

Nancy Fraser and the Theory of Participatory Parity

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According to Nancy Fraser, the renewal of socialism requires a conflation of activism and political theory; indeed, emancipation can only exist on the basis of equal participation in all spheres of life, and can only be understood in terms of social struggles, which today appear in multiple forms.

In her interviews, Nancy Fraser readily presents herself as a child of the *New Left*. And her books show that not only did politics afford her an education but also, through activism, provide her with many of her philosophical topics, such as subaltern public spheres, the Left or feminism. For instance, she argues that the public sphere, as described by Jürgen Habermas, viz. : as being coextensive with politics, is not unique but that it is also comprised of subaltern counterpublics, that constitute “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs”¹, for that was what Nancy Fraser experienced within the context of feminist and pacifist discussion groups in the 60s. She insists on the plurality of separate public spheres to the extent of arguing that “something is ‘political’ if it is contested across a broad range of different discursive arenas and among a wide range of different publics”². And yet, plurality is never celebrated for its own sake – in so far as Nancy Fraser never gave in to the postmodern temptation – but is hailed as a tool of emancipation. Subaltern counterpublics function as spaces of regroupment and also as training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. This logic enables subaltern counterpublics partially to offset the unjust participatory privileges enjoyed by members of dominant social groups. Therefore, it has an emancipatory potential in terms of which all movements, public policies and theoretical propositions are measured.

Her experience as an activist has also repeatedly led Nancy Fraser to address the issue of the Left with its steps forward and its limitations, to reflect on the « postsocialist condition » or on the evolution of feminism. Although she defines herself as a « socialist », she rarely draws on Marx’s works, with which she has nevertheless been familiar ever since she began her career as an activist, reading his works under the influence of Marcuse. And even if she occasionally refers to Marx when defining Critical Theory for instance, or when asserting that political democracy requires substantive social equality – a position she relates to Karl Marx’s still unsurpassed critique of liberalism in Part I of “On the Jewish Question”³ –, Marx’s works have only recently prevailed in hers, especially in “Behind Marx’s Hidden Abode. For an Expanded Conception of Capitalism”⁴.

¹ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy”, *Social Text*, No. 25/26 (1990), p. 56-80, Duke University Press, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/466240>.

² Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*, London-New York: Verso, 2013, p. 60.

³ “Rethinking the Public Sphere”, *op. cit.*, note 20.

⁴ *New Left Review* 86, March-April 2014, p. 55–72.

Generally speaking, at the beginning of her career, Nancy Fraser tended to draw on French authors (from Foucault to Derrida), then she turned to German ones (from Habermas to Honneth). The shift from German to French authors is particularly conspicuous in one of her most famous articles – “Struggle over needs” (1989) – which was written under the influences of both Foucault and Habermas before Nancy Fraser definitely chose the German way.

Be it in the “heady spirit of the 1960s and ‘70s”⁵ or in periods when politics had receded into the background, Nancy Fraser always embodied a steadfast, confident feminism vividly instanced in the last sentence of her criticism of lacanian feminism: “It will not be time to speak of postfeminism until we can legitimately speak of postpatriarchy.”

Without drawing on class analysis, her kind of feminism locates gender relations on the terrain of *political economy* while seeking to expand that terrain to encompass *care* work, reproduction and, as from the 1990s, recognition. Carework in particular is given great importance as it gives Fraser grounds for rejecting the temptation to try and incorporate women as wage-earners in capitalist society and for thinking the transformation of the deep structures and animating values of capitalist society – which implies, for instance, that wage work should be decentered while unpaid care work, carried out by women and essential to society’s well-being, should be valorized.

However, Nancy Fraser’s thinking leaves no room for any original paradise: no force, no group, no struggle is assumed to be innocent. She makes it clear, for instance, that she does not mean to say that subaltern counterpublics are “always necessarily virtuous”⁶. Years later, she exposed the tendency in anticapitalist discourses to exempt what is, at least in part, shielded from the market, like nature or public power, from all criticism, and grounded her rejection of this romanticism in the fact that these entities do not lie outside capitalism but are co-constituted by and with it. In the same way, she reproaches Karl Polanyi for opposing a “good society” to “a bad economy”, and for being blind to the forms of domination and to the patterns of status hierarchies that are present in society but are external to the market. Along the same lines, she repeatedly made a scathing assessment of the welfare state, which she blames for treating those it pretends to help as clients, consumers and tax-payers rather than as fully-fledged citizens. Feminism itself is challenged for having entered a dangerous liaison with neoliberalism, based on a similar rejection of traditional authority and resulting in the supply, over the last forty years, of a low-paid, low-skilled female labor force aspiring to emancipation.

On that basis, Nancy Fraser develops a consistent and original theoretical framework comprised of at least four foci: a strong presence of social and political struggles at each step of her critical thinking; the normative weight of politics, and especially of the form of participation it involves; a rejection of any psychological approach to understanding or shaping political action or the political scene; and lastly, a specific idea of emancipation that gives socialism a heterodox twist.

The Pre-eminence of Struggles

Nancy Fraser means to develop a critical theory of society, which implies the construction of a research program and its conceptual framework based on the observation of the purposes and the activities of *progressive social movements*. Marx’s 1843 definition of Critical Theory as “the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age”⁷ has pride of place in her own work.

⁵ *Fortunes of Feminism, op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁶ “Rethinking the Public Sphere”, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

⁷ Quoted by Nancy Fraser in *Fortunes of Feminism, op. cit.*, p. 19.

Unsurprisingly, struggles pervade her written work and form the basis of her stand on issues of justice.

For instance, when in the 1980s and '90s, recognition became the grammar of new forms of social conflict while claims for redistribution faded into the background, Fraser developed a dual conception of justice with an objective dimension – establishing criteria of redistribution – and an intersubjective dimension concerning status recognition. Struggles also form the backdrop against which she approaches the Westphalian framework, that is, the idea that the territorial state is the appropriate unit for thinking about issues of justice, and points to the necessity of moving beyond this frame in order to take the existence of “meta-struggles” into account in so far as they challenge the idea of redress by national states.

In such bounded territorial states, some people are denied their status and position of legitimate parties in conflicts about justice. This is denounced in the campaigns that “target the new governance structures of the global economy, which have vastly strengthened the ability of large corporations and investors to escape the regulatory and taxation powers of territorial states”⁸. (p. 191).

Over the last few years, Fraser has been observing the present crisis of capitalism through the prism of new grammars that were developed in connection with social conflicts centered on environmental issues, social reproduction, and public power. Her relationship to Habermas itself may be grounded first and foremost in the way she interprets the problem of communication as a post-Marxian attempt to bring to light new forms of social conflict that are not centered on the exploitation of labour. As a matter of fact, in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, he sought to scrutinize “new forms of social conflicts, centered less on distribution than on ‘the grammar of forms of life’”.⁹

Nancy Fraser thinks of the importance she gives to struggles in terms of a reaction against what she describes as “one of the worst aspects of 1970s Marxism and socialist-feminism: the over-totalized view of capitalist society as a monolithic ‘system’ of interlocking structures of oppression that seamlessly reinforce one another.”¹⁰ And so, the reason why she observes the capitalist crisis from the vantage point of the new struggles it generates is that it enables her to interpret it as an intersubjective process, and not as an objective system breakdown, for what is at stake is “the responses of social actors to perceived shifts in their situation and to one another”.¹¹ This intersubjective process never takes the form of a negotiation. One would try in vain to find in her works something like the paradigm that is more and more often met with in contemporary humanities and according to which agents have to adjust and steer a delicate course in the face of forces that exceed them. The individual is never described as transacting with an order and its norms, nor as making claims for himself by resorting to carefully worked out concessions. In Nancy Fraser’s social theory, those who do not accept the rules and the values of the system are *struggling* or trying to struggle against it.

Mapping out a critical theory of society presupposes a biased identification with the struggles of a period on the part of the theorist. However, Nancy Fraser manages to mitigate this necessity in two ways: first, the theorist merely makes proposals to the public without assuming the function of avant-garde: “This is a proposal I make to the people with whom I am discussing, interacting, when we are debating about the Muslim scarf, or the burden of taxation, and so on: I suggest

⁸ *Fortunes of Feminism, op.cit.*, p. 191.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 231-232.

answering the following question: ‘is this going to promote participatory parity?’¹² Secondly, as she stated at the time of her controversy with Axel Honneth, folk paradigms of justice “do not constitute an incorrigible foundation from which to derive the normative framework of Critical Theory”: “On the contrary, the critical theorist must evaluate their adequacy from at least two independent perspectives. She or he must determine, first, from the perspective of social theory, whether a society’s hegemonic grammars of contestation are adequate to its social structure, and second, from the perspective of moral philosophy, whether the norms to which they appeal are morally valid”.¹³

Thus, while she criticizes claims for recognition of identity in that they tend to encourage conformism, intolerance and the preservation of patriarchal structures within groups, she nevertheless refrains from considering those who struggle for the recognition of a collective identity as fools: she seeks “a balance between independence from, and sympathy for, struggling subjects”¹⁴ On the other hand, the absence of explicit criticism or open protest in a given context does not lead her to conclude that this context is free from any injustices, for the means of communication and of interpretation are not equally available to all the members of a given society. They may make it impossible for some individuals to give evidence of the harms they suffer.

The struggles Nancy Fraser indefatigably explores structure each age. They are in no way rare disruptive events introducing chaos in an otherwise stable order; they challenge a given order as much as they contribute to its creation. Thus, the modern territorial state is defined as having been for centuries the appropriate unit for causing and resolving the conflicts about what individuals owe one another. Struggles also have a “constitutive role” in capitalism, understood as an institutionalized social order. The specific configuration it takes on in each age (also) results from internal struggles over the boundaries between production and reproduction, economic and political dimensions of life, etc., and from their outcomes.

We should therefore point out that Nancy Fraser ascribes a mundane and structuring character to these struggles, and does not invest them with any telos; struggles are the driving forces of history, but their succession does not ineluctably lead us towards a pre-established horizon.

The Measure of Participation and the Normative Weight of Politics

Nancy Fraser ascribes a specific normative value to politics: her theory is pervaded with the notion that the political scene and practice raise all sorts of expectations.

For instance, the model of recognition she offers is underpinned by a questioning of the *political arrangements* that prevent some members of the political community from participating on a par with others (as opposed to Axel Honneth – her great contradictor – who for a long time relegated the question of institutions to the sidelines in his thinking on recognition). In the same way, civil society – defined as the place where politics is experienced through associations and public debate, and as what escapes both the state and the economy – crops up in unexpected theoretical areas. Nancy Fraser entrusts civil society with tasks that most contemporary political philosophies will not assign to it, like carework for example, which, as she suggests in “After the Family Wage”, should be located outside households: “In state-funded but locally organized

¹² « Théorie de la société et théorie de la justice : Entretien avec Nancy Fraser », in *Variations*, Automne 2003, n°4, p. 21.

¹³ Nancy Fraser, Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition ? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, New York, Verso, 2003, p. 182.

¹⁴ Nancy Fraser, « Identity, Exclusion and Critique. A Response to Four Critics », *European Journal of Political Theory*, 6 (3), 2007, p. 323.

institutions, childless adults, older people, and others without kin-based responsibilities would join parents and others in democratic, self-managed carework activities.”¹⁵

However, what really confers a political dimension on her thinking is, first and foremost, the notion of *participation*. A measure or a society is fair to the extent that it makes participation possible for all members, that it ensures a parity of participation in the construction of institutionalized value patterns, in processes of deliberation about the rules of redistribution; and more generally, in all forms of social interaction. In Nancy Fraser’s view, individuals should definitely be full partners in social interaction. Her theory of justice thus differs from works centered on the notion of capabilities for instance, in that she does not focus on the way human beings function, but on the possibilities of social interaction. The notion of parity, which encompasses the notion of equality in Nancy Fraser’s works, not only illustrates her concern with “social character of social life”¹⁶, but it also forms a strong motif that implies a specific kind of activity: *political* claims-making in processes of collective decision. Positing that justice in its most general meaning implies a parity of participation, Nancy Fraser describes her position as a “radical-democratic interpretation of the principle of equal moral worth”¹⁷, an interpretation which underpins her politics.

The first occurrence of the notion of participatory parity in direct relation to political participation takes place as early as 1992, in “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy” (1992), where the liberal model of the public sphere is described as being inappropriate in so far as it does not consider social equality as a necessary condition of its full realization. Thus, before expanding it to other areas, Nancy Fraser first conceived parity of participation as a key element of the democratic public space.

Pointing to the normative weight of politics in Nancy Fraser’s theory does not suggest that, as a functional sphere with its specific objects, politics prevails over all other fields of activities and spheres of life. Indeed, Nancy Fraser insists that the principle of parity of participation applies to all the arenas of social interaction: be it the family, our personal lives, employment, or the market, or formal or informal politics as well as the various associations that are formed in civil society. In so far as one can be excluded from some of these arenas, the critical theorist should keep a close watch on each of them.

In the same way, politics do not have a privileged place in her theory of justice. In “*Reframing Justice in a Globalizing World*”¹⁸ published in 2005, Nancy Fraser adjusted her two-dimensional theory: in addition to distribution and recognition, justice acquired a political dimension. “‘Political’ meant in a specific sense, which concerns the nature of the state’s jurisdiction and the decision by which it structures public controversies. Centered on issues of procedure and on determining who counts as a member of the political community, the political dimension of justice is concerned chiefly with *representation*.”¹⁹

However, Nancy Fraser rejects the idea that relations of representation should determine relations of redistribution and of recognition because this idea fails to account for the complexity of causal relations within the capitalist society. In a correlated way, justice is not reducible to the implementation of a certain conception of representation. As a stage for issues of procedure and membership, the political dimension is just one of the facets of justice, and if we consider how

¹⁵ *Fortunes of Feminism, op.cit.*, p. 134.

¹⁶ Nancy Fraser, « Identity, Exclusion and Critique. A Response to Four Critics », *op.cit.*, p. 319.

¹⁷ *Fortunes of Feminism, op.cit.*, p. 193.

¹⁸ *Fortunes of Feminism, op.cit.*, chap. 8.

¹⁹ *Fortunes of Feminism, op.cit.*, p. 195.

late it appeared in her work and how sparingly she followed it up, we may even consider it to be of secondary importance. However, Nancy Fraser's idea of participation gives politics a normative dimension that deeply influences her social theory, her moral philosophy and even her social ontology.

Indeed, the subject that emerges from her writings is intrinsically political: not only is he autonomous, in the sense of having a capacity for self-determination, but he also transforms the world, or tries to. The participation the individual is entitled to is a matter of *taking-part* in the construction of the world, of cultural values, of norms, of two-way relations, of the political community, and so on. The individual should not abstain nor withdraw nor be satisfied with "expressing himself". Thus, concerning socially-recognized needs, Nancy Fraser notes that "subordinate groups articulate need interpretations intended to challenge, displace or modify dominant ones, about parenthood for instance. But," she reminds us, "these interpretations are never simply 'representations'. In all cases, they are 'acts and interventions'"²⁰. In Nancy Fraser's view, the subject does not simply have a voice; he also has *weight* – political weight.

Distancing the Psyche from the Political

Running through Nancy Fraser's theory is a mistrust of the psyche as a source of justification and of psychology as a technique, in so far as both are liable to become instruments of subjection and of ideology. While refraining from developing a straightforward criticism of psychoanalysis, she nevertheless follows in Foucault's steps in that she rejects would-be psychologies that de-politize social problems and attributes to the family endless powers of explanation.

Thus, she argues that public spheres are places where individual as well as collective identities not only express themselves but are also *formed*. Subaltern public spheres in particular provide the members of subordinated groups with a framework which allows them to understand that they share experiences and encourages them to develop new narratives of the self: "public discursive arenas are among the most important and underrecognized sites in which social identities are constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed. My view stands in contrast to various psychoanalytic account of identity formation, which neglect the formative importance of post-Oedipal discursive interaction outside the nuclear family and which therefore cannot explain identity shifts over time."²¹

The psyche must not interfere with political theory, which Nancy Fraser shows in a number of different ways. For instance, in her view, the problem of misrecognition should not be considered in relation to its possible effects on self-consciousness, or to a moral or psychological suffering, however real it may be. She conceives misrecognition as "a *status injury* whose locus is social relations, not individual psychology".²²

On the other hand, the institutionalized political sphere could never achieve its ends, however legitimate, by putting pressure on the psyche; democracy is not supposed to produce the citizens it needs to maintain itself, in contradiction with John Rawls's assumption that it is the responsibility of the state to ensure essential things such as "their (children) acquiring the capacity to understand the public culture and to participate in its institutions, in their being economically independent and self-supporting members of society over a complete life, and in their developing the political virtues, all this from within a political point of view".²³ Nancy Fraser makes no room

²⁰ *Fortunes of Feminism, op.cit.*, p. 59.

²¹ *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition*, Routledge, 2014, p.96.

²² *Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation*
The Tanner lectures on human values delivered at Stanford University, 1996, p.25.

²³ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Columbia Classics in Philosophy, 2005, p. 200.

for education in her political theory: “when misrecognition is equated with prejudice in the minds of the oppressors, overcoming it seems to require policing their beliefs, an approach that is authoritarian”.²⁴

Besides, psychology and psychiatry are regularly described in her works as discursive practices that lead to subjection in so far as therapeutic practice and willpower, especially when coupled with a discourse about self-development, become formidable obstacles to the constitution of the individual as a political subject.

This is the case with shelters for battered women for instance, which have evolved towards greater professionalization in the United-States since the late 1970s, creating a division between professional and client as many social-work staffs tend to frame problems in a quasi-psychiatric perspective. “Consequently, the practices of such shelters have become more individualizing and less politicized. Battered women tend now to be positioned as clients. They are increasingly psychiatrized, addressed as victims with deep, complicated selves. They are only rarely addressed as potential feminist activists.”²⁵

In the same way, in the analysis she and Linda Gordon carried out on the usages of the term “dependency”, they highlighted a major semantic shift during the industrial era when a moral and psychological register was born, according to which dependency could designate an individual character trait, like lack of willpower or excessive emotional vulnerability, and which had direct political consequences: the emphasis was no longer laid on relations of subordination between employers and employees and these relations no longer referred to in terms of “dependency”.²⁶

Nancy Fraser’s distrust of the psychological approach in practices as well as in thought processes does not stem from a simple resistance towards the hegemonic ambitions of the psychological discourse – concerning the situation of women or the possible ways to their emancipation. It is rooted in the conviction that psychology and politics are incompatible in some way. When psychology is foregrounded, politics is bound to fade into the background.

Socialism and the Challenge of Emancipation

As mentioned earlier, Nancy Fraser’s relation to Marx remained quite invisible in her writings for a long time, and whenever it became more visible, it appeared to be fairly loose. For instance, she does not go along with his criticism of bourgeois law: “It is true, as Marxists and others have claimed, that classic liberal rights to freed expression, assembly, and the like are ‘merely formal’. But this says more about the social context in which they are currently embedded than their intrinsic character.”²⁷

Her overweening use of the notion of (social) justice is another symptom of remoteness from the Marxist revolutionary constellation, especially if one remembers the terms in which Rosa Luxemburg used to talk of justice: “the old war horse on which the reformers of the earth have rocked for ages, for the lack of surer means of historic transportation. We return to the lamentable Rocinante on which the Don Quixotes of history have galloped towards the great reform of the earth, always to come home with a black eye”²⁸.

²⁴ *Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation*, *op.cit.*, p. 26.

²⁵ *Fortunes of Feminism*, *op.cit.*, p.73.

²⁶ “A Genealogy of Dependency’: Tracing a Keyword of the US Welfare State”, coauthored with Linda Gordon, in *Fortunes of Feminism*, *op. cit.*, chap. 3.

²⁷ *Fortunes of Feminism*, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

²⁸ M.A. Waters, ed., *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, New York,1970, p. 72–3.

As a matter of fact, Nancy Fraser readily resorts to the idea of reform when broaching the question of social change; more specifically, she makes use of a socialist reference through the expression coined by André Gorz, “non-reformist reform”, which in her view, refers to “a *via media* between an affirmative strategy that is politically feasible but substantively flawed and a transformative one that is programmatically sound but politically impracticable”.²⁹

“When successful, nonreformist reforms alter the terrain on which future struggles will be waged, thus expanding the set of feasible options for future reforms. Over time their cumulative effect could be to transform the underlying structures that generate injustice”.³⁰

Another socialist author, Gramsci, has pride of place in her works, especially in her early works in which she resorts to the concept of “hegemony”, defined as “the discursive face of power”. And in her theory of the public spheres, she indeed focuses on “the power to establish the “common sense” or “doxa” of a society, the fund of self-evident descriptions of social reality that normally go without saying.”³¹ In her view, “this includes the power to establish authoritative definitions of social situations and social needs, the power to define the universe of legitimate disagreement, and the power to shape the political agenda”³². In the same way, Gramsci’s influence can also be felt in her reflection on “the socio-cultural means of interpretation and communication” (MIC), meaning by this “the historically and culturally specific ensemble of discursive resources available to members of a given social collectivity in pressing claims against one another.”³³ On that basis, she comments on the way subordinated social groups are placed at a discursive disadvantage, which makes it difficult for them to talk about the harms they suffer.

Beyond those more or less explicit theoretical references, Nancy Fraser inherits two main themes from socialism: the need to reflect on a thick definition of equality and on the place of political economy.

What is at stake in her concept of parity is, first and foremost, equal participation in political *deliberation*, but parity does not imply a reciprocity of arguments; Nancy Fraser envisions a degree of symmetry in social relations, but not in the shared respect for discursive imperatives or in the equivalence of the justifications that are put forward and received. The violation of equality principles (a concept that preceded the concept of parity and appears in an article entitled “After the Family Wage: a postindustrial Thought Experiment”, 1994) can take various forms, including poverty, exploitation and inequality. Failure to respect the rules of communicative ethics does not count as a violation of these principles though.

Her theory of social justice is more widely based on the possibility of a discrepancy between faultless procedures and a substantial injustice. The various forms of oppressions she analyses are all rooted in mechanisms that are in no way intersubjective since inequality is always entrenched in structures. One conception she opposed quite strikingly is the two-dimensional character of female subordination as well as the slave/master model that we can find in Carole Pateman’s criticism of the sexual contract for instance. In Nancy Fraser’s view, gender inequality does not arise from those crude forms of subordination, but on structural mechanisms that are quite impersonal and are perpetuated in fluid cultural forms.

²⁹ *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *op.cit.*, p.78-79.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

³¹ Nancy Fraser, “The Uses and Abuses of French Discourse Theories for Feminist Politics”, 17, *Boundary II* 82, 85 (1990).

³² Nancy Fraser, Sandra Lee Bartky, *Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency, and Culture*, Indiana University Press, 1992, p. 175.

³³ *Fortunes of Feminism*, *op.cit.*, p. 57

The willingness to take political economy seriously shapes her feminism and accounts for her multi-layered analysis of market mechanisms (along with and against Habermas in the 1980s, with and against Polanyi in the 2000s, with and against Marx in the 2010s), and it is also at the heart of the controversy she has entered into with Judith Butler.³⁴

The argument she feels she has to challenge is Butler's contention that the heteronormative regulation of sexuality is part of the economic structure by definition and that the prejudices suffered by homosexuals are entrenched in relations of production. However, Nancy Fraser objects that this regulation of sexuality "*structures neither the social division of labor nor the mode of exploitation of labor power in capitalist society*".³⁵ Butler's argument is unacceptable not so much on account of its monistic bias as because she does not acknowledge the material reality of work or the brutality of the mechanisms of exploitation. Still, Nancy Fraser steers away from orthodox socialism as she resorts to a causal dualism in order to explain the hierarchical structure of capitalist society. Contemporary capitalist society is interspersed with gaps between the economic order and the kinship order, between the family and personal life, between status order and class hierarchy. The market has no power to determine the social status of individuals, even if it may affect it. In other words, she rejects the distinction between infrastructure and superstructure: cultural harms are not superstructural reflections of economic harms. Gender oppression in particular is irreducible to a logic of classes (at the same time, all axes of oppression are mixed by-products of both economy and culture and imply both maldistribution *and* misrecognition).

Recently, Nancy Fraser extended the domain of the constituents of capitalist society that escape the market. A myriad of practices and social relations, on which the market is *dependent* – which has paradoxically escaped the attention of Marxists, although Marx himself had had the intuition of such a dependence – have been added to the cultural value patterns. Thus, social reproduction, understood as the various activities related to economic production and the maintenance of social ties as well as a set of shared meanings and communities, nature, considered by capital as a mere provider of resources, and public power, that establishes and guarantees the norms governing the market (ownership and expropriation rules, etc.) ought to be considered as so many domains that escape the market while creating the conditions of its possibility.

This leads Nancy Fraser to conceive of capitalism as being more than just an economic system (not everything is commodified) although it is obviously not an ethical form of life either. In her view, capitalism is an institutionalized social order.

Basically, Nancy Fraser's point of divergence from Marxist socialism concerns the meaning of emancipation. The problem with orthodox Marxism does not only stem from the fact that emancipation is "missing" from the list of struggles that have been waged in its name against the domination of some groups or logics, but also from the fact that it focuses on classes, thus leaving aside women as well as ethnicized or racialized groups, a blindness that could be corrected thanks to the addition of what has been so far omitted. Nancy Fraser's logic is not of a summative kind, her normative ambition is not limited to adding a cultural dimension to economy.

First, categories that are traditionally associated with one dimension in a socialist framework are associated with the other dimension in Nancy Fraser's works, which blurs the frontiers between the two as well as the types of social transformations pertaining to each. One may therefore point

³⁴ Judith Butler's text, « Merely Cultural », and Nancy Fraser's rejoinder, « Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler » were both published in the same issue (52/53) of *Social Text* (Vol. 15, Fall/Winter 1997).

³⁵ *Fortunes of Feminism, op. cit.*, p.181.

to the fact that although reification is a category that features in her works, it does not originate in a generalization of a form based on commodification and exchange; and it does not refer to the transformation of the world into a world in which everything is quantified either, or to the deterioration of the axiological contents of life, or to the conflation of social relations and real-life experiences with manipulable objects, or to the atomization of collectivities, etc. Reification enters in the description of pathologies that may emerge within a given culture: what she calls “the problem of reification” is the tendency to oversimplify and to freeze collective identities. This “problem” is linked to the set of practices and institutions that encourage separatism, intolerance and chauvinism as well as the maintenance of patriarchal structures and authoritarianism. Hence the necessity of rethinking the issue of emancipation, which is not reducible to a desalienation from capitalist social relations.

Besides, moving away from orthodox socialism once again, Nancy Fraser posits that emancipation is both collective and individual in its process as well as in its *telos*. It is a process of self-determination whereby *individuals* secure “reflexive, collective, democratic and dialogical control over the forces that surreptitiously affect their lives”.³⁶

Lastly, steering clear of the messianic haze in which the notion of emancipation is often shrouded, Nancy Fraser does not define it in a negative way, as an abandonment, a disalienation, the end of dispossession; she fleshes it out with the possibility of a clearly defined practice: participation. Emancipation is not identified with the end of the class society, nor is it weighed down with expectations regarding the pursuit of happiness, it is conjoined with participation, the latter being the means and the result of the former.

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³⁶ “Théorie de la société et théorie de la justice : entretien avec Nancy Fraser”, *op.cit.* Emphasis mine.