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

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**Summary**

Insurrection is theorised as a form of resistance in and around organisational life, often functioning to promote more sustainable forms of organisation and organising. However, urban riots, as a form of insurrection, are typically narrated through nonconformity, social injustice, and immigration, which often deny (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’. In doing so, we hope to sit in contrast with the dominant insurrection and rioting scholarship, to explore as well as inspire alternative ways of organisation and organising in contemporary circumstances which are grounded in affirmative relationality.

**Track** – Critical Management Studies

**Word count** = 1,991 words (excluding tables and references).

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

### **Introduction**

Insurrection 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 of these, riots expressed in public spaces, are not phenomena which are 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). In addition, we argue that generating understanding about riots does not just offer insight into the organisation and organising of resistance (insurrection as a specific form), but it also provides insight into how other forms of organisation and organising can respond to this form in ways which speak to the wider ambition of sustainable development.

Urban riots have gained momentum since the late 1970s (Bertho, 2009) and are often cast as, or explained by, nonconformity, social inequality, and immigration - by both 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 in society (Mucchielli, 2011), where the notions of deviance, criminality, rage and hate, and the irrationality of demonstrations of anomy can 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 has suggested that almost two thirds of riot defendants came from the poorest fifth areas (Lewis et al., 2011), and in France, research has argued that riots represent a rebellion against the discrimination of specific migrant groups who live in the outskirts of big cities (Bleich et al 2010).

These conceptualisations can deny violent riots as containing political form or message, and can render riots as ‘violence without claims’ and rioters as ‘primitive rebels’ (Hobsbawn, 2013; Winlow et al., 2015). Yet there is emerging literature which call for a close attention to the complex and political dimension of urban riots, which interconnect issues of individual and group or crowd identity with their functionality or intentionality of specific groups including youth (Henn and Foard, 2014; Reedy et al 201; Stott and Drury, 2017; Choi and Kim, 2018). Whilst insurrection 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*, that is, sensed “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, and is driven by an ethical life captured by a triad of ‘love, rights and solidarity’ (Honneth, 1991, 1995).

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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 which makes it a priori the enactment or achievement of justice and the distribution of power (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). 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).

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

### **Riots in France and Britain: Failures to Recognise**

The French riots broke out 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, in either space or time; whereas rioting had usually taken place on the outskirts of big cities, it was now disrupting smaller towns and even rural areas, and it marked 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, 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. More generally, 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 which ran counter to empirical work which suggested that that a third of people arrested in riots had a criminal record in France (Kokoreff, 2008) or 13% in the case of the

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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). 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 understood as a significant rejection of the 'relevance' of a particular community and specifically those who need a form of 'religious freedom'. In other words, how 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, where 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 this waiting period, 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 seemingly 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.

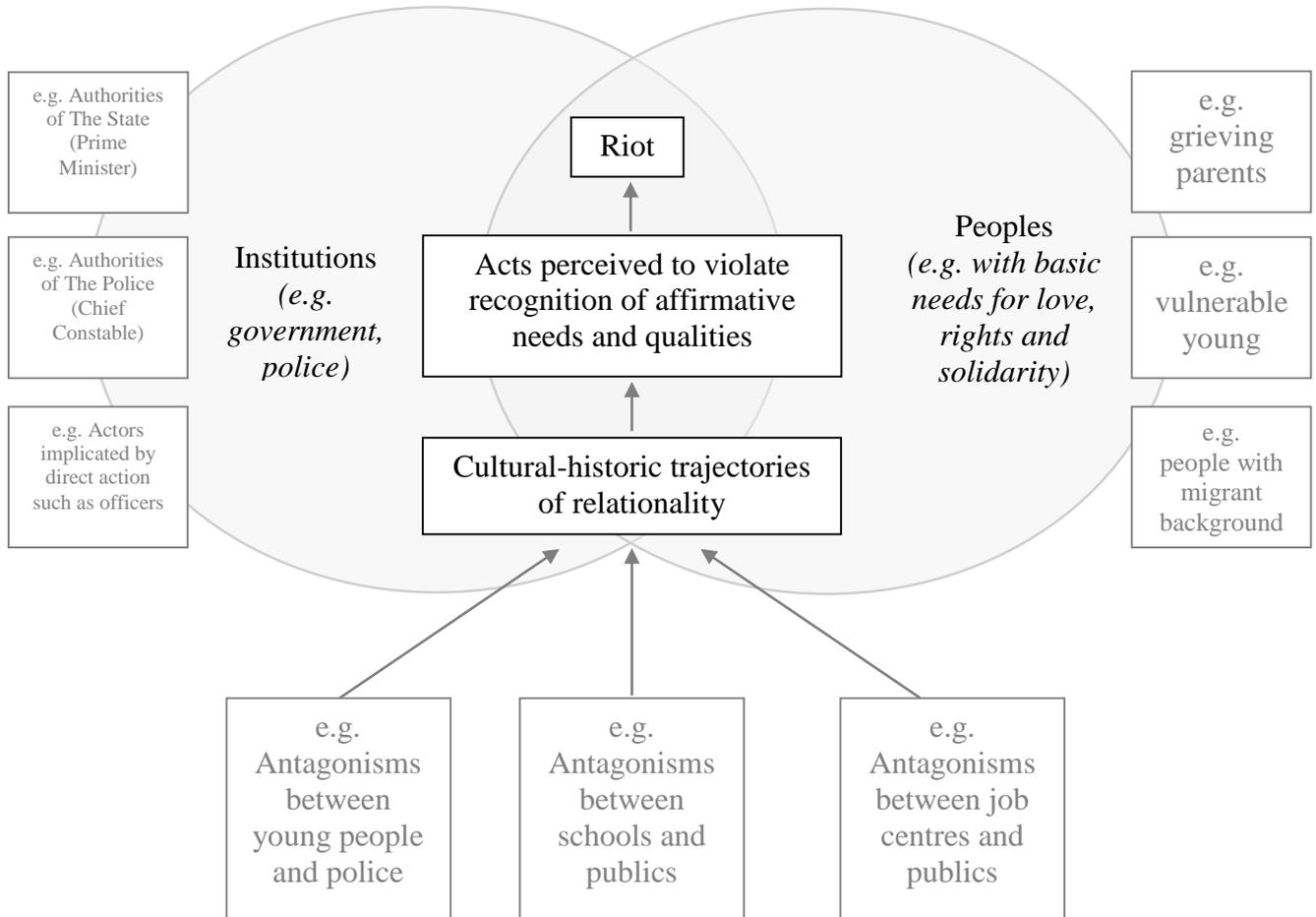
### **Re-casting Riots as Recognition**

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 including that which relates to affirming people in different circumstances, including people with religious belief, 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. Specifically, rioters did not typically attack other rioters but seemingly specific targets (Chabanet and Weppe, 2017). In the case of the French riots of 2005, rioters primarily targeted schools, job centres, and social services, reflective of a wider social resentment especially in disadvantaged areas in France towards generating social mobility (Mucchielli and Ait-Omar, 2007; Chapoulie, Anderson & Anderson, 2017;). In contrast, police stations were the main target of rioters in the British riots of 2011, which may reflect a long standing antagonism between young people and the police (Brogden and Ellisson,

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2013). As such, our initial theorisation of recognition is encapsulated in the figure below. Our plan for developing the paper prior to discussion/presentation at the conference includes elucidating greater nuances to the dynamics presented above.

Figure 1 Initial conceptualisation of ‘riots as recognition’



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