

Nancy Fraser: *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflexions on the 'Postsocialist' Condition*
New York and London 1997: Routledge, 241 pp.

There is recent evidence of the growing influence of the critical theorist Nancy Fraser, professor of social and political theory at the New School of Social Research in New York. In *Justice Interruptus* she sets out to address the dilemmas of justice in the 'post-socialist' age after 1989 by pointing out the need for an integrative approach capable of incorporating the distributive paradigm, represented by the traditional conception of social equality, and the recognition paradigm, represented by the multicultural politics of difference. Fraser defines the 'post-socialist' condition in order to specify the framework of contemporary political theorising. She distinguishes three constitutive features of 'post-socialist' conditions: 'an absence of any credible overarching emancipatory project despite the proliferation of fronts of struggle; a general decoupling of the cultural politics of recognition from the social politics of redistribution; and a decentering of claims for equality in the face of aggressive marketization and sharply rising material inequality' (p. 3). In particular, Fraser criticises the unproductive opposition of culture and economy and the very frequent interpretation of the distributive paradigm and recognition paradigm as mutually incompatible. She argues that both paradigms refer to a fundamental aspect of justice that cannot be suppressed; the distributive paradigm deals with class inequities and material injustices, which the recognition paradigm tends to overlook, while conversely the recognition paradigm deals with institutionalised injustices and cultural misrecognition, which is more or less neglected by the distributive paradigm. However, these two kinds of injustices are of crucial significance, and according to Fraser every current relevant theory of justice should address them as two analytically distinct but practically intertwined aspects of justice. Moreover, the

comprehensive political project of the 'post-socialist' era must take into consideration these three constitutive features – an absence of any credible vision of social transformation, an equality/difference dilemma, and resurgent economic neoliberalism in connection with globalising capitalism – and develop a credible vision of radical democracy that could present an alternative to the present social order.

In the first chapter, 'From Redistribution to Recognition?', Fraser explains her two-dimensional approach to the theory of justice, which takes into account both economically grounded maldistribution and institutionally generated status inequity or misrecognition. In this context, she elaborates the moral-philosophical, social theoretical and political-theoretical underpinning of her approach. Fraser bases her critique of both egalitarian theorists and recognition theorists on the notion of bivalent categories such as gender and 'race'. She argues that the category of gender (and that of 'race') encompasses both socio-economic injustices associated with exploited classes and cultural injustices associated with despised sexualities. Consequently, to rectify gender inequity, both the political economy must be restructured and resource equities eliminated, and institutionalised disrespect must be eradicated and the cultural norms enabling recognition changed. 'Of course, the two faces are not neatly separated from each other. Rather, they intertwine to reinforce each other dialectically because sexist and androcentric cultural norms are institutionalized in the state and the economy, and women's economic disadvantage restricts women's "voice", impeding equal participation in the making of culture, in public sphere and in everyday life. The result is a vicious circle of cultural and economic subordination.' (p. 21)

Fraser also analyses aspects of justice in terms of political orientation, and she distinguishes between affirmation and transformation with respect to both redistribution and recognition. Fraser cites the liberal wel-

fare state, which actually generated misrecognition by focusing only on surface reallocations, as the paradigmatic example of affirmative strategy in redistribution, and points to socialism as the paradigmatic case of transformative strategy, owing to its focus on a deep restructuring of the relationships of production. With respect to recognition, Fraser's paradigmatic case of affirmative strategy is mainstream multiculturalism, which focuses only on the surface reallocations of respect and leaves intact the symbolic structures that virtually support the misrecognition of depreciated groups, and her paradigmatic example of transformative strategy is deconstruction, which destabilises deep binary oppositions and thus also group differentiation. In both aspects of justice, affirmative strategies are inadequate, and therefore, Fraser advocates transformative strategies. However, in her later works, Fraser reached the view that this distinction is not absolute but rather contextual. At the same time she awoke to the difficulties connected with the implementation of transformative strategies and consequently began arguing for 'nonreformist reform': 'on the one hand, they engage people's identities and satisfy some of their needs as interpreted within existing frameworks of recognition and distribution; on the other hand, they set in motion a trajectory of change in which more radical reforms become practicable over time' [Fraser and Hrubec 2004: 881]. Affirmative transformations of this kind combine the radical contents of transformative strategies with the easy assertion of affirmative ones.

In addition to elaborating this two-dimensional theory of justice in the first part of the book Fraser also presents a critique of the current welfare state, which in her view relies on the old gender order based on the ideal of the family wage. In the chapter 'After the Family Wage' she compares the 'universal breadwinner model' advanced by liberals and American feminists and the 'caregiver parity model' asserted by social democrats and the majority of Western Euro-

pean feminists. While the first model lays emphasis on promoting women's employment through the state provision of employment-enabling day-care services, the latter supports informal care through the state provision of caregiver allowances. Nevertheless, in Fraser's opinion, neither model respects the complex nature of gender equity, which requires both gender equality and the recognition of gender differences. Fraser formulates seven normative principles according to which the level of attained gender equity can be assessed: the antipoverty principle, the anti-exploitation principle, the income-equality principle, the leisure-time equality principle, the equality-of-respect principle, the anti-marginalisation principle, and finally the anti-androcentrism principle. Fraser proposes an alternative conception of the welfare state, one based on the 'universal caregiver model' that combines the previous two models and corresponds to modern post-industrial conditions. The 'universal caregiver' model requires a new view of men's roles and the radical re-organisation of working life. Consequently, this alternative for truly promoting gender equity calls for the deconstruction of gender in the sense of making 'women's current life-patterns the norm for everyone' (p. 61).

The second part of *Justice Interruptus* is devoted to reflections on the theory of discourse, which Fraser sees as a means for overcoming the decoupling of the social from the cultural. Her guiding aim here is to interconnect discourse analysis with the institutional level of the social structure. In the chapter 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', Fraser deals with Habermas's explanation for the genesis of the public sphere and proposes a critical reconstruction of his model. In 'Sex, Lies, and the Public Sphere' she goes on to discuss the separation of the public and the private. In 'A Genealogy of "Dependency"' Fraser deals with the genealogy of the concept of 'dependency' and revises the Foucauldian approach. Finally, in 'Structuralism and Pragmatics?' she criticises the Lacanian theory, which in

her view reifies 'the symbolic order', and in a discussion of the pragmatics model elaborated by the French feminist Julia Kristeva she draws attention to the contribution that discourse theory has made to feminist theory.

In the third part of *Justice Interruptus* Fraser applies her general theory of justice to gender inequity and conceptualises a feminist critical theory of justice, which combines an anti-essentialist cultural politics of recognition with an egalitarian social politics of redistribution aimed at developing a 'credible vision of radical democracy'. In the chapter 'Multiculturalism, Antiesentialism, and Radical Democracy' she distinguishes three phases of second-wave American feminism. She reconstructs the history of the US debate over difference, and she points out the weaknesses of the first phase of the debate between 'equality feminists' and 'difference feminists' and the second phase of the difference debate that focused on 'differences between women', and finally she discusses the current phase, which focuses on 'multiple intersecting differences', by presenting the distinction between the anti-essentialist deconstructive version of feminist theory and the pluralist version of multiculturalism within the framework of feminism. In accordance with her two-dimensional theory she argues that a one-sided focus on cultural politics is insufficient and neglects the injustices caused by political economy. Moreover, she tries to resolve the dilemma between the anti-essentialist sceptical attitude toward identity and difference and the multiculturalist aim of revaluing and promoting group differences and group identities. Fraser calls for the construction of a new equality/difference debate that can 'combine the struggle for an antiesentialist multiculturalism with the struggle for social equality' (p. 187).

In her most recent article, 'Mapping the Feminist Imagination: From Redistribution to Recognition to Representation', Fraser returns to her previous notion of the feminist debate and relates it to the post-9/11 political climate. She writes about a new phase of fem-

inist politics that is characterised by reframing gender justice. Feminists thus face a new form of injustice that Fraser calls 'misframing': 'Misframing arises when the state-territorial frame is imposed on transnational sources of injustice... In such cases, struggles against maldistribution and misrecognition cannot proceed, let alone succeed, unless they are joined with struggles against misframing' [Fraser 2005: 305]. Therefore, feminists have to develop a new transnational political space to appropriately address gender injustices arising from 'women's vulnerability to transnational forces'; gender injustices have to be seen as connected not only to redistribution and recognition, but also to representation, which according to Fraser constitutes a third dimension of gender injustice. 'In contesting misframing, therefore, transnational feminism is reconfiguring gender justice as a three-dimensional problem, in which redistribution, recognition, and representation must be integrated in a balanced way.' [Fraser 2005: 305] Furthermore, in this new feminist political project Fraser highlights the role of the European Union, which in our globalising world she sees as a competent partner for other transnational agents, such as the United Nations and the World Social Forum.

In the ensuing sections of *Justice Interruptus* Fraser advocates her approach and stresses the benefits of her conception in a review of currently prominent feminist approaches. In 'Culture, Political Economy, and Difference' Fraser interprets Iris Young's theory of difference based on an identification of the five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. Whereas Young criticises Fraser for dichotomising culture and economy, Fraser's criticism targets the failure of Young's approach to encompass both culture and political economy. According to Fraser, Young for the most part insists on the multiculturalist politics of difference while evading the political question of how to pursue redistribution and recognition simultaneously. In other words, she crucially ne-