-conscious appreciation of the wealth of members of the bourgeoisie¹⁰.

In this ideological framework the classical notion of exploitation simply vanished. On an individual basis it makes no sense to measure how much you exploit yourself – it needs the growth of two entities to arrive at a useful concept of exploitation. Working harder reduces the utility of the same individual for which this increased exploitation should increase utility. A quantitative comparison between decrease and increase of utility (e.g. by commodities consumed with higher wages for harder work) becomes only possible if the overall process of social production (determining wages and prices) is taken into consideration – and this is exactly what gets out of sight in this individualized perspective. The advice to the necessarily blind worker thus collapses to: Work harder and hope for higher consumption.

After Marx death in 1883 ideological warfare on the side of the working class took on a much more modest form. On the one hand reforms in England had somewhat improved the lot of the working class calling into question Marx’s predictions. On the other hand membership in unions sharply increased in the last decades before World War I; class consciousness expressed as union membership visibly paid off by reducing exploitation rates. Leaders of socialist parties and unions had to pay a price for the increasing popularity: Marx’s theory was too complicated to be easily understood¹¹ by uneducated workers, ideological short-cuts had to be used. Genuine communist ideas were mixed with religious topics, with nationalist aspirations, and the like. And to achieve improvements in social policy in some countries socialist leaders were ready to partially cooperate with the representatives of capitalist firms on state level. Despite a certain variety of working class consciousness across countries due to these diverse feedbacks from ideological leaders on their class members the tragedy of ideological confusions only became visible in the world wars of the 20th century.

⁹ The three major proponents of this school in 1874 were spread all over Europe: Jevons in England, Menger in Austria, and Walras in France and Switzerland.

¹⁰ Note that from a feminist point of view this also marked the division of production and reproduction field assigning men to the former and women to the latter. The bourgeois family model became the norm after WW II including unpaid work of wives and the breadwinner model (see Thompson 1964).

¹¹ Marx work not only is complicated and hard to understand without an appropriate intellectual background, it also is incomplete with respect to many of the most pressing questions concerning the implementation of communist institutions (see Foley 2006, pp.86-154).

In a more general perspective class consciousness proved to be not just as being derived from the ('objective') position of the class in a society's primary metabolism, it turned out to be co-determined by the strategically chosen ideological trajectories of the leaders of working class movements. A first spotlight on this problem came from Karl Marx himself, when in one of his latest texts ('Critique of the Gotha Program') he criticized the authoring labor leaders for stating that 'Labor is the source of all wealth and all culture', since with this 'bourgeois phrase' they are 'falsely ascribing supernatural creative power to labor; since precisely from the fact that labor depends on nature it follows that the a person who possesses no other property than his or her labor power must, in all conditions of society and culture, be the slave of other people who have made themselves the owners of the material conditions of labor.' (Marx 1970). To reclaim historically precise specification is today a task as urgent as it was in 1875. Excluding the currently unemployed from class analysis and class action, a typical practice of union leaders, is as devastating as the narrowing down of the presumptive carrier of revolutionary action to those currently exploited in capitalist firms. Indeed the notion of unemployment has itself been a reinforcing element of class relations in capitalism. The fragility of reproductive conditions of workers thus mirrors what today often is expressed as the desire for recognition. The integrative power of a modern capitalist state after WW2 consisted in its ability to offer substitutes for status and recognition without touching the dimension of political economy (the horizontal axis in figure 1 below) in a too substantial way.

3. Meanders of class consciousness

In the 20th century the first disaster that made the lack of class consciousness of the working class visible was the fact that in World War I national capitalist classes of France and Germany were able to organize their respective workers around national goals. Class consciousness in general was less binding than the well-organized surge of *national identity* (compare Gellner 1983).

The next, even more disastrous ideological defeat of the working class came with the rise of Fascism in Italy and Germany. One secret behind Fascist demagogical success was the aggressive de-coupling of the individuals' roles in political economy and their identity. The newly invented link, organizing the so-called Arian part of the population to form a 'movement', was a reference to an imagined biological trait – independent of any economic basis. The ingredients for the construction of this most dangerous collective identity are now well known¹²:

- (i) Use some visible biological traits of human individuals (e.g. color of skin) to replace the categories of political economy;
- (ii) convince your target group that the self-esteem of its members currently is unduly hurt, that they do not occupy the superior social position, which history has reserved for them;
- (iii) propose and implement drastic measures to fight the group of (seemingly biological) enemies that wickedly undermine the rise to glory of the biologically superior;
- (iv) use modern information technology to broaden and to cement your ideological credo.

¹² The interpretation of these historical facts, of course, has led to a wider range of theories; see e.g. (Wippermann, 1997). Even more formal treatments of fascist mechanisms can be found in Eatwell (1993) or Hanappi and Horak (2000).

Though the historic example of the plan of an Arian race to extinct the Jews is instructive, the general recipe of Fascist ideology is still much more generally applicable than the single case would suggest. In particular the tremendous increase in the capabilities of modern information technology - as compared to Adolf Hitler's first broadcasting device, the 'Volksempfänger' – has freed the fourth point of the list above, electronic manipulation, from most technical limits.

So with World War II not only the immediate destruction of working class institutions took place, also a long-lasting damage to class-consciousness of the working class could be observed. As the atrocities of Fascist regimes became publicly known to everybody after the war large parts of the working population shied away from anything looking like political ideology; pragmatism was the name of the game. Even more so as Western leaders put a spotlight at Stalin's terrible policy in the 30-ties as revealed by Khrushchev in 1956¹³. Workers in the Western hemisphere became disillusioned, instead of sticking to a communist vision of a radically different, better world they were content to subscribe to small improvements institutionally conquered by social democratic parties – typically following the slow pendulum of governance in democratic two-party systems. Working-class consciousness was transformed into voting behavior.

All these ideological battles, of course, took place in front of the primary metabolism of society, which still was based on exploitation. It was just the link between *material developments* and the *worlds of interpretation* which became less and less visible. This not only concerned the working class, at least in Europe the capitalist class till the end of the 70-ties lost a considerable part of its 'animal class instincts' to the compromising style of bureaucratic capital interest management. Institutionalized state-managed exploitation in Europe had become possible not only because of the advancements on the ideological battlefield; there also was the fact that the war had destroyed almost half of the capital stock in continental Europe and investment demand for reconstruction created a growth environment that allowed for simultaneous (stronger) profit and (weaker) wage growth¹⁴. The loss of class consciousness, of course, could not be consciously observed by class members, it was simply experienced emotionally as a feeling of 'modernity', an expression on which 'modern' sociology quickly jumped to spin a theoretical apparatus¹⁵.

When exploitation rates in the USA finally were threatened by competition from again rapidly growing Europe (Germany) and Japan, the economic war on global export shares was opened by a sudden switch to flexible exchange rates in 1971. Two oil crisis and a synchronous recession in all OECD countries were the consequence. And there it was again: Economic crisis induced the political leaders of the capitalist class to re-enter the ideological battlefield again in the early 80-ties. Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and Helmut Kohl started a large scale ideological initiative to destroy the institutionalized results of class compromise of the last 30 years. With

¹³ From this time onwards Western leaders could always point at the Russian example of where a communist revolution could lead to. As long as there seemed to be a need for a mild version of socialism to pacify Western workers, this became the *raison-d'être* of social democratic parties in Europe.

¹⁴ A whole set of other economic policy measures - including a boost in trade integration, an extension of the credit-system, and the acceleration of exchange rate exploitation of 3rd world countries – fostered this 'growth miracle'. At its beginning the politically induced support of the Marshall Plan aid from the USA played a pivotal role too (see also e.g. Kolko and Kolko 1972).

¹⁵ In economic theory the correlating strand of theory has been called the 'neo-classical syntheses'. It chose John Maynard Keynes as its originator (it is still the question if this does justice to Keynes) and was accepted by workers and capitalists as the doctrine allowing state intervention to guarantee a smooth growth of capitalism. Despite its weak theoretical basis it appeared to be a quite useful and adaptive rule set, making it easy for the social democratic leaders to substitute it for any kind of non-modern Marxist class analysis.

respect to the European working class it aimed at the implantation of capitalist firm logic in each single brain of each single employee¹⁶. Social democratic parties, having lost their mission after the breakdown of the SU, only could survive by adapting to the distorted perceptions of their clients. And they did so with enthusiasm as their leaders were ideologically as disarmed as their voters. This state of affairs still characterizes the situation of working class consciousness in Europe today.

On the background of these developments it is interesting to take a closer look at the more recent fashion of social identity theories and in particular at its extreme form, at postmodernism. First, in the 80-ties, as a reaction of some leftist French philosophers on the apparent loss of a revolutionary subject, postmodernism some 20 years ago became a full-fledged non-paradigm for some sociology departments. It is interesting because it indicates how an almost total loss of materialism, in Marx' language 'dialectical materialism', leads to an almost total loss of theoretical orientation¹⁷ – to an abandonment of science, which is disguised as the ultimate latest fashion of science.

But the latest deep world economic crisis in a dramatic way has brought this old question on the table again: Is it possible to construct the link, better the 'interplay', between the primary metabolism of a global human society and the way in which classes of people perceive it, in such a manner that progress (global welfare enhancement) as class action becomes visible again? And how could social identity contribute to such an elaborated concept?

Postmodernist thought as well as mainstream economics necessarily remain mute in face of the looming depression, at best they can serve as daunting example for what theory building has to avoid. The next chapter will explore this question.

4. Diversity: A tool fostering exploitation?

After having discussed how the concept of working class has been vanished in "mainstream" economic theory, this section will highlight a rather new approach subtly contributing to the exploitation of people, namely diversity and (on the organizational level) diversity management.

As already mentioned in the last decades there is a shift in science from investigating the material living circumstances and exploitation of people to studying psycho-social identity constructions and the role of diversity. Tajfel and Turner (1986) developed a Social Identity Theory (SIT) – often also related to social categorization theory - stating that human beings tend to discriminate against out-group members not joining characteristics of the own group. According to the SIT-approach a person has several "selves" which are activated in specific contexts. Thus, an individual has multiple social identities derived from membership of social groups.

Hence, the trend shifting away from a class understanding to individualism (and even more to "multiple selves" of an individual) was carried forward and highly absorbed by a variety of scholars in different fields.

In particular with respect to economic performance a new concept based on SIT originated in the era of Ronald Reagan, namely "diversity" and on the firm level "diversity management": Based on the human rights movement in the US fighting for equal opportunities in the labor market and

¹⁶ The force of visions in political economy has been treated more detailed in Hanappi (2011).

¹⁷ In Marx's language a complete theoretical alienation.

against discrimination due to gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, affirmative action programs were negotiated guaranteeing an employment-quota for minorities. These political achievements were devaluated during the neo-liberal economic era of Ronald Reagan. Contrary to the idea of (political and economic) empowerment of historically disadvantaged groups, diversity focused on the economic performance of firms and the according contribution individuals with their social backgrounds could add to it. Hence, the role of group differences was down-played and the role of individual emphasized (see Kelly and Dobbin 1998). The basic idea of diversity referring to differences of persons and diversity management was to utilize a more diverse workforce to increase productivity (for a general discussion see e.g. Prasad et al 1997, Kersten 2000).

The underlying concept of *diversity* therefore referred to a variety of social categories grouped along different dimensions: While e.g. Gardenswartz and Rowe (1994) conceptualized diversity as a four layer model – including the inner kernel of *personality*, the set of so-called *internal* dimensions (i.e. gender, ethnicity, race¹⁸, age, disability, sexual orientation), the set of *external* dimensions (e.g. geographic location, education, religion, marital status, ...) and *work-related* diversity (e.g. work content, seniority, management status, division/work field belonging,...). The internal dimensions are also termed as “unchangeable” and should not serve as reasons for discrimination in particular from a legal perspective¹⁹. Furthermore religion and marital status should also not be reasons for not hiring or promoting people since they might be the best fit for the jobs in terms of qualification.

Several other concepts are defining diversity in a similar way (see Cox 1993; Thomas 2001) sometimes more or less sophisticated, but all of them emphasizing the role of social identity aspects (for an overview see also Hanappi-Egger 2004; 2011) and the need of “celebrating diversity” (see Cox 1993).

Diversity management was imported in Europe by affiliates of US-American companies (such as Ford, Microsoft, IBM,...), but it became clear that some local adaptations had to be made. In particular due to legal frameworks such as e.g. maternity protection law or general employment regulations, US practices had to be modified. Nevertheless more and more European companies are formulating diversity mission statements and are establishing measures and programs fostering the recognition of women, minorities, lesbian-gay-bi-inter-transgender people, elderly employees and the like.

In the meantime much critique on the concept of diversity respectively diversity management is formulated by various groups: The perspective of “describing” human beings by a disjunctive set of social categories does not represent the fact that many discriminatory practices do not relate to either the one or the other of these, but are rather intersectional (see also McCall 2005), overlapping. This for example leads to the emergence of black feminism and the need to focus on the discriminatory intersection of gender, race and class in particular in the US-context.

¹⁸ Note that the term “race” cannot be translated in German as “Rasse” due to the Nazi connotation of this term preventing that human beings could be classified based on biological traits. Instead the according German meaning usually used is “ethnicity/skin color” – nevertheless being aware that no socio-psychological skills can be derived from this.

¹⁹ The EU anti-discrimination guideline e.g. forbids discrimination in the work context based on gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, ethnicity and disability.

Furthermore the mentioned classification systems refer to specific aspects of individuality but ignore others. So the question is who and why someone is getting a voice?²⁰

Also the functionalist perspective that diversity can be managed is causing a lot of discussion. Or as Magala (2009, p. 30) put it: “[...] we realize that ‘diversity management’ has also been turned into a managerialist ideology of the second half of the first decade of the 21st century. [...] This ideological turn also followed growing awareness of diversity’s entanglement with ideologically obscured (but very sensitive) links to inequalities. *Celebrating differences, we are legitimising the inequalities inherent, implicitly included in ‘otherness’ and ‘difference’*. Inequalities, which emerge as the raw energy resource of social dynamics and change (because they give rise to the powerful forces of upward social mobility reinventing and transforming societies), have to be managed and legitimised (so that the sans-culottes or anarchists or hippies or terrorists do not blow everything up). The socially acceptable price for managing and legitimizing them fluctuates as much as the price of a barrel of oil on stock exchanges.”

A completely different, but most general critique stems from post-modern scholars, who are generally questioning the value of “grand narratives” (see Rosenau 1992). With respect to diversity and social categorization they argue that identities are fluid and context-specifically shaped and dynamically created. Hence, the “difference-oriented” approach attempting internal homogeneity will reproduce stigmatization and thus is not adequate to the complexity and relativity of individual perceptions of the self and the world.

As a consequence even the naming of groups is denied, as well as identifying any other points of fixation. Distinction is seen as a purely linguistic construction; hence disadvantaged groups cannot – and should not - be addressed. The political implication of this standpoint is clear: at the end there are no groups anymore since a shared and inter-subjective understanding of group identity is not possible (for further critique on post modernism see also Codrescu 1986, Giddens 1987, Thompson 1993, Fraser and Nicholson 1989, Fraser 2000).

Besides this extreme (postmodernist) standpoint which will not be followed further since it is not relevant for any political agenda, the astonishing phenomenon in the diversity discourse is that “class” is left out in most scholarly work in particular in Europe. Although class is a salient issue, Kirton and Green (2010, p. 6), authors of one of the most influential UK-textbooks on diversity management e.g. state that “we do not offer an explicit class analysis of inequalities, because of the intersection of class with other sources of labor market disadvantage we concentrate on. We start from the position that certain groups of people enter employment and organizations already disadvantaged by wider social inequalities as reflected in, for example, the education system.” Such a position clearly contributes to the ideological attempt to make class vanish as a relevant category²¹.

Coming back to the topic of the paper the definitions of diversity referring to social categories have to be investigated in more detail to elaborate their interplay with the traditional “working class” concept. Nancy Fraser (1995) has made an important contribution to the discussion of

²⁰ Hanappi-Egger and Ukur (2011) e.g. highlight the diversity context of Kenya and show the irrelevance of certain social categories such as sexual orientation - representing a highly tabooed topic. On the other side “tribes” – a category not at all considered in a “Western” context is a highly influential aspect in social life in Kenya.

²¹ Hanappi-Egger (2011) emphasizes the role of educational systems and textbooks in myth-building and in creating taken for granted knowledge to maintain the ideology of capitalism in particular in business education (see also Althusser 1997, Zizek 2011).

social differentiation by outlining the distinction between the injustice of distribution²² and injustice of recognition: “Here, then, is a difficult dilemma. I shall henceforth call it the redistribution– recognition dilemma. People who are subject to both cultural injustice and economic injustice need both recognition and redistribution. They need both to claim and to deny their specificity. How, if at all, is this possible?”

She goes on to develop a sophisticated view of justice in society by distinguishing at one extreme collectivities exposed to exploitation, such as the working class in a Marxian sense, and on the other extreme collectivities exposed to marginalization by lack of recognition. As an example she mentions gays and lesbians who suffer from “the authoritative construction of norms that privilege heterosexuality. Along with this goes homophobia: the cultural devaluation of homosexuality. Their sexuality thus disparaged, homosexuals are subject to shaming, harassment, discrimination, and violence, while being denied legal rights and equal protections – all fundamentally denials of recognition. To be sure, gays and lesbians also suffer serious economic injustices; they can be summarily dismissed from work and are denied family-based social welfare benefits. But far from being rooted directly in the economic structure, these derive instead from an unjust cultural-valuational structure.” (Fraser 1995, p. 77)

In between these two poles exist various overlapping collectivities which she calls bivalent: “Bivalent collectivities, in sum, may suffer both socioeconomic mal-distribution and cultural misrecognition in forms where neither of these injustices is an indirect effect of the other, but where both are primary and co-original. In that case, neither redistributive remedies alone nor recognition remedies alone will suffice. Bivalent collectivities need both.” (ibid, p. 78)

Nancy Fraser intends this matrix to be used as an analytical tool²³ to investigate both mentioned aspects of injustice, which entails knowing the various forms of discrimination which different social groups can face (see Fraser and Honneth 2003).

As we assume that the class dimensions – representing exploitation and the material existence of people – as well as social categories – referring to discrimination and economic exclusion - still play a crucial role, a more systematic linkage of distribution and recognition has to be developed. Hence, in the following we will sketch the interplay of both trajectories – distribution as defined in political economy and recognition referring to the usually specified social categories (see figure 1):

²² Note that Fraser’s notion of distribution has to be enlarged: While Fraser is referring to secondary distribution in the discourse on mal-distribution from the point of view of classical political economy this covers just one of four aspects of the primary metabolism.

²³ Note that e.g. Young (1997) attacks this approach rather harshly by pointing to the creation of a “dichotomy”. Nevertheless Fraser points in several papers to her understanding that these two axes are specified for analytical purposes and that recognition and distribution cannot be completely separated from each other.

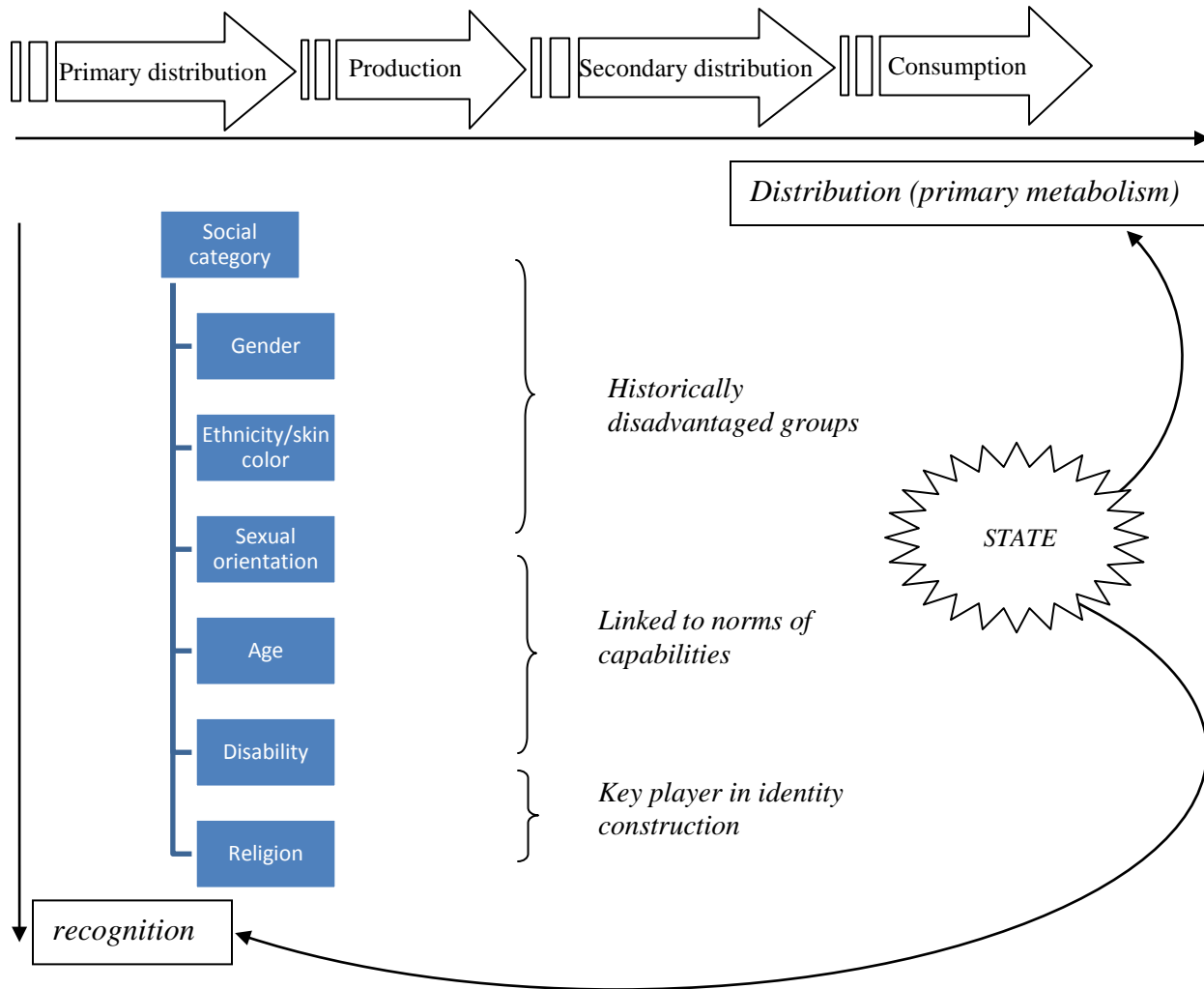


Figure 1: Opening up the space of political economy: primary metabolism and recognition

As already mentioned the topic of distribution cannot be limited to secondary distribution only but has to cover all phases of the primary metabolism.

Concerning the *social categories* referred to in public diversity discussions it is remarkable that there seems to be a hidden agenda in mentioning exactly those aspects: Gender, race (ethnicity and skin color) and sexual orientation represent historically disadvantaged groups who had to fight for their human rights. Age (in terms of elderly people) and disability were (and still are) functioning as exclusion mechanisms, since there is an indirect association with incapability and less productivity. Hence, older or disabled people can be exposed less to economic exploitation²⁴. Despite antidiscrimination guidelines and awareness raising activities these groups stay to be highly excluded from the labor market.

Religion – despite its own role in forming working ideologies (which will not be discussed in more details here) – has become a key-player in the diversity discourse, because religious communities and in particular their leaders are key players in society as well as in identity

²⁴ Foucault (1992) was emphasizing how from the very beginning of the Industrial revolution workers were psychologically as well as bodily disciplined for the purpose of exploitation.

constructions. Thus, religion obviously is an important coalition partner for those in economic power. It indeed is remarkable how intrinsically tied - since several thousands of years - religion (i.e. the reference to unobservable superior beings) to the maintenance of class structures has been. The contemporary strong return of the phenomenon religion might well indicate a quantum leap of alienation in some parts of the world experiencing enforced globalization. Left without much explanatory force with respect to the current global crisis (neither from within nor from outside the ruling local state apparatus) larger parts of the population easily fall prey to the self-reinforcing mechanisms custom-tailored by religious leaders. As any other drug abuse successful religious intoxication indeed can provide part of its promised bliss – without that property it would fail. But as far as it necessarily has to turn away from the dimension of political economy – and any reliance on superior beings has to subscribe to this turn to some extent – it only can keep old and attract new believers by continuously increasing the dose of mystification. As the historical record shows socioeconomic stagnation of the ruling class system and accelerating blindness of the accompanying religion go hand in hand. In this perspective the religious movements emerging in the face of the current global alienation are certainly treacherous coalition partners. They not only are fierce, sometimes openly aggressive competitors for alienated minds, each of them also is rooted in a very specific historical and geographic context. It is against this background that a temporary and in any case only transient inclusion of religious diversity as an element in a fight for progressive recognition can be envisaged.

The in figure 1 mentioned various groups do have different status in societies and they are more or less successful in gaining a voice. This means that on one side they get recognition – and on the other side their participation in the primary metabolism is negotiated. “Political correctness” e.g. in using gender- and culture-sensitive language has achieved remarkable success, thus the political hierarchy seems to be flattened. Nevertheless economic inequality has even become worse since the gap between rich and poor people becomes bigger all over the world²⁵. The according socio-political bargaining processes of e.g. anti-discrimination laws or work regulations are mediated by the state and its political governing bodies and representatives. This role of the state is sketched in figure 1 by linking it to both topics – recognition as well as distribution.

Summarized it can be stated that the current discussion on diversity and the need for fighting social hierarchization and marginalization of people due to social categories such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability and the like is important. Nevertheless focusing merely on recognition runs into danger to contribute to the strategy of fading out the exploitation aspect of capitalism. Capitalist ideology applies a kind of “divide and conquer” tactics: Splitting the disadvantaged groups in smaller and smaller units and exposing them to competition is a tricky way to a) shift the focus from distribution to recognition and b) to eliminate solidarity and therefore the chance to build critical masses.

The vertical dimension depicting social categories as contemporary correlates of lost class consciousness complements the horizontal axis showing the process of political economy. Today both axes are mediated by social institutions, the largest part at the level of nation states. There have been numerous theoretical efforts to modernize the class concept to improve the understanding of the elements along the vertical axis²⁶. It is as well possible to try to update the

²⁵ For a modeling approach of political hierarchy and economic equality see Bowles et al. (2009).

²⁶ Notably Pierre Bourdieu (1985) developed a new class concept, which promised to provide more adequate descriptions of actual behavior. Unfortunately it concentrated on sets of behavioral rules (practices), and did not

class concept by following the historical development of the horizontal axis of political economy. This is what is proposed next.

Conclusions: Updating working class concepts

Exploitation of nature and exploitation of man by man is the common denominator of all forms of primary metabolism of the human species. For the industrial capitalism of the 19th century classical political economy has structured this process as shown in the previous graph along the horizontal axis.

But can class analysis of classical political economy be taken as a starting point for the analysis of today's political economy? Which changes and enhancements would be necessary to grasp the essential new features, which now – after 200 years of turbulent development – characterize capitalism?

One immediately evident shortcoming of classical analysis is that the scope of its models was always restricted to the dynamics of a typical European nation state²⁷. Though an extension to a larger territorial unit at first sight looks a bit trivial, the history of the two great waves of globalization – the first just before WWI, the second starting in the last decades of the 20th century – should teach the opposite. The first wave of 'imperialism' brought the final breakdown of the unhappy coalition of feudal political rule and capitalist economic rule in Europe's nation states, giving birth to the purely capitalist national governance system still prevailing today. In each nation state political and economic power became united in the same bourgeois class, with a special part of this class – the state bureaucracy – managing national class compromises. From that point in time onwards class struggle was partially transferred to institutionalized conflicts in state institutions with severe implications for class consciousness. The second wave of globalization taking off in the early 80-ties was characterized by an incredible increase of the power of transnational corporations reaching out for global advantages by the use of local nation states' conditions. In the course of this process globally acting firms, including financial intermediaries, became more powerful than national working classes, national bureaucracies, and other nationally bound parts of the bourgeoisie. If one adds the above described blurring effect of the ideology of modernity and postmodernity in the advanced industrialized countries after WWII, then a dramatically changed situation for the possible emergence of global working class consciousness becomes visible (see also O'Rourke and Williamson 1999). The discourse on diversity respectively diversity management sketched in the previous chapter is just the tip of an iceberg of an intricate ideological warfare.

The second shortcoming of received theory is even more difficult to remedy: The technical evolution and implementation of information and communication techniques has led to a marked shift in the interaction scheme between what the classics saw as 'material base' and the corresponding 'ideological superstructure'. For the classics there has been some kind of balanced oscillation between the influences running from economic processes to the world of ideas about them, and currents running in the counter direction: from ideological constructs to material

link up to economic processes proper. An interesting survey of this and other concepts of class can be found in (Wright 2005).

²⁷ Even when Ricardo compared relative cost structures of two states to argue for free trade, the assumed two states were typical European examples. Marx theory of exploitation was not extended to cover large scale exchange rate exploitation, his interest in the topic only reached to some remarks on an 'Asiatic mode of production'.

interventions in the economic process. Starting with Smith's suggestion that the economic actions of a capitalist, which at first sight in the ideological world of moral philosophy looked like 'private vices', in the longer run via the intermediation of markets might turn out as welfare enhancements; and ending with Marx's suggestion that class position first determines class consciousness, which then enables conscious class struggle that in turn changes class structures, and provokes new class consciousness²⁸. The 20th century proved that with the help of advancing information and communication technologies the self-consciousness of large masses of people can be severely manipulated and decoupled from their more and more alienated position in (globally) divided production processes²⁹. But even along the exploitation process axis itself the evolution of money forms into ever more abstract information spheres proved to change the rules of the game. The Great Depression of the 30-ties as well as the still lingering global financial bubble of today show how pure expectations of future exploitation rates can keep abstract and material accumulation alive for some time. But as is the case for any phenomenon in the world of information, changes can come very fast and with little warning. The shift towards a highly interconnected world with tightly knit information networks thus has led to an enormously increased global fragility. Correcting feedbacks from material processes arrive relatively slow and usually occur in parts of the world not monitored in the location of the source of the disturbance. Consciousness tends to be split in small and local pieces. *In a sense this leads back to the consideration of multi-dimensional diversity.*

To enhance the classical scheme of political economy clearly a much more sophisticated framework will be needed including social categories serving as basis for discriminatory practices. The contemporary global correlate of the classical national working class has to be a coalition of consciously diverse communities all across the globe. The emphasis on diversity across different continents and states follows directly from the fact that current exploitation mechanisms of transnational companies are focusing to a large extent on exploitation via exchange rate levels³⁰. The span of possible oppression, which exists in each geographical location for each active diversity dimension³¹ is evidently rather different, and depends mainly on the dynamics of local political struggles. On the global level on which capital processes today each single span immediately is translated into more or less successful exploitation. For most of the people involved in such local struggles the details of these translation processes remain invisible. As target for political unrest local political organizers present more or less sophisticated substitutes – usually symbols that serve self-promoting agitation. And this indeed is the weak point of even the most successful local fight for recognition: In the end it might get caught in

²⁸ Contrary to his (implicit) scientific approach, in his role as revolutionary activist Marx propagated that in the near future the class structure will collapse into the fight between two classes (capitalists and workers), and that the latter as the only necessary class for the primary metabolism will thus in the end be the carriers of the unique and adequate, common consciousness – communism. This forecast, though useful as a political program of the 19th century, proved to be wrong.

²⁹ The highly pessimistic, indeed depressing, theoretical conclusion drawn from the Fascist intermezzo can be found in the work of the emigrated Frankfurt School, see (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1969 (1944)). Only two decades later Adorno did paint a more future-oriented, programmatic picture (Adorno, 1966), which more or less was ignored by the cultural upheaval of the sixties. Only recently his insights are rediscovered and might contribute to the goals sketched in this paper.

³⁰ The emphasis on the levels of exchange rates should signal that exchange rate exploitation even works without speculative attacks based on changes of these levels.

³¹ Existence and strength of diversity dimensions in different parts of the world therefore are keenly observed by capital managers; the instrumentalization of diversity for profit maximization on a global level appears as perverting the usually proclaimed goals of 'diversity management' on the firm level.

killing a faked bugbear without even noticing that they just are prisoners of - well - *a new form of the same old ideology*.

But how is it possible to break the spell of being split up and being caught in idiosyncratic singular battles along diversity dimensions. How can the blinding clarity with which market-clearing processes are preached and sold – not only as our second nature but indeed as our prime natural property – be replaced by views enabling organization of unified actions of the exploited? The strongest force uniting these communities presumably can be a common enemy. In which respect can an enemy of such a diverse set be common? As far as capitalism is concerned the answer is straight forward: Groups in this coalition do not only feel exploited, they are exploited. They are exploited by the common ‘enemy’ of a global finance network backed up by military intervention. Note that ‘global finance’ is a symbol again, a symbol designating a presumed force behind processes experienced as increased oppression³². This ‘enemy’ thus first occurs immaterial as neutral cost minimizing imperative, not paying sufficient attention to the diverse specificities – lacking recognition. Only if the ‘enemy’ recognizes resistance from a broader coalition, then it changes tactics to ‘divide and conquer’; giving privileges to some members only to stir unrest in the coalition. As an answer to this it will need international cooperation, admittedly not a novel idea indeed. At this point solidarity backed up by a theoretical blueprint that promises improvements to all becomes important. In other words inter-group recognition becomes mandatory, and a theory identifying exploiters is needed³³.

In conclusion this paper thus argues for two most urgent lines of action to be enforced: A rediscovery and update of the dimension of exploitation in a renewed theory of global political economy, and interacting with this theoretical task a reframed discourse of inter-group recognition complementing local intra-group recognition. This latter element can be a substantial catalyst to free the existing singular dynamic forces from the ideological bonds of capitalist rule that so artfully keeps them entangled.

Needless to say that optimism returns just when contradictions are going to explode.

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³² It is not evident to a Greek public bus driver why her wage is cut severely to ‚save the Euro‘. Neither is it evident to a poor citizen of a third world country why the price of the food he needs is exploding. And neither can a black worker in an Arab country understand why her recognition and remuneration is so much below the level of her Arab colleague.

³³ One of the most apt modern Anglo-Saxon interpreters of Marx, John Roemer, already thirty years ago had started to work on a theory that could revitalize the concepts of exploitation and class (Roemer, 1981, 1982). Making heavy use of equilibrium-oriented game theory – but neglecting all Hegelian roots of Marx theory – Roemer arrives at a theorem linking class and exploitation, the class-exploitation correspondence. Both concepts, of course, are defined in a way that accommodates Roemer’s framework.

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