# The critique of justice in the debate between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth: notes toward a critical theory

*La crítica de la justicia en el debate entre Nancy Fraser y Axel Honneth: notas para una teoria crítica*

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**Abstract**

The aim of the present essay is to discuss the debate between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, through a dialog between the topics justice, framing and moral person. The work in which the authors are face to face was analyzed and parallel works by both authors were compared; simultaneously, a theoretical thread was built by observing their individual works, which address the sense of subject and Justice. The issue confronting them is not "recognition versus redistribution", but the construction their analyses depart from: (i) be it from a macro or microsocial perspective, (ii) broader structural relationships or subjectivity processes built on ethics, (iii) the basic, or gradually built, principle of a previous "good" life. Obviously, these questions are addressed through the argumentative forms subscribed by the authors, and they seem to be opposed to each other due to a mere disagreement between authors; however, far from resulting in stagnation, the debate leverages their points of view. In this point, Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth contribute to the development of the most fundamental point of the Critical Theory, namely: developing elements that allow a better understanding of reality through perspectives that are engaged with in social change.

*Keywords:* Critical Theory; Nancy Fraser; Axel Honneth; moral person; Justice. .

**Resumen**

El objetivo del presente ensayo es discutir el debate entre Nancy Fraser y Axel Honneth, considerando el diálogo entre los temas justicia, encuadramiento y individuo moral. Se analizó el trabajo en el que los autores se encuentran cara a cara y se compararon trabajos paralelos de ambos autores; Simultáneamente, se construyó un hilo teórico a partir de la observación de sus obras individuales, que abordan el sentido de sujeto y Justicia. El tema al que se enfrentan no es "reconocimiento versus redistribución", sino la construcción de la que parten sus análisis: (i) ya sea desde una perspectiva macro o microsocial, (ii) relaciones estructurales más amplias o procesos de subjetividad construidos sobre la ética, (iii) la base, o construido gradualmente, principio de una "buena" vida inicial. Evidentemente, estas cuestiones se abordan a través de las formas argumentativas suscritas por los autores, y parecen opuestas entre sí por un mero desacuerdo entre autores; sin embargo, lejos de resultar en un estancamiento, el debate aprovecha sus puntos de vista. En este punto, Nancy Fraser y Axel Honneth contribuyen al desarrollo del punto más fundamental de la Teoría Crítica, a saber: desarrollar elementos que permitan una mejor comprensión de la realidad a través de perspectivas comprometidas con el cambio social.

*Palabras clave:* Teoría Crítica; Nancy Fraser; Axel Honneth; Persona Moral; Justicia.

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## I. Introduction

Since the publication of *A theory of Justice*, by John Rawls (1971), political philosophy has head towards justice and the subject as the basis to understand both the moral and the ethical viewpoints. Rawls' influence on the field of Political Theory is clear in the normative perspective of several authors known by their liberal viewpoint, such as Ronald Dworkin (1985) and Susan Okin (1989), as well as in the perspective of communist writers, such as Iris Marion Young, and Critical Theory scholar, like Nancy Fraser (2009, 2013, 2016), Seyla Benhabib (1992), Axel Honneth (2007, 1995) and Rainer Forst (2002). The aim of this article is not to discuss all these authors, although some of them will be compared in the text, but to address the debates witnessed in the early 2000s that have opened room for a perspective of justice based on the Critical Theory.

Therefore, the present essay introduces and discusses the contexts and definitions of matters such as justice and subjects presented by Nancy Fraser (2017, 2016, 2013, 2009) and Axel Honneth (2007, 1995). Although all the books substantiate the debates between the herein assessed authors, the analyzed works opened room for the confrontation between studies and the presentation of certain discussions. In methodological terms, bibliographic research was adopted to compare texts of authors who address topics such as justice, redistribution, recognition and the subject of justice based on their contributions to the field of Critical Theory.

Firstly, I focus on Nancy Fraser's reflections in the chapters of the book wrote she in partnership with Honneth: *Redistribution or Recognition* (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). Nevertheless, given that the discussion focuses on Fraser's notes, some of her other books in which several profiles of the construction of her argumentation are pointed out were also referenced. Most of the chosen texts were written after the set of books wrote in partnership with Honneth (Fraser & Honneth, 2003), which were published from 2009 to 2017. Next, two books by Axel Honneth alone, published in 1995 and 2007 - prior to the aforementioned collection written with Fraser – are central to my study; in these books he enlarges on some critics presented in the book co-written with Fraser. Finally, some relationships between these authors are suggested, relationships that are not limited to them and achieve other authors.

The article does not exclusively analyze the authors' arguments based on the chronology of their introduction in the chapters of *Redistribution or Recognition*. The discussion points that rise throughout the book, that distance or bring the authors closer,   will be compared to other authors in the field because the matter itself is not limited to Critical Theory. This will trigger arguments built along other lines of thought, also taking into account their limitations.

Accordingly, the question of justice abandons exclusively moral, procedural or more territorial perspectives and reaches a global perspective; as Nancy Fraser (2009) puts it, a "post-Westphalian perspective". Given that (¿?) Critical Theory embraces the discussion about Justice and the subject of justice, Fraser starts by considering these topics as inherent to the social-change process. After all, there is no way to address matters such as citizenship, justice and welfare under social conditions in which people are forced to daily coexist with degradation and negligence. Critical Theory stands out for developing the matter of justice by distancing itself from linear and moralizing elements, as well as by understanding social changes without following the perspective of justice or of "full" citizenship. When these changes are analyzed through the logic of subject of justice, it is possible to observe the existence of a well-defined subject concerning the access to justice.

From the perspective of the debate between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, it is possible to perceive a confrontation that heads towards re-signifying Critical Theory. The dispute between these two authors over the normative and the understanding of an ideal  theoretical basis shows that both writers agree on some elements, namely: the historical and dialectical relationship between inequalities, the capitalist system, suffering and suffering-related determinations. However, the authors disagree over the explanatory and causal aspects of these relationships when it comes to macro or microsocial basis, be them structural, or not.

Fraser ponders that a perspective can be "micro" in the scope of recognition and of individual or exclusively collective disputes. It is essential to take into account the socioeconomic and political-institutional elements related to redistribution. On the other hand, Axel Honneth follows the Hegelian line of thought by advocating that

recognition is a category that not only embodies, but also organizes the whole social system, from redistribution to marriage, from contracts to individuals.

The two authors disagree on core points; however, they remain intensely close to each other. Their confrontation does not lie on the recognition vs redistribution relationship, but on the construction of the point, that is, on where the analysis starts from: a macro or microsocial perspective, broader structural relationships or subjective processes built over ethics or over the basic - or slowly built - principle of a preceding "good" life. The only point they totally disagree on is the question of the "good" life and the concept of "good", in other words, whether it emerges from structural or microsocial terms or whether it is previously necessary to think about justice.

## II. Of the justice and of the subject in Nancy Fraser

Nancy Fraser has a historically well-defined argument about justice field and its political relationships in the field of gender studies, mainly in terms of its core debaters (Butler, 1999; Benhabib, 1992; Cornell, 1998; Okin, 1989; Phillips, 2011; Rhode, 1991; Young, 1997, 2011). Fraser discussed the elements of Critical Theory in the 1990s within the scope of the recognition and feminist agenda. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Fraser built her bi-dimensional system, which was strongly criticized by Iris Marion Young (1997, 2011), who claimed that Fraser highlighted political matters and reduced feminist struggles to the prevailing economic development. In a more controversial sense, that she reduced the feminist agenda of the so-called third-wave to identity matters that can be methodologically used to legitimate conflicting social groups.

However, throughout the 2000s, Fraser breaks with such a sense by adding a third dimension to it. With the addition of representation, it thus became a better-structured three-part system. Besides, the construction of the my argument will be guided by the debate between Fraser and Honneth in their joint works; whenever

necessary, the points where Fraser no longer stands in the same conceptual aspect as that of Honneth will be highlighted.

Similar to Samuel Fleischacker (2004), Fraser (2009, 1989; Fraser & Honneth, 2003) points that egalitarian redistributive claims are the major paradigms of social justice theorization after the second feminist wave. Notwithstanding, he places the debate between recognition and redistribution, which are factors often disregarded and seen as antagonistic (Fraser & Honneth, 2003: 19). In parallel, he highlights that taking one of them into consideration without the dialectical sense is meaningless; thus, the matter of social justice would hold a bi-dimensional purpose.

Furthermore, Fleischacker (2004) states that, based on the redistributive perspective, the great danger lies on considering the dimension of financial income as the factor boosting the human development process – which is somehow linked to the human capital dimension. Consequently, the addressed matters can be reduced to mere income transfer or to policies that aim at allowing the development of actions bond to income, such as labor. From a feminist perspective, Angela Davis (1983) considers that it is possible to have the ultimate exclusion of subjects seen in this essentialist economic form, in which those subjects would be "included" in income generation and in labor position policies that would not take into account differences within differences that economic policies are usually blind in solving social problems.

This exclusion of individuals is one of the "shades of justice" substantiated by the redistributive logic that Katrina Forrester (2019) puts forward when she analyzes the influence of Rawls on socioeconomic justice policies. Redistributive policies are mostly seen at a macro-level rather than as necessarily capable of observing differences; hence, they address social subjects and the conditions they have to cope with. The herein expressed logics lies on a greater social gain, and it triggers the question: Would it be a utilitarian part of what Rawls had actually addressed with? Thus, this redistributive paradigm, based on Fraser's logic, is capable of providing social changes when the justice of the subjects of justice is taken into consideration.

Therefore, Fraser focuses her debate with Honneth on redistribution and recognition as reference policies, in other words, as paradigms of popular justice, which are dated and historically contextualized based on demands, actors and

processes linked to processes that connect to each other. Class policy (for redistribution) and identity policy (for recognition) are observed within this dispute. The bad interpretation of these paradigms of justice lead to false antithesis and rebuild itself as the only perspective to be disrupted in all claims and groups (Fraser & Honneth, 2003).

Bad interpretation is the sense that creates the false antithesis between redistribution and recognition, such as a sum zero game, in which the choice for one of them implies the exclusion of the other one, making one more important than the other. Mainly from the State and its agents' point-of-view, bad interpretation puts public choices under this antagonistic bias about a position that stands above the other. At this point, Fraser advocates that a popular paradigm of justice is associated with the public and political dimension of social convincing and mobilization within the bias of change, such as a demand and call from society in terms of triggering the discussion and from the influence of State (Fraser, 2013, 2009). This is the core point that separates the approach of Justice through the Critical Theory bias.

Fraser's construction is substantiated in the perspective of fighting propositions that do not address the sense of constructing subjects who have equal moral value within the political contexts that highlight the sense of subjects of justice. This framing encompasses moral elements and is initially apart from ethical fundamentals. Nevertheless, she considerate universal elements by, somehow, detaching justice from the territorial element, or, as she points out, by following the Westphalian paradigm. Moreover, it is worth emphasizing that this theoretical process mainly takes place throughout Fraser's work after 2006 and it is consolidated in her book *Scales of Justice* (2009).

Although the author does not delve into the bad-interpretation question, there are three agreements among the four introduced that are fundamental: 1) the origins of popular paradigms present multiple conceptions that open room for injustice; 2) solutions suggested by the paradigms are also multiple derivatives; and 3) the varied conception of the affected collective of injustice (Fraser & Honneth, 2003).

However, the fourth argument – popular paradigms embody different ideas about group differences – has an element inconsistently interpreted by Fraser,

according to Young (1990): i.e., she places it inside those that consider cultural change as the main aim of recognition policies. Young (1990, 1997, 2011), on the other hand, places the oppression elements rooted in the social and cultural structure of society. In order to disrupt these oppression systems, the cultural basis is the element that cannot be disregarded from the movement of change, since culture and social structure are dynamically associated with domination and oppression. Considering the cultural basis as an intrinsic part of the disruption of oppressions different from having cultural basis as the main object.

On the other hand, Fraser (Fraser & Honneth 2003) properly interprets one of the points emphasized by Young (1990), namely: recognition policies that are apart of or disregard group differences tend to reinforce injustice. Young (1997, 2011) underlines that justice builds an inequality context of hierarchy and domination by considering subjects as universal. In other words, it is like there was the easy identification of the dominated and the dominant. Fraser states that there are differences inside groups and that such a context is not free from reproducing the domination structure based on other manifestations. Young (1990, 1997, 2011) highlights, for example, that seeing women as a universal and cohesive group means disregarding the fact that there are structural differences and inequality among women.

Further, we can point out that Fraser (2013, 2009) pinpoints the political-institutional movement in the abstraction of oppressions that, notably, end up diluting it. It is as if they existed through social differentiation and through the capitalist system, they are some sort of "choice" or differentiation reached by oppression forms that can affect certain groups or individuals. This perspective was previously shown as false by Davis (1983), who built a theoretical perspective of the American oppression system of slavery, with emphasis on black women in the USA, in the 19th and 20th centuries. Similar to Audre Lorde (2007), he argues that women's oppression system can embody elements such as class, race, sexuality, territory and cultural, among other phenomena that support this oppressive structure. Iris Young herself presents this same argument in her work *Five Faces of Oppression* (1990). Notwithstanding, in her analyzes of the prison system in the United States, Michele Alexander (2011) observed

how the government used economic, social, political, institutional and structural racism at different points in history to build the constitutional basis that downgrade black citizens in legitimate systems associated with the North-American economic order.

The abstraction of oppressions addressed by Fraser takes place either in recognition or in redistribution policies, depending on agent, policy receptor, applied mechanisms and objectives. She organizes the broad perspective, keeps the oppression structure and reduces the development potential of these policies. It is essential to highlight that Benhabib (1992) had already affirmed that these systems produce and reproduce other systems that erase differences, idealize the private scope and de-publicize the public scope. Butler (1999) follows the same rationale when she addresses the matter of gender roles within the social structure and social struggles in the structure.

Thus, in her defense of redistribution and recognition policies, in parallel, she aims at structuring a concept of subject of justice. Fraser bases her arguments on three aspects. The first of them distances the perspective of Justice (as personal deed) from recognition policies by allocating one of the basis of law, whose non-recognition implies the non-parity of equal moral value and of status as full interlocutors. The sense of subordination would herein be the violation of justice –closer to the political sense advocated by Young (1990).

Taking recognition apart from personal deeds is, besides the direct attack to Axel Honneth, a construction in the political Justice scope, in which Justice is a matter of social duty that evidences reciprocity (Höffe, 1995). Putting personal deeds in the justice dimension means addressing a perspective of merit that disregards them from the social context and from how efforts relate to each other within a post-Westphalian order. Simultaneously, it creates an individualist context of recognition unable to gather groups and inter- and intra-group relationships. At the same time, it is an attack against all conceptions of liberal rights in the order of the individual within unilateral "relationships" whose priority order guides the concept and practice of Justice.

The second aspect advocated by Fraser is addressed in her status model applied to moral value, which embraces the pluralism of values and affects groups in

their own situational forms of "good" life in terms of j ustice. She emphasizes participation parity as an element to justify and understand recognition as normatively bonding by bringing along the sense of public achievements rather than the sense of personal deeds. This statement allows recognition and redistribution not to subsume one or another (Fraser & Honneth, 2003: 30-37). It also takes individualizing senses apart from liberal concepts of justice that are mainly associated with liberal feminism or rooted in  individual rights as essential (Fraser, 2009). Individual rights, in turn, take the political-institutional and social element apart from political justice (Höffe, 1995). Possibly, this is one of the core critical points advocated by Axel Honneth, Rainer Forst and Seyla Benhabib against Fraser, and by Fraser against these authors – it takes the previous concept of the "good" life as essential to the Justice process and to the idea of struggling for rights, apart from having rights.

The third aspect lies on participation parity, on the parity of putting in place a linguistic grammar to public debate and argumentation, in order to avoid monologic and reductionist approaches. Somehow, when she builds her social structure model and defines the political function of the public sphere model, Fraser (Fraser & Honneth, 2003: 45-52) turns to Habermas (1989), who disregards the women's question by reducing them to the European sense of feminine subject. Such a belief does not reflect women's participation in politics. In another point, Fraser mentions Rawls (1971) by addressing his difficulty in building a model of public and democratic process of deliberation. Fraser understands that Rawls' process takes representative subjects (who disregard historically) as equally situated.

Building on these three aspects, Fraser introduces her bi-dimensional model (or the perspective dualism, as she called it) as one embodying the historical sense of changes in social structure and in the political culture (Fraser & Honneth, 2003: 53), as well as of differentiation between class and status, and their causal interactions (Fraser & Honneth, 2003: 51). She does it by observing conflicting and structuring trends in bad distribution and non-recognition scope as fundamentals to be stopped. According to Fraser, there is no way to develop mitigating and non-reformist measures; actually, the question lies on distorting the system from its own structure.

Fraser's aim is the discursive core notably in the pluralist scope to allow a radical transformation in society. According to her, the transformation does not exclusively concern the cultural dimension - as advocated by Honneth, who reduces all social subordination to bad recognition produced by hierarchy set to this dimension. According to Fraser, subordination is a political matter of justice mediated by status and by its institutional expression (Fraser & Honneth, 2003: 164). Pluralism, in Fraser, is essential to the development of what would become her three-part dimension. However, it is not wise to consider it in its softened version, in the liberal version, observed, for example, in Dahl (1989), according to whom, pluralism embodies a branch of full interaction in the democratic logic, without any ability to contest – moral and fundamentalist disputes pass unscathed in this logic. In further works, Fraser makes it clear that the plural dimension does not necessarily mean lack of disputes, but that nobody can be downgraded in the plural context of values (Fraser, 2009). This is the difference in the understanding process, since a plural environment does not necessarily entail an environment free from cultural hierarchy.

In order to consolidate the herein addressed statements, it is possible to highlight in publications following the debate with Honneth, that Fraser (2009) argues that any proposition of justice normatively valid must take into account three elements: redistribution, recognition and representation; each one of them embodies a specific sphere. Redistribution (the economic dimension) refers to "What", i.e., the disputed object of justice. Recognition (the cultural dimension) denotes "Who", i.e., people who will be affected by the schematic configuration of justice; representation (the political dimension) addresses "How" as institutional constructions created for this very purpose (Fraser, 2009, 2013)

Fraser's concept of "participation parity" is linked to that of justice, i.e., the second dimension only exists when the first one is the conceptual and procedural basis supporting such a parity, since it "disrupts the institutionalized barriers that stop some people from participating together in parity as full interaction partners" (Fraser, 2009: 60). It means that the evaluation of democracy and of the standards concerning its understanding  would only be legitimate if they are certified by fair and open deliberation processes in which everybody participates as pairs.

For Fraser (2013, 2009), talking about justice means taking into account the way individuals are positioned in relation to one another in life dimension differences, from politics to economy, the judicial system and the social order. Participation parity is a normative instrument that takes different moral concepts of the "good" life based on one criterion, namely: parity. If people participate under equal conditions and are subjects of justice under equal moral equivalence, then iy is possible to talk about Justice. At this point, the conception of the "good" life in Fraser is organized by parity, and that is how she builds her sense of "subject of justice". Fraser suggests a reflexive justice that embodies unequal demands and correlates meta-divergences linked to this process. Such a statement is also seen in the debate with Honneth. However, it is essential to point out that Fraser has reassessed some of her positions in more recent books (Fraser, 2017, 2016, 2013).

## III. Of the justice and of the subject in Axel Honneth

The concept of recognition in Axel Honneth is not explored in the book co-written with Fraser (Fraser & Honneth, 2003), given that the debate was proposed by Fraser and boosted by Honneth's answers. Thus, his concept can only be understood exploring his past works (Honneth, 2007, 1995), in order to further assess his answers to Fraser. His concept of recognition is substantiated by the Hegelian logic of social struggle, which assumes the dispute for the moral grammar of social conflicts in the inter-subjectivity dimension.

According to Honneth (2007, 1995), recognition concerns the inter-subjectivity modes of social relationships whose subjects recognize each other as beings and subjects, be them as loving beings or as carrying judicial intentions or as belonging to a social order. According to him, social life reproduction takes place through reciprocal recognition because subjects can only reach "a practical self-relationship when they learn to conceive themselves based on the normative perspective of their interaction partners, as their social recipients" (Honneth, 2007: 155). At this point, Fraser and Honneth highlight Recognition based on reciprocity of social interactions.

These forms of recognition are disputed in moral grammars, i.e., language, apprehension, codification and interpretation forms of moral elements that organize acts of speech, behavior and expectation of individuals as social and moral subjects (Honneth, 2007). Nevertheless, these morally motivated struggles are attempts to establish broader institutional and cultural reciprocal recognition forms that, in turn, generate normative changes in societies (Honneth, 1995). According to Honneth, recognition is a moral and normative sphere supported by three dimensions that together form the socialization process: Love (primary effective relationships), Law (judicial equity relationships) and Esteem (broad social relationships).

This socialization process is solid and takes place in material and immaterial relationships, as well as in social relationships whose recognition forms depend on the experiences of people. Consequently, dimensions of social status are built over these recognition forms, which are claimed by the subjects. At this point, Honneth revisits the Marshall's (1950) historical construction about how inter-subjective recognitions change their status under judicial conditions that normatively guide society and on how social changes achieved through recognition claims guide the social relationships and status itself.

Honneth (2007) refers to the civil, political and social rights processes, analyzing how these rights derived from social struggles through broader interpretations of rights based on the universal logic. These rights hold different individuals as having the same moral value; in other words, individuals who inter-subjectively see themselves as equals. It is obvious that this recognition takes place in struggles, since the rights of specific groups are guided by the recognition of the ones bond to it, rather than of those who are "outside" of it, i.e., a downgraded recognition.

Therefore, recognition is linked to the ethical and moral dimension of belonging, relevance and individuality within the social order of individuals who must be respected due to their existence and who must be considered part of society. Honneth (2007,1995) follows Fraser's framing when it comes to "disrupting" recognition due to the sense of bad recognition, which she calls as we saw "bad interpretation".

The structure of recognition in social relationships concerns three recognition modes: emotional dedication (love), cognitive respect (right) and social esteem (esteem); their disrespects are mistreatment, exclusion and degradation. The threatened components are physical integrity, social integrality and dignity. In case relationships are broken by disrespect, individuals' integrity and its perception about themselves are undetermined and end up building social beings from inequality relationships. Such a disruption caused what Honneth calls "suffering due to indeterminacy", according to which there are no intersubjective recognition and self-development ability among equal individuals (Honneth, 2007, 1995).

At this point, Honneth (Fraser & Honneth, 2003) understands that redistribution dimensions derive from recognition, since institutionalized hierarchies echo on the other spheres of life, such as the economic and income redistributions, and the distribution of opportunities by balancing respected individuals and the disrespected ones in affective, judicial and social relationships. Primary relationships trigger the inter-subjectivity moment; other forms of recognition are impaired whenever there is self-respect disruption (HONNETH, 2007, 1995). That is why it is not possible to focus on the "good" life first, because social relationships will build on this process, a fact that could be unequal and point towards social hierarchies.

The first recognition dimension in Honneth lies on intimate relationships – love (Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Honneth, 2007, 1995). Love implies self-confidence when it is respected, but its disrespect leads to violence. For example, the socio-political construction in a male chauvinist and patriarchal society takes place within the masculine hegemony. In other words, institutionalized violent actions of husbands over wives would be a matter of respect and women's questioning would be the indication of non-respect and violence against men's self-confidence. The same relationship could be exemplified from the perspective of racism.

Fraser points out that the position of love, as part of the dimension of justice in social relationships, is dubious, since it can lead to hierarchy and subordination relationships "mitigated" by affection (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). Honneth defends his position saying that Fraser's interpretation is mistaken, and has not considerate his arguments; however, he points out the ethics in relationships. An ethical basis would

stop certain hierarchizing social constructions to be bond to recognition processes in their three manifestation forms. It is important recalling that this is the same argument about the question set by Fraser about the likelihood of having a recognition capable of rising a justifying normative element to any recognition claim.

On the other hand, Fraser highlights that either redistribution or recognition have their specific features concerning relational types between one dimension and the others. According to Honneth, the social structure presents intimate, judicial and social recognition limitations, each of them with its own complexity, and they form the development of human beings. At a given moment, a gap in this trajectory would imply some degree of suffering. Unlike Fraser, Honneth does not build his argument on a unilateral way, because recognition is always a social system and social interaction would not allow this process to happen. Finally, it is a fact that Honneth does not use the potential of Fraser's critics on the abstraction of recognition, which covers illegitimate claims – he brings up the ethical element and ethics to the debate, but his construction is more focused on answering to the bi-dimensional system than to Fraser's critics; this point weakens his argumentation.

Honneth shows two critical elements that distance him from Fraser: 1) understanding the capitalist social order demands including the three spheres and cultural values linked to the institutional construction of the economic sphere; 2) conflicts and struggles of social capitalist formation are related to mutual recognition principles (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 125). At this point, a further distancing between these two writers is observed, since Honneth confirms individuals' fluidity in social relationships. He is not concerned with a system capable of balancing the treatment process of justice, as it is highlighted by Fraser in her participation parity thesis.

This is the moment when the debate between Honneth and Fraser somehow recalls the lexical application of Rawls (1971, 1996) and his principles of justice: 1) equal freedom for all and 2) social inequalities that improve the lives of all based on the logics of the principle of difference. This second principle, which is more fluid, concerns social relationships in course and aims at acting by applying justice in order to focus on reaching the first principle. Honneth was sophisticated in considering the social change in contexts of justice, since he defends himself from Fraser's attacks by

pointing out that his theory is built by contexts rather than by embodying it "later". Fraser shows the argumentative refinement in the moral basis of a subject of justice, which cannot be downgraded at some point to the detriment of an open and unstable pluralism.

According to Honneth, all social integration somehow depends on recognition; moreover, non-recognition is not the engine moving social exchanges. At this point, one finds a "core of expectations about the recognition that all subjects add to social interaction" (Fraser & Honneth, 2003: 184). Honneth observes the risks of such a generalization and accepts the challenge of finding the structure of feelings linked to recognition. It is the moment when one sees what he calls "weak" construction of a sense of good. He argues that there is a joint process, rather than a given and ready model based on comparisons between several relationship forms among individuals. Ethics happens along with subjects' development construction when it comes to recognition. That is why there is no conception of the "good" life, not even at a first moment. Different from Fraser, who introduces a structured conception of "good" for her bi-dimensional model of participation parity by limiting the subjects of Justice in terms of their borders and by building a process whose moral elements guide towards intra-societies, in a substantive and comparative way, in terms of social participation (Fraser & Honneth, 2003).

Finally, in Honneth, one can see that the moral element (which has more incisive features) is stronger than that advocated by Fraser, who aims at taking this moral element away or closer, depending on the application of the bi-dimensional model. For Honneth, injustice means recognition flaws, which cover other spheres of life; so, if the beginning of recognition is defective, it does not mean that it is stopped; on the contrary, relationships embody that indeterminacy and put in flawed social relationships. It is important because this allows us to understand that Honneth's conception of recognition is linear, as if the three "stages" (love, judicial and social) were accumulative.

Critics of the Honnethian theory argue that addressing recognition as a moral perspective, but also on the normative perspective that does not set a conception of "good" life, since recognition fragilities and their constructive basis take place in

personal relationships set among individuals. Therefore, it would not be possible to determine participation parity measures among individuals, as done by Fraser. The subjects of justice in Honneth act as moral actors who claim normative basis and are vulnerable. It is essential to take into account the individual and community elements in order to avoid suffering.

## IV. The construction of the Fraser-Honneth debate

Fraser pinpoints that the sense of recognition in the justification of claims by Honneth (1995, 2007) is based on self-respect, self-esteem and self-confidence, which concerns full recognition of one's moral bases. She addresses that all self-esteem claims will be justifiable, either if they derive from black women or from neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan. At first, she abstracts from the ethical element of claims and from the argumentative sense that involves the public sphere and introduces very different claims to it – from the first two by inclusion in the system and from the last two by exclusion – in the debate with Honneth.

This abstraction brings along a double game. On the one hand, it puts the two claim forms at the same level, at different justifications from a specifically discursive view of respect. The attack to Fraser is justifiable, such as that made by Benhabib (1992) and Young (2011). On the other, it makes clear the possibility of discursively manipulating the matter about tolerance to certain groups through recognition based on the permanence of their claims in the political system, mainly the possibility of self-respect embodied by extermination groups.

At this point, it is possible to see a sharper critic by Fraser concerning Honneth's "cultural monism" (Fraser & Honneth, 2003: 150), particularly when it comes to recognition as the item balancing all normative flaws in society by creating a "moral psychology of pre-political suffering" (Fraser & Honneth, 2003:152) that questions the denial of recognition as the only item driving dissatisfaction. According to Fraser, such a denial is not the normative core, but a kind of injustice, among other cores (Fraser &

Honneth, 2003: 153). It is possible to consider recognition as the only moral category allowing the experience of authentic justice and stop dialectics itself.

This is a significant point because suffering in the moral-psychology basis from the cultural monism viewpoint does not take into account how feelings and suffering can be manipulated in order to cause distancing in associative capacity, because the popular paradigms drive social understanding and mobilization (Fraser, 2017, 2013, 2009). Simultaneously, this construction can, at first, embody a universalist and essentialist profile of subjective ways of being, living and understanding reality based on fixed roles and behaviors, according to which, this manipulation limits the ability to take suffering itself into account, but allows a "normal" reality that individuals adapts themselves to (Butler, 1999).

The psychological-moral basis would anticipate these matters by giving up the need for moral explanation and for normative justification. Therefore, there would not be, based on Fraser (Fraser & Honneth, 2003), the sense of a "good" life advocated by Honneth. At a certain extent, according to Honneth (Honneth, 2007, 1995), recognition fragilities and their constructive basis take place in their own relationships; there is no way to predict such a conception in a crystalline way, even if we have the emerging of bad interpretation and suffering matters. Actually, there is a psychological-moral basis, but it is not necessarily normatively bonding, at first.

Having a previous conception of the "good" life means accepting Fraser's perspective (2017, 2013, 2009), according to which, it is necessary to have a normative parameter that could take into consideration justice in an equitable way. Thus, she accomplishes the effort of her bi-dimensional theory basis based on participation parity, according to which, moral elements are comparative parameters, for example, the "good" life does not take into account the non-downgrading of people through moral conditions, not even their exclusion through broad moral doctrines, as stated by Rawls (1999). Therefore, Fraser created a barrier to stop the bad interpretation of paradigms of justice in order to avoid them.

On the other hand, according to Honneth's rationale (2007, 1995), limiting a composition of "good" life means anticipating minimum aspects among individuals, although these individuals may not have the possibility to set social relationships that

would justify his relational conception of "good" life through self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. He understands that one cannot make bad interpretations when individuals are measured according to their relational ability.

Fraser poses the following question: How does gathering economic and political structures of affection (recognition through love) mask these relationships? She (Fraser & Honneth, 2003) does not develop her argument, but suggests that circumscribing broader and structuring social relationships concerning individuals' social relationships entails taking away the compositions of a social structure as a whole, to the sense that affection would give birth to economic, political and juridical dimensions of oppression.

Throughout the debate between the two herein addressed authors, Axel Honneth blames Fraser of privileging redistribution to the detriment of recognition. Honneth (Fraser & Honneth, 2003) states that there is an unbalanced relationship between recognition and redistribution, mainly from the philosophical viewpoint; therefore, he understands the need of investigating better theoretical languages adjusted to normative justifications in political claims whose recognition would address the terms that would, consequently, derive from redistribution. He highlights that Fraser homogenizes social movements, mainly the media ones, by making them the "identity" type, a fact that takes away a series of exclusions and oppressions, as well as by making them "anachronistic" by taking them as "data" (Fraser & Honneth, 2003" 99-100).

Thus, social suffering is standardized, and it can produce political exclusions. Somehow, it is possible to observe ethnocentrism in Fraser's argumentation, notably in the construction of social movements that are made "essential" by her (Butler, 1999), namely: 1) the figure of woman; 2) how she leverages different oppression forms (Young, 1997, 2011) seen by her as race (Davis, 1983) and sexual elements (Lorde, 2007). Actually, it is not the first time that Fraser is blamed for such position; the two chapters written for the work developed with Honneth have one single footnote in which she points out the work by Angela Davis (1983), who has approached racism.

It is also important to highlight that Fraser addresses all her work from the 2000s based on the logics of the United States and centers her critics regarding justice

on conditions observed in this country (Fraser, 2013, 2016, 2017). Notably, her analysis about capitalism, unpaid labor and feminist demands take into account the United States – it can be considered a problem in her critics to popular paradigms. When it comes to her analysis about care, Fraser (Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Fraser, 2009) continues to apply her model, which is now "three-part" rather than dualist, to North-American women, but, sometimes, she does not take social markers into consideration . Whenever she takes them into consideration, she does not do it critically.

It is worth highlighting that Honneth (2007) has pointed out that group anachronisms and their claim references create a platform that associates such claims to individuals' rights by inputting the rational construction of instruments that take away any discursive possibility about differences between and intra groups. Moreover, he argues that Fraser attributes such an institutional rationing to groups that end up emptying the subject as moral actor by taking away normative claims and their vulnerabilities, as well as by creating undoubtable private interests and further universal ones. According to Honneth, suffering has a normative core, and this "instrumentalization" derives from bad recognition and will act on indeterminacy (Fraser & Honneth, 2003: 103-106).

Based on this perspective, Honneth points out two claiming mechanisms in the identity policy: individualists and commons (Fraser & Honneth, 2003: 129). Individualists stop recognition as group members. Commons stop equalizer juridical treatment in comparison to other groups. It regards community cohesion – which triggers the dispute for resources and recognition (Fraser & Honneth, 2003: 130). Anachronism and reification of social groups end up shattering community cohesion, since they do not take into account neither individual nor community elements that generate suffering.

Suffering is an injustice and these are the recognition-denial experiences – respect flaws (Fraser & Honneth, 2003: 112). These experiences are not associated with the object, but with the form of recognition. Thus, there are three spheres: love, law and esteem (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 109-113), and their relational social forms and principles. Their different recognition forms are divided into three relationship types: intimate, juridical and social.

Fraser shows that injustice corresponds to lack of likelihood of accomplishing participation parity under equal moral value conditions between subjects of Justice. These experiences are not associated with recognition, but with the object and with how it happens regarding the capitalist system.

At this point, Honneth's critics brings up elements from other authors such as Susan Okin, Deborah Rhode and Anne Phillips. Okin (1989) understands that the socio-political dimension is based on concepts of justice that are not significant for the construction of social relationships that imply the figure of subject-disrespect downgraded in social order. It also implies downgrading all other spheres of life, such as family and gender roles that build the public and private relationship. Rhode (1991) evaluates that these contexts echo on the law, *strictu sensus*, when it comes to claims and to the unequal constitutional statute. On the other hand, Phillips (2011) sees culture and social re-signification reached by hierarchy contexts and by violence against social groups.

The setting question becomes more complex than that pointed out by Fraser: participation parity does not seem applicable to the Honnethian argumentation framing, since there are elements unable to be measured. Would Fraser's framing be "rational-institutional" as Habermas claims (1998, 1989)? Assumingly, the debate and confrontation between authors is essential for further research, as well as delving into divergences when the debate appears little explored by Critical Theory.

## V. Final considerations

From the perspective of the debate between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, one can see a conflict in the search for re-signifying the Critical Theory. The dispute between these two authors for the ideal normative and understanding of the theoretical basis, one can observe that both of them agree on one point: the historical dialectic relationship between inequity, capitalist system, suffering and related determinations. However, these authors disagree on the explanatory and causal aspects of these relationships; notably, when it comes to the structural macro- or microsocial basis.

Fraser understand that there is no perspective capable of being "micro" at recognition scope and at the scope of exclusively individual or group disputes. It is essential to take into consideration the socioeconomic and political-institutional elements concerning redistribution, status, position in production means, productive and reproductive labor, as well as the institutional basis observed in contractual relationships such as marriage. It is fundamental to consider that redistributive and recognition relationships are important for  the social system, and that both of them need to be fully seen as structural and non-subordinated – it is so because, according to Honneth, it is harming to the understanding of reality as a whole. However, it is important to highligh that in her book, Fraser considers that her system of dualist perspective is developing towards embodying the dimension known as "representative system".

On the other hand, Axel Honneth follows the Hegelian line of thought, and is supported by the thesis that recognition is a category that does not only embodies, but also – as Fraser says – organizes the whole social system, from redistribution to marriage, from contracts to individuals. Recognition becomes a core category emerging from the subject, as becoming and potency, although he does not directly associate authors who have addressed these concepts; in other words, a more autonomous subject, also more aware of itself, differently from that depicted by Fraser. This statement brings along the suffering of indeterminacy, based on the conception proposed by Honneth (1995), i.e., the horizon holding perspectives whose non-recognition turns into a measure that will focus on the individual and social formation of subjects and that, most of all, will put them in the moral, ethical and Justice perspectives.

Both authors disagree on two core points; however, they get intensely close to each other. The question that keeps putting them in confrontation is not the recognition vs redistribution relationship, but the construction of the analysis regarding what kind of perspective we must considerer first. Honneth starts from the micro-perspective of a subjective process that builds on ethics and is based on the idea of a "good" life. The principle lies on the ethics of individuals and on their echo on social relationships. However, Fraser begins from the macro-perspective of structural

relationships based on the slow construction of the subject of justice. The principle lies on participation parity, which can only be confronted from a concept of previous life within the context of global justice. When these questions are obviously placed in their argumentation forms, they seem to be irreconcilable; however, what can be actually seen is debate leverage, rather than stagnation caused by mere disagreement between them.

Another irreconcilable point between them lies on the question of the "good" and on the conception of "good": i.e., if these questions are put in structural and microsocial terms and if they are necessary to think justice. Approaching justice in terms of macro demands having in mind a previous conception of "good" in order to organize the social dimensions of structure by limiting how inequalities happen. Hierarchies supporting this structure give birth to the social order and to the aspects of access to justice dimensions. Approaching justice in micro terms, in turn, points towards a non-previous conception of a good life, because it understands that this construction takes place in primary social relationships. Those relations are at full development process; thus, conceptions develop from the inter-subjectivity of relationships.

Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth contribute to the development of Critical Theory in its most fundamental point: developing elements that allow an understanding of reality from perspectives engaged to social change. The first aspect points out that starting from a macro-or microanalysis cannot mean its reduction to one of these points. Based on Fraser, one can see the disregard of affection elements that organize the recognition dimensions and that these elements can be a barrier to participation parity, because they have a moral element that cannot be absorbed as criterion of Justice.

At this point, it is possible to have a logic so broad that it would be unable to consider different societies in disputes for justice, because they are taken as relatively close to each other under moral conditions that allow the parity criteria. As for Honneth, it is possible to see elements of affection as social regulators that guide the whole recognition process and that can gather broader understandings than that of reason for the existence of non-recognition: would love respond to non-recognition?

Do all spheres of life have love as recognition? In case of socioeconomic sores, would affective relationships account for setting the very beginning of this process?

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