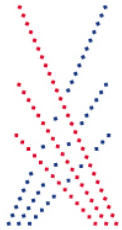

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Insurrection as recognition: riots for love, rights, and solidarity

[developmental paper]

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Summary

Social unrest has become an increasingly visible approach to collective resistance to sustainable development issues such as poverty, inequalities and climate change. Here, riots are theorised as a form of insurrection, and are typically narrated through nonconformity, social injustice and immigration. However, this perspective often denies (1) riots as having a political message or form (i.e. they are 'pure violence without claim'), and (2) rioters as having affirmative needs or qualities (i.e. they are 'primitive rebels'). This study draws on publically available narratives and deploys the relational ontology of Axel Honneth to re-cast riots and rioters as responding to violations in basic human need for 'recognition', that is, as expressed through 'love, rights and solidarity'. As such, this paper contributes an alternative perspective on theorising and organising in/around insurrection grounded in affirmative relationality that values justice, humanity and empathy for building and sustaining performance.

Track – Critical Management Studies

Insurrection as recognition: riots for love, dignity, and solidarity

Introduction

Social unrest has become an increasingly visible approach to collective resistance against sustainable development issues such as poverty, inequalities and climate change. Insurrection, as a specific form of social unrest, has recently been theorised as a contemporary form of resistance in and around organisational life, characterised as "collective, owned, and publicly declared forms of resistance that aim to challenge or unsettle existing social relations, forms of organizing, and/or institutions" (Mumby et al., 2017:1170). Studying insurrection "invites us to interrogate and broaden the meaning of 'the political'" (ibid) as it includes strikes, social movements, the decentralised 'uberized economy', occupations, and violent riots (e.g. Taylor and Moore, 2014; Reinecke, 2018; Daskalaki and Kokkinidis, 2017; Callahan and Elliot, 2019 forthcoming). The latter, riots expressed in public spaces, are not phenomena confined to history, but are indeed a highly emotive form of contemporary collective response associated with sustainable development issues including equality, social justice, and climate change (Amis et al, 2018; Daskalaki, et al 2018).

Urban riots have gained momentum since the late 1970s (Bertho, 2009) – often cast as or explained by nonconformity, social inequality and immigration, by governmental narratives and scholarly literatures. Here, as depicted by a chief of police in France, riots are analogous to a harmful 'virus' that should be eradicated from society (Mucchielli, 2011); notions of deviance, criminality, rage and hate, and the irrationality of demonstrations of anomy often dominate discussion (Drury and Stott, 2011; Alpaugh, 2016). Such discussion can attribute the cause of riots to issues of social integration, disengagement, antagonism, poverty and ghettoization of specific groups (Body-Gendrot, 2014). Empirical work has echoed such analyses, for example, research in the UK suggested that almost two-thirds of riot defendants came from the poorest fifth areas (Lewis et al., 2011), and in France, research argued that riots represent a rebellion against the discrimination of specific migrant groups who live on the outskirts of big cities (Bleich et al., 2010). Yet these conceptualisations can deny violent riots as containing political form or message, rendering riots as 'violence without claims' and rioters as 'primitive rebels' (Winlow et al., 2015).

Emerging literature calls attention to the complex and political nature of riots, which interconnect issues of individual and group/crowd identity with their functionality or intentionality of specific groups including youth (Henn and Foard, 2014; Reedy et al. 2016; Stott and Drury, 2017; Choi and Kim, 2018). Whilst riots can emerge from loose networks or highly bureaucratic organisational forms, each "are characterized by a lack of access to institutional channels" (Mumby et al., 2017:1170) to confront, challenge or change wider circumstances. We hone in on this lack of access to institutional channels as a central rationale to engage Axel Honneth's work which posits forms of insurrection are motivated by wrongful violations of *recognition*, i.e., 'injustices, disrespect, or denigration' at the individual or group level (Brincat, 2017). Here, recognition is underpinned by a relational ontology where there is a shared basic human need based on an ideal state of intersubjective understanding, driven by an ethical life captured by a triad of 'love, rights and solidarity' (Honneth, 1991, 1995).

For Honneth, such relationality and mutuality can encompass a range of specific acts which reflect "practical attitudes whose primary intention consists in a particular act of affirming another person or group" (Honneth, 2012:80). Such attitudes provide the social conditions for intersubjective social freedom, or at least the driver for social struggles to reach it, as "they permit the addressee to identify with his or her own qualities and thus to achieve a greater degree of autonomy" (ibid). Indeed, recognition is rendered in a way that makes it *a priori* the enactment or achievement of justice and the distribution of power (Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Hartmann and Honneth, 2006). However, the actualisation of such conditions can only be met through mutual recognition, where there is a:

> reciprocal experience of seeing ourselves confirmed in the desires and aims of the other, because the other's existence represents a condition for fulfilling our own desires and aims… Subjects must have learned both to articulate their own aims to the other and to understand the other's articulations in order to recognise each other in their dependency on each other (Honneth, 2014:44-45).

A growing body of organisation and critical management studies literature has adopted an analytical framework to explore the dynamics of how social hierarchies play out in and through organisational practices and contexts (e.g. Aadland et al, 2018; Friedland, 2018; Brewis, 2019). Recent research uses recognition theory to examine, for example, how performance management practices can negatively affect the well-being of workers regarding self-concept (Tweedie et al., 2019), how organisational commemorative practices can support or challenge experiences of inclusion/marginalisation (Cutcher et al., 2019), and how organisations can mobilise mutually constitutive relationships to redress cultural, political and economic inequalities (Audebrand and Barros, 2018). Yet, there remains a dearth of organisation and critical management studies literature that specifically relate to insurrection as a form of organisation. As such, this paper contributes an alternative perspective on theorising insurrection and aims to inspire different organisational responses that are grounded in affirmative relationality.

We adopt these notions as an analytical device to offer an alternative reading of two riots in France and Britain: the two most riot-affected countries in Europe (Garbaye, 2011). The two largest urban riots in contemporary French and British history examined here stand out as milestones in social atomisation (Body-Gendrot, 2016; Reeves and De Vries, 2016): the 2005 riot in France and the 2011 riot in Britain.

Riots in France & Britain: Failures to Recognise

The French riots erupted on 27 October 2005 in the Northern Parisian *banlieue* of Clichy-sous-Bois, after Zyed Benna, 17, and Bouna Traoré, 15, died – electrocuted in a power substation while fleeing the police (Soumahoro, 2008). Rioting spread across hundreds of neighbourhoods and towns in the following weeks, producing damages estimated at €200 million. No previous rioting had exhibited this magnitude; whereas rioting had usually taken place on the outskirts of big cities, it was now disrupting smaller towns and even rural areas, marking the first time that a riot had expanded nationally (Mucchielli, 2010). Similarly, rioting broke out in Britain in August 2011, shaking the country for five days. In this case, the riots followed the death of a Jamaican-origin man, Mark Duggan, who was shot by police in North London. Attacks against the police, and looting, expanded quickly to other cities including Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham, Salford and Wolverhampton (Sutterlüty, 2014). The outcomes were disastrous: five deaths, dozens of injured people and overall damages estimated at £300 million (Lewis et al., 2011).

As a response, both the British and French governments publically described the riots as criminal acts. For example, the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, said "The whole country has been shocked by the most appalling scenes of people looting, violence, vandalizing and thieving. It is criminality, pure and simple […]. Young people stealing flat-screen televisions and burning shops – that was not about politics or protest, it was about theft" (House of Commons, 11 August 2011). Similarly, the French Home Affairs Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, reflected the wider political views that "between 75% and 80% of rioters questioned were criminals with previous criminal records" (Agence France Presse, 15 November 2005). In both cases, governments responded to riots with narratives that ran counter to empirical work suggesting that a third of people arrested in riots had a criminal record in France (Kokoreff, 2008) or 13% in the UK (UK Parliament, 2011). In terms of Honneth's notion of recognition, such public narratives can be understood as a national-scale declaration of how the government was actively dis-affirming the value and contribution of particular individuals and groups, and hence denying the qualities of the rioters as well as their agency to change circumstances.

Days after the riot in Clichy-sous-Bois, on October 30 (during Ramadan), a teargas grenade was hurled at the doors of a mosque during prayers. The Home Affairs Minister – who confirmed that this was a police grenade, with no link to any police responsibility – failed to restore the calm, and the grenade was seen as provocation by Muslim residents. The grenade attack sparked riots throughout Seine-Saint-Denis, then nationally (Kokoreff, 2008). Public narratives by the Prime Minister and other governmental officials claimed that the two boys were pursued by the police as they were engaging in crime (even though this was untrue) but narratives indicated that this response provoked people to engage in the riots (Waddington, 2012:36). According to 'Rachid', a young resident in Clichy-sous-Bois, "the attack stands out as an action against religious freedom that can never be

forgotten. Nothing could be worse than this. Yet nobody said nothing, as if we were irrelevant" (Libération, 2005). Here, the account illustrates how the lack of action from any institution was interpreted as a major rejection of the 'relevance' of a particular community and specifically those who need a form of 'religious freedom'. Thus, a form of deep disrespect emerged through not taking actions to *recognise* a group or their needs.

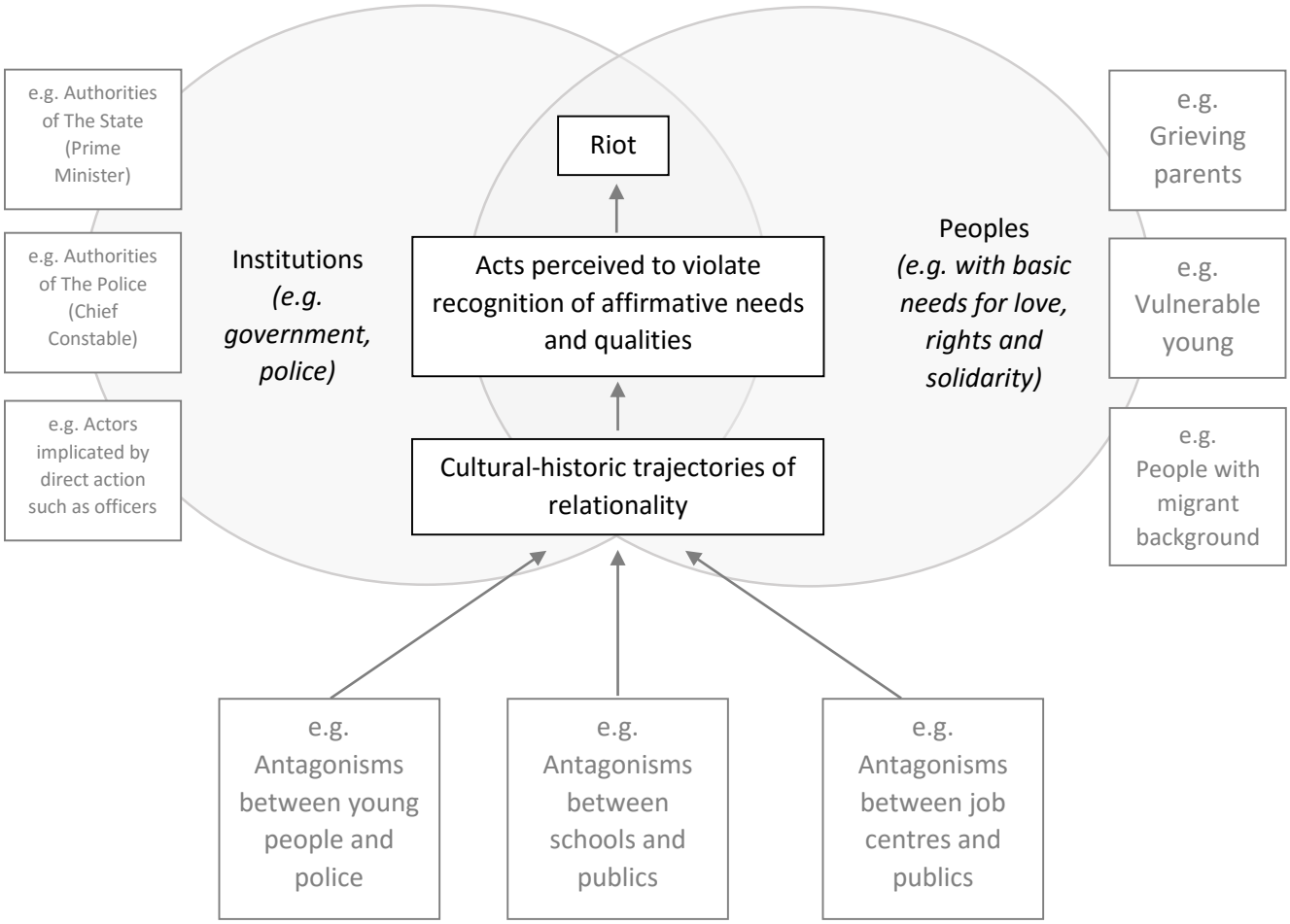
The same dynamic can be identified in the 2011 British riots; the way in which an institution (the police) responded seemingly had a significant role in inciting a large number of residents during Duggan's arrest on 4 August. Here, several hundred people marched to the police station on 6 August, accompanied by the Duggan family, to ask for a clear reconstruction of events. The demonstration coincided with the fact that the police had not yet officially communicated the death of Duggan to his family (Bridges, 2010). As neither the police officer on duty at the time nor the chief inspector called to the scene were able to provide the required information, the demonstrators asked to speak to the Chief Constable. The first scuffles between demonstrators and the police began five hours later, during which time, accounts that a 16-year-old girl had sustained injuries after allegedly attacking police with a champagne bottle began circulating on social media (YouTube, 2011). Such events ignited and inflamed the riots, and a few hours later, at 3am on 7 August, hundreds of people joined in the looting of shops in Tottenham Hale. In terms of Honneth's notion of recognition, the account illustrates how the lack of action to respect the wishes of a grieving family, and the supposed injury of a vulnerable adult had a role in mobilising riot action.

Re-casting Riots as Recognition

Re-casting riots through the lens of Honneth's concept of mutual recognition runs counter to dominant explanations grounded in nonconformity, social justice and immigration – and re-asserts the possibility and potential of an ethical life through the triad of 'love, rights and solidarity'. The accounts illustrate different forms of recognition related to affirming people in different circumstances, including people with religious beliefs, people who are grieving, and people with perceived vulnerability. Yet the cases also suggest that the theorising of recognition is necessarily culturally-historic in that acts of recognition can relate and interconnect over time and space. Rioters did not typically attack other rioters but seemingly specific targets (Libération, 2005). In the French riots of 2005, rioters primarily targeted schools, job centres and social services, reflecting wider social resentment in disadvantaged areas towards generating social mobility (Mucchielli and Aït-Omar, 2007; Chapoulie, Anderson & Anderson, 2017; Chabanet and Weppe, 2017). In contrast, police stations were the main target of rioters in the British riots of 2011, reflecting a long-standing antagonism between young people and police (Brogden and Ellisson, 2013). As such, our initial theorisation of recognition is encapsulated in the figure below.

As a developmental paper, we seek a constructive dialogue around (1) the theoretical contribution proposed in this paper, and (2) the methodological possibilities that might facilitate the elucidation of more nuanced dynamics explored through Honnethian theory. We aspire to sit in contrast with dominant perspectives to provide alternative organisational responses that are grounded in affirmative relationality, thereby recognising justice, humanity and empathy – as a means of building and sustaining performance.

Figure 1: Initial conceptualisation of 'riots as recognition'



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