Fortunes of Feminism

Round Table on and with Nancy Fraser

Discussants:
Jo Littler, Eric Fassin, Barbara Poggio, Nancy Fraser

Fortunes of feminism: Act four
By JO LITTLER

Fortunes of Feminism collects together some of Nancy Fraser's writing on gender over a twenty-five year period, between 1985 and 2010. They are all texts which were originally published elsewhere, including reworked chapters from her book *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the Postsocialist Condition,* and articles published in a range of left, feminist and critical theory journals, including *Signs, New German Critique* and (in the case of several of the later chapters) *New Left Review.* Here, they are re-framed and re-staged, with substantial explanatory prologue, accruing extra meanings in their new assemblage. As the title expressively tells us, this is a 'Drama in Three Acts', a show charting the vicissitudes of feminism in the Global North between the new left and the neoliberal present.

The acts tell the story of how a vibrant second wave feminism challenged, at the peak of welfarism, the masculinist/androcentric assumptions of post-war social democracy (a feminism seeking 'less to dismantle the welfare state then to transform it into a force that could help to overcome male domination'). The second part begins to examine what happens to feminist imaginaries during the slow rise of neoliberalism: including a fixation on cultural dimensions of recognition and identity politics at the expense of economic egalitarianism. The third act skewers full-blown, or late stage neoliberalism, as it had -- by this time these articles were written -- emerged. Analysing how it draws on feminist energies to legitimate itself, and searching for a reinvigorated anti-capitalist feminism in response, it considers how to 'reactivate and extend the insurrectionary, anti-capitalist spirit of the second wave' (Fraser, 2013, 16).

The arrival of the book in 2013 was invigorating and dramatic because it opened up new and productive ways of conceptualizing and clarifying what has been happening both to gender and to feminism during the period when neoliberalism became entrenched in practice in the

Global North. *Fortunes of Feminism* provided a set of conceptual tools through which to understand the reconfiguration of gender dynamics in relation to the social and political transformations of Western societies. For example, it offers a schematization of how the movement from the single to the two-earner family model as normative ideal over the past 60 years happened without absorbing the left feminist demand for a 'universal caregiver' model of social and economic reproduction, which would involve including both men and women in the public workplace, shortening the working week, and enabling both men and women to become equal caregivers and caretakers of children (*ibidem*, 111-138). Fraser's accounts of the historical, social, political and economic paradigm shifts which both shape and are shaped by gender are remarkable in their ability to synthesise complexity, in their clarity and force, and in their pointing to viable alternatives: they offer a powerful lens through which to understand, and work to change, the gender politics of the present.

The book and the articles constituting it were nonetheless inevitably met with disagreement and spawned greater discussion for many feminists. Some read them as unjustly attacking feminism, blaming feminism too much for neoliberal politics; or as downplaying the success of gender mainstreaming, or feminism's long march through institutions (Walby, 2011). Others wondered whether they seriously downplayed the work of feminists who continued to not-be-neoliberal throughout the long rise of neoliberalism (Fraser, 2015)[1].

These issues are very important to raise. They help draw attention to the complexity of feminism, of what different ideologies, discourses and practices it can be articulated to; and to the multiplicity of its forms, as well as to the spheres in which it has made most and least progress. When interviewing Nancy Fraser for *Soundings* I asked if, in *Fortunes of Feminism*, she was primarily discussing movement, academic or mainstream media feminism, and whether she ever worried about minimizing the impact of non-neoliberal or socialist feminists. She made it clear that she was talking about a hegemonic form of feminism; and that these latter constituencies included herself as well as friends and «sisters and comrades. But I think, frankly, that we have to admit that we are not particularly influential» (Fraser, 2015). It's a good example of leaving your ego at the door in the service of effective political analysis.

It is noticeable now that the contemporary anti-capitalist feminism (or indeed what we might call 'anti-neoliberal feminism') that was in still in its infancy when *Fortunes of Feminism* was

[1] Such commentaries often linked the book together with Hester Eisenstein's critique of neoliberal co-option in *Feminism Seduced* (2009), a title implicitly figuring feminism as a more singular damsel than the more multifaceted *Fortunes of Feminism.*

published in 2013 has grown and expanded (cf. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the Women's Strike) alongside other changes in the political landscape (Trump, neo-nationalism, regressive populism, the rise of new forms of socialism in mainstream politics). These issues have begun to be addressed in more recent work published since, and given that we are now in 2019 it is worth including them in this discussion, as a kind of extension of the third act of *Fortunes of Feminism* -- or, more likely, a fourth one.

This more recent work includes an clarifying essay on the contradictions between capital and care for *New Left Review* (2016); and two short books published by Verso, first *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* co-written with Cinzia Arruzza and Tithi Bhattacharya (academics heavily involved with organizing the Women's Strike in the US); and second *The Old Is Dying and the New Cannot be Born,* consisting of an extended essay and an interview with the editor of the left US magazine *Jacobin,* Bhaskar Sunkara. The title of the latter book is the oft-used Gramsci quote on the political interregnum, and in it Fraser picks apart neoliberalism in an era of Trump. Arguing that 'neoliberalism is not a total worldview […] it is a political-economic project that can articulate with several different and even competing projects of recognition – including progressive ones' (p.42) she names the two key current projects as 'progressive neoliberalism' (ie, socially liberal neoliberalism) and 'hyperreactionary neoliberalism' (ie, the politics of Trump with all its attendant racism and sexism). Instead she argues for a progressive populism, discussing Bernie Sanders in this vein. *Feminism for the 99%* is a way to contribute to such movement for progressive populism, an invigorating call for 'kick-back', rather than 'lean in' feminism (p.13). This is anticapitalist feminism against 'equal opportunity domination'; against a liberal agenda which, as they write, cannot effectively defeat sexism and will let the planet burn.

We are taught as academics to pick apart the problems of other academic texts. But I have few problems with these works. They are so productive and helpful. Fraser's analyses are important because they incisively pinpoint the political logic co-opting feminism which is crucial if we want to work on amplifying its more egalitarian and democratic forms. In this vein I was glad to see the 'fateful' reduction of equality to meritocracy highlighted (Fraser, 2019, 13); for as I also have discussed elsewhere, the ideology of meritocracy, in all its various and shape-shifting forms, has become a key means of cultural legitimation for neoliberalism (Littler, 2018). One potential problem is that I fear the phrase 'progressive neoliberalism' is something of a hostage to fortune, only too easily misunderstood in an era of short attention spans / an oversaturated attention economy (or to put it in other terms, that it is not sufficiently progressively populist itself). Perhaps 'socially liberal neoliberalism' is less

likely to be misunderstood, although it could also runs the risk of breeding semantic confusion, sounding a little as if caught in its own stuttering repetition.

Yet the substance of the texts work effectively to parse the new formations of neoliberalism, of its varieties between liberalism and nationalism, the pathetic social inadequacy of the former amplifying and spawning the violence of the latter. Some questions remain over the extent to which reactionary neoliberalism is in some forms not neoliberal at all but rather reactionary nationalism, a new form of authoritarian populism flirting with fascism. The issues 'the fourth act' deals with are live, including trans debates and formations of racialization; the environmentalism is integrated more and more, as it needs to be (I write these words in London, in the UK, during a heatwave, in the month Chennai in India ran out of water; amidst the hottest planetary June temperatures ever recorded).

These two recent short books are riding the wave of the diversification trend in publishing that has popularized the pithy polemic over the past ten years, cascading from Zero and Repeater presses into the mainstream publishers. At a time when Penguin is publishing and heavily promoting the right-wing stoical self-help books of Jordan Peterson – and more shame should be heaped on them for doing so – it is heartening to see Fraser reach out to extend the audience for her ideas through different forms. The vast online uptake of a *Guardian* article paraphrasing *Fortunes of Feminism* was a forerunner of this (in 2015 Fraser said that that she was astonished by the uptake of the *Guardian* article and regretted not being able to do more popular work). In attempting to reach out and mobilise through manifestos, as well as clarify through theory, these texts instantiate what they intellectualise, or practice what they preach: by working to construct a progressive populism as well as stating its necessity.

Merely economic?

By ERIC FASSIN

In *Fortunes of Feminism,* Nancy Fraser develops an argument about second-wave feminism that is both historical and theoretical. While Act One is the expression of "an insurrectionary force," "as utopian energies" give way to "identity politics," Act Two marks a shift "from redistribution to recognition;" finally, Act Three's Hegelian synthesis of "feminist radicalism" *redux* could define our present (Fraser, 2013, 1). While the three sections that organize this 2013 volume correspond to these three moments, the collection of essays covers twenty-five years, from 1985 to 2010. As a consequence, it makes clear that Fraser's conceptual apparatus has a history of its own – most visibly in the expansion of the binary model into a ternary one that now includes "participatory parity", captured in the subtitle of a 2005 essay: "from redistribution to recognition to representation."

Historicizing Fraser's thinking proves most illuminating when revisiting a famous debate that took place in 1997. Judith Butler then offered a critique of critics of the so-called "cultural Left" who complained that "the cultural focus of leftist politics has abandoned the materialist project of Marxism, failing to address questions of economic equity and redistribution." (Butler, 1997, 265). According to her, "the charge that new social movements are 'merely cultural,' that a unified and progressive Marxism must return to a materialism based in an objective analysis of class, itself presumes that the distinction between material and cultural life is a stable one." Has not Marxism, at least since Engels' work on the family, always been both about production and reproduction (*i.e.* the reproduction of labor power)? Moreover, since Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall have grounded cultural studies in Marxist theory, according to Butler, such attacks are but the symptom of an "anachronistic materialism." (*Ibidem*, p.267-268). "Merely Cultural": the title of her essay is thus an ironic response to what she considers a parody of New Left concerns with minority politics.

Two decades later, this polemic still resonates at the center of left-wing politics. In France, for example, Mark Lilla's denunciation of American identity politics in the name of liberalism has translated into an attack on *"gauche identitaire"* in the name of class by historian of immigration and the working-class Gérard Noiriel – both converging (unexpectedly) in a defense of "the people" (versus "minorities"); (Lilla, 2017; Noiriel, 2018a and 2018b). This is an opposition between what critics of minority politics often name "societal" issues (gender and sexuality) and "social" ones (restricted to economic inequalities). Within this framework, race plays an ambiguous role: it can be considered either "social" (when reduced to class) or "societal" (accused of distracting from class). Such a rejection of the "cultural Left" can even

be heard within feminism: in the name of "materialist feminism," Christine Delphy thus accuses poststructuralists of idealism: "Butler never talks about material conditions or economic oppression. None of this exists for her. Her take on domination is purely ideological." (Delphy, 2015).

Are we doomed to this profound antagonism within the Left? Is there no alternative to the alternative between "materialism" and "culturalism", post-Marxism and post-structuralism, class politics and minority issues? Fraser presents her advocacy of a "radical feminism" as an attempt to reconcile the critiques of gender and capitalist oppressions. In the same 1997 issue of *Social Text (*Fraser, 1997 and Fraser, 2013, 175-186), she therefore responded to Butler's response: from Fraser's perspective, the distinction between "recognition and distribution" does not provide the theoretical foundation for such a polemical opposition. Far from joining forces with orthodox Marxism, she "proposed a theoretical framework that eschews orthodox distinctions between 'base' and 'superstructure,' 'primary' and 'secondary' oppressions, and that challenges the primacy of the economic." The political consequence is clear: "injustices of misrecognition are as serious as distributive injustices." But, for her, the fundamental theoretical divide remains: the former "cannot be reduced to the latter."

While Fraser rejects the accusation that she establishes a hierarchy of oppressions as a "red herring," she still insists on maintaining a theoretical distinction: "Butler has mistaken what is actually a quasi-Weberian dualism of status and class for an orthodox Marxian economistic monism." (Fraser 2013, 176-177). Of course, this rebuttal is not devoid of polemical barbs: by conflating different forms of oppression, "Butler has resurrected what is in my view one of the worst aspects of 1970s Marxism and socialist-feminism: the over-totalizing view of capitalist society as monolithic 'system' of interlocking structures of oppression that seamlessly reinforce one another." Fraser makes a plea for "historicization" (rather than "deconstruction"). Butler invokes Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss to undermine the opposition between the material and the cultural; but according to Fraser, these anthropologists' arguments about the "gift" and the "exchange of women" only apply to "pre-state, precapitalist societies". Against Butler, Fraser argues that the defining feature of capitalist societies is precisely the "distinction between the economic and the cultural." (*ibidem*, 183-184).

Reading their exchange twenty years later, in the context of Fraser's 2013 collection of essays, clearly shows that the polemic is not over. Far from being purely theoretical, it remains deeply political – from Fraser's own point of view. In a piece that was first presented in a 2008 keynote lecture, she relies on the critical analysis of the *"critique artiste"* (from

Baudelaire to the 1960s) developed by Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiappello in their influential essay on the "the new spirit of capitalism." Capitalism remakes itself "in part by recuperating strands of critique directed against it." In particular, "the 'new spirit' that has served to legitimate the flexible neoliberal capitalism of our time was fashioned from the New Left's 'artistic critique' of state-organized capitalism."

According to Fraser, this is true of second-wave feminism: "Unambiguously emancipatory in the era of state-organized capitalism, critiques of economism, androcentrism, étatism, and Westphalianism now appear fraught with ambiguity, susceptible to serving the legitimation needs of a new form of capitalism." The polemical intent against "Act Two" feminism is clear: "After all, this capitalism would much prefer to confront claims for recognition over claims for redistribution." The theoretical distinction thus revives, with a historical twist, the political hierarchy that is at stake in the polemic between Butler and Fraser (Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History," *ibidem*, 209-226; Boltanski and Chiappello, 2005, 219, 220, and 223).

In order to avoid returning to such a hierarchy of oppressions, I wish to question anew the distinction between recognition and redistribution – not in anthropological terms, as Butler does, but in historical ones, following Fraser's lead. However, today's context is not capitalism in general; it is neoliberalism. Without rehashing all the important arguments that have been developed over the years by Butler, Fraser, and many others, I want to maintain the conclusion of the 2006 volume on race and class that I co-edited: "recognition is most often a prelude to redistribution; conversely, redistribution is usually a form of recognition." (Fassin and Fassin, 2006, 250, my translation). This is my main point: it works both ways.

First, while it has been argued that "same-sex marriage" is part of what Lisa Duggan named in 2002 "the new homonormativity", a crucial tenet in the "sexual politics of neoliberalism", I believe that it is still worth arguing that the politics of recognition is also about redistribution. Indeed, in the age of #MeToo, it is worth recalling what may have been obscured by Catharine MacKinnon's later struggles against pornography: the original argument of this feminist legal scholar about the sexual harassment of women at work is based on the idea that violence against women is not purely symbolic; not only does it affect bodies, but it is also an essential part of the economic domination of women – through "horizontal segregation" and "vertical stratification." (MacKinnon, 1979). Sexual harassment is both symbolic and material, in the double sense of physical and economic.

Conversely, the politics of redistribution is also about recognition. This second, crucial element is often overlooked because of the focus on the first one: as the descendants of the

New Left have long been on the defensive, as we try to justify that our concerns are not "merely cultural". I believe it is now time to reverse the perspective and focus, not on the cultural, but on the economic – not on minorities, but on class. My point can be summarized by a twist on Butler's title: "merely economic"? I argue that class oppression is very much about recognition. It may not always have been true; but it is essential that we should understand it in this era of neoliberalism, which is also the age of populism.

Think of the "yellow vests". While the interpretation of this movement that has agitated France since late 2018 is both complex and contested, there is no doubt that it is both about redistribution and recognition. While it started as a movement of mostly working-class Whites against taxes on gas that weigh most on those who, far from city centers, depend on their cars to go to work, the fluorescent color of the men and women mobilized on roundabouts is a symbolic attempt to reclaim visibility by those who claim to be an invisible majority of "the people". This explains in part the Macron administration's difficulty in dealing with this social movement. Without recognition, redistribution will not do; the symbolic violence is thus duplicated by the physical repression, all the more so since neither the President nor the Prime Minister acknowledge police brutality – as if the wounded demonstrators remained politically invisible.

It is all the more important to take seriously this convergence of the cultural and the economic if we want to understand the political success of right-wing populists such as Donald Trump (Fassin, 2017, especially 49-57)[2]. We know that he owes his 2016 election to his xenophobic, racist, and sexist discourse. We also know that, contrary to what many believe, he did not prevail among the working-class – indeed, even among White voters, there is no correlation between class and the Trump vote. But what about his clear victory among "Whites without a college degree"? Are we to understand that they were fooled by false promises of redistribution? If so, how come we suspect that the very same might vote again for him? In order to understand this, we need to take recognition into account. These uneducated voters "feel recognized, valorized, appreciated as White men. The depreciation of foreigners, women, and minorities, is the other side of their appreciation: their value becomes greater as that of others becomes lesser." (Fassin, 2019, 121-129, quotation 126, my translation).

Neoliberalism is about value – not just capital, but also human capital; not just one's bank account, but also one's own worth. This resonates with feminist arguments, at least since Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own." But the same goes for race: it is inseparably

[2] Translation forthcoming with Prickly Paradigm : *Populism Left and Right*. See also exit polls: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/11/08/us/politics/election-exit-polls.html

economic and cultural as Black Lives Matter understands all too well. Here let us take the example of the persecution of the Roma in neoliberal Europe today: why should this minority be the target of intense campaigns, even in countries such as France where Roma migrants from Romania and Bulgaria have never exceeded 20,000? Because their poverty makes them potent symbols in a neoliberal world; by contrast to them, everyone has at least some form of worth. Race is about worth – worthiness and worthlessness. Value is relative as valuation is comparative: even Blacks and Arabs in France can feel appreciated, by contrast to the Roma, if only by contributing to their depreciation (Fassin *et als*., 2014, 58 ss.).

Neoliberalism is not just traditional capitalism to a higher degree. This is why we have to take Fraser's call for historicization a step further. For this, I rely on Michel Feher's fundamental analysis of financial capitalism: today's world is not so much about profit any longer; it is about credit (Feher, 2018). What is true about business and government is also true about individuals and social movements. This is how we can interpret what has unfolded in the last few years: "At odds with the Left populist strategy that wishes to convert white male rage against women, minorities, and foreigners into righteous indignation directed at unaccountable elites, Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and the March for Our Lives unapologetically speculate against the various facets of the "citizenship value" that Donald Trump promised to raise." (*ibidem*, 228). There are alternative ways of valuating lives – appreciating and depreciating them: this is what such movements have to say against racism, sexism, and the culture of violence.

This implies that new social movements can and must indeed recuperate the neoliberal logic of credit for their own ends, thus turning upside down the capitalist recuperations of cultural politics. "In a word, far from sacrificing substance to symbolism or concentrating on symptoms to the detriment of structural inequalities, these movements reckon with the fact that the allocation of moral, social, and financial credit has become the decisive stake of social struggles."(*ibid*, 229). Redefining what is worthwhile, namely, imposing new definitions of worth, is what politics is about today – both for neofascists like Trump and Jair Bolsonaro and for emancipatory social movements, whether class-based or not. Is it not time to take seriously the fact that neoliberalism is not "merely economic"? I argue, along with Feher, that the struggle against capitalism, in a neoliberal age, cannot afford to leave out culture. The cultural is not just an addition to the economic; it is an essential component of inequalities, and a crucial ingredient in their making.

Insurgence, betrayal and resurgence: is the feminist history a drama?

By BARBARA POGGIO

What is the trajectory of the women's liberation movement from the 1970s to the present? What has happened to its radical and critical push against the patriarchal system and its struggle to promote social and political change? And which spaces are opening up in the present and in the future for feminist action and practice? These questions are the common thread of "Fortunes of Feminism. From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis", published in 2013 by one of the most famous and influential exponents of American critical feminism, Nancy Fraser. The volume retraces the trajectory of second-wave feminism, starting from a series of contributions written by the author over several decades, and engaging in a dialogue with some of the major voices of critical theory and post-structuralism like Habermas, Foucault, and Butler.

In order to trace the history of second-wave feminism, Fraser chose to adopt the narrative device of a drama in three acts. In the first act, feminism expresses its radical criticism to the welfare state, highlighting the women's subjugation. In the second, in the context of a weakening of the struggles for redistribution, the cultural dimension of recognition becomes increasingly relevant, in a process of progressive convergence with the neoliberal agenda. And finally, in the third and final act -temporally set in the present - Fraser identifies the space and the possibility for a resurgence of radical feminism, in light of the crisis of liberal capitalism.

Very rich and dense, Fraser's book offers countless solicitations to the debate on feminism, and interacts with other debates, including in particular those on social justice, on the implications of globalization and on the affirmation of neoliberalism. In these pages, I would like to recall first what I believe to be the key points of Fraser's narrative, and subsequently focus on some of the issues prompted by the reading.

As previously said, Fraser's volume retraces the history of second-wave feminism by adopting a three-act structure, which in some ways recalls the circular structure of the Hegelian dialectic.

The story begins with the emergence and affirmation of second-wave feminism in the 1970s. At the heart of the essays collected in the first act we find a critical reading of the welfare state, where the major implications - in terms of social order management - and their limits are highlighted from a feminist viewpoint. Fraser shows how the second-wave feminist

movement, along with other radical currents, fought to transform society by challenging gender injustice and the androcentrism behind the post-World War II capitalist and welfare models.

The opening thesis deals with the inability of the thinkers of the Frankfurt School, including Habermas, to identify and problematize the gender implications of that model of governance. The focus on the figure of the (white) breadwinner, the "family wage" system and the complementarity of women's unpaid reproductive and care work, the lack of problematization of domestic violence, the tendency to favor the rhetoric of needs rather than that of rights, the stigmatization of female dependency are some of the major shortcomings feminism initially addresses in its protests and claims.

In the second act, however, we witness a sort of betrayal (the antithesis) of the instances that had characterized the previous phase. The critical momentum that had pushed the movement in the first act is running out and feminism seems to be experiencing a phase of "domestication". Leaving behind the economic criticism and the demands for social redistribution and equality, it now turns its attention to issues of recognition, identity, promotion of difference and specificity. The roots of this twist are found in the influence of French post-structuralism, and Lacanism in particular. While acknowledging the merit of these theoretical perspectives in highlighting the discursive construction of gender identities, Fraser looks with concern at the possible divergence - in both political analysis and practice - between the material and the symbolic dimension, and, more importantly, the risk that identities might come to be seen as monolithic and determinist systems - which means reifying and sclerotizing them - or as atomized and self-creating forms, which means dissolving them altogether.

However, the main concern remains the (involuntary?) convergence between the identitarian and cultural twist of the feminist movement and the affirmation of the neoliberal design: according to Fraser some of the core principles of the first phase of second-wave feminism (i.e. economic criticism and opposition to androcentrism and statism) have been subjected to a process of resignification that transformed them into forms of legitimation of the neoliberal order.

Lastly, the third act, set in contemporary times (perhaps more as a hope than as a mere description of the reality), in a moment when the crisis of neoliberalism carries along the opportunity to give new life to the promises of feminism. Now is time for a synthesis that brings together redistribution and recognition through the introduction of a third dimension -

that is, representation - more purely political, thus foreshadowing a new alliance with social protection.

This is, of course, just a brief summary of the much denser and deeper narrative that Nancy Fraser offers us of the history of second-wave feminism. I would like to recall some of the numerous insights offered by Fraser's book, focusing on the ones that have been sources of doubt or puzzlement for me, in the interest of making this opportunity for dialogue more fruitful.

Nancy Fraser's reflections on feminism and gender asymmetries have always been deeply linked to her idea of social justice. Through the reconstruction she proposed in her book, we can, in fact, see a cumulative process of elaboration on this concept and its articulations. She starts by focusing on redistribution - the topic that characterizes the first act of the history of second-wave feminism - on the basis of a critical vision of society's economic and class structure, of the division of labor, and of the asymmetrical access to resources and services. From this perspective, she wonders *what* constitutes an equitable distribution of material resources. In the next step a "bifocal" vision is adopted by focusing attention - on a more cultural ground - on the recognition of status, rights, identities, and differences: now the question is *who* should be included or excluded from the social and political community. This is a vital question in the debate on the recognition of minorities (as in the LGBTQ movements) or on multiculturalism. These two dimensions are, according to Fraser, analytically distinct and relatively independent, though they usually coexist and might mutually reinforce each other. Ultimately, the third step leads to a three-dimensional configuration: in addition to the economic and cultural dimensions, the third act introduces the political dimension of representation - that is, how the boundaries of political action and opposition are defined- which is, in fact, the necessary condition for claiming and obtaining the first two: there is no redistribution nor recognition without representation.

It is only by actualizing these dimensions that we can achieve participatory parity and actually create a society in which the legitimation of the demands of recognition does not occur at the expense of economic justice. However, it is not entirely clear how this final synthesis can actually be achieved - assuming it is, in fact, a synthesis - and may require further reflection, particularly in the light of the current developments in global and local politics and their implications in terms of social justice, not only on the ground of gender, but also, for instance, in terms of migration, job insecurity, and generational inequalities.

The second issue I would like to draw attention to arises from Fraser's take on the relationship between second-wave feminism and neoliberal capitalism. "Dangerous liaison", "disturbing

convergence", "assimilation" are some of the expressions she uses to describe the problematic stances of second-wave feminism in regard to the establishment of post-Fordist capitalism. Fraser argues that some of the feminism's most critical positions - in opposition to the androcentrism and paternalism of the welfare state, to the family wage, and to the exclusion of women from the public space typical of the Fordist and Keynesian model - have indeed contributed to the weakening of the welfare state, and facilitated the affirmation of the neoliberal order and its resulting phenomena: job insecurity, lower wages, and declining living standards.

From this perspective, then, feminism would have been - more or less inadvertently - a fundamental ally of neoliberalism, complicit in the consolidation of the new paradigms of accumulation, and in an ancillary position that favored the affirmation of new market models that are as unbalanced as the previous ones. However, even though it is undeniable that in some cases – like that of the academic context, where actions aimed at promoting women's role in positions of power have leaned on the neoliberal policies of performance enhancement and meritocracy (Poggio, 2018) -, Fraser's vision of feminism appears to be perhaps excessively severe and trenchant.

On the one hand, the risk is to underestimate dynamics that are physiological to every movement that becomes institutionalized. As a matter of fact, institutionalization always - and inevitably - coincides with the de-escalation of the critical and anti-systemic thrust of the movements (Della Porta and Diani 2006). In this sense, it is not accidental that today's most radical feminism finds new lymph right when many of its achievements are at risk once again.

At the same time, as Sylvia Walby (2011) notes, neoliberalism actually makes feminists' goals harder to achieve, for it increases social inequality and reduces democracy. For Walby, there is no actual evidence that the feminist movements welcomed neoliberalism, but instead was neoliberalism that instrumentally used some of their principles. But this does not necessarily imply actual complicity or collusion. And it is therefore ungenerous to criticize feminism as instrumentally represented by neoliberals. However, this brings us to a further issue, that is, what we actually mean when we say "feminism".

Nancy Fraser's narrative of second-wave feminism suggests the idea of a homogeneous movement that goes through three main stages: at first engaged in a liberation struggle against the gender system of the Fordist society, then progressively focused on identitarian and cultural claims that partially coincide with the objectives of neoliberal capitalism - by which feminism is co-opted - and finally got ready to reclaim the radical nature of its origins, in the light of the awareness gradually acquired. What we are told here is fundamentally the story of

a single collective subject that reacts to the changes in the socio-economic context, risks losing its direction and finally finds its way again. On the one hand, however, this three-phase articulation and the negative connotation given to the second one might be simplifying a process that is actually much more nuanced and erratic. Feminism, the original one, emerges from the second act as a weakened and paralyzed subject facing a neoliberalism that is so powerful it can resignify its ideals, mobilizing its "double", a corrupted and co-opted version, that is, the neoliberal feminism (Ferguson 2017).

On the other hand, Fraser presents a rather skinny representation of feminism, whose story is in reality much more articulated, as suggested by the many analytical contributions that over time have provided maps and typologies of feminism, highlighting that feminism does not come in a single form but rather in many different ones. From early liberal feminism to socialist feminism, black and post-colonial feminism, psychoanalytical feminism, difference feminism, post-structuralist, and post-modern feminism, many are the categorizations used to describe feminists' different stances and interpretative viewpoints (Calás and Smircich, 1996, Lorber, 1997). The feminist movements born in the 1970s, in particular, have always been multi-stranded, often divided within themselves and with different points of view on the type of world they were fighting for. Not to forget the most recent and controversial phenomenologies, such as market feminism (Kantola and Squires, 2012) or postfeminism (Mc Robbie, 2004). An array so rich and heterogeneous in expressions that is difficult to ascribe to a single trajectory.

Lastly, there is a final issue I would like to draw attention to, which is related to Fraser's account of the so-called "cultural turn". In her book, as we have seen, Fraser tries to highlight the challenges and risks associated with the affirmation of a feminism centered on cultural issues and on identity politics. Main references of the two are found, on the one hand, in the difference feminism (Kristeva) and, on the other, in the postmodern gender theory (Butler). Actually, these two expressions of feminism are very distant, I would say almost antithetical to some extent, nonetheless they are ascribed to a common "cultural" genesis on the grounds that in both cases the focus shifted from the material and structural dimension of sexual inequality to the symbolic and discursive dimension of identity and difference. Here it is perhaps possible to grasp an ambivalence in Fraser's reasoning: if, on the one hand, the author's proximity to the critical and structuralist approach is evident, on the other she recognizes the potential of discourse theory for the purposes of a politics of resistance. Such potential largely arises from recognizing that gender is a "discursive construction". The different opportunities that women and men encounter in their social experiences cannot, in

fact, be explained on the basis of biological diversity. Instead, they result from processes of identification and socialization that are largely enabled through discourses and that refers to a specific symbolic order, which Lacan defined as the "Law of the Father". Fraser, however, fears the essentialist and deterministic drifts of these developments, and their inability to give account of the complexity and instability of identities and transformations linked to practices, experiences and collective actions. In my view this reconstruction perhaps tends to oversimplify and polarize the reality. I would like to mention here that many contributions - in the field of feminist sociological research of recent decades, and mainly organizational studies - have tried to overcome the dichotomy between the material/structural and the symbolic/discursive dimensions by adopting the concept of social practice, and by looking at gender as a situated and practical accomplishment, in which individual agency and social structure intertwine (Connell, 1987; Poggio, 2004). Such a perspective can be particularly useful in order to deconstruct and change the existing hegemonic structures. Taking into greater account these and other approaches – such as intersectional theory - that over the last few decades have been elaborating on feminism, by developing reflections that are certainly inspired by a cultural matrix, but have also made the effort to go beyond culturalist reductionism, could add a further piece to the precious work of systematization and re-elaboration of feminist contribution hitherto made by Nancy Fraser.

For an Anticapitalist Feminism: A reply to Poggio, Fassin and Littler
By Nancy Fraser

A lot has happened since I published *Fortunes of Feminism* in 2013. At that time, the structural impasses of financialized capitalism were already generating palpable effects: precarized work, ballooning debt, financial meltdown; de-democratization, political gridlock, intensified violence; exacerbated stresses on climate, communities, care. But it was only after the book's appearance that people began defecting overtly and en masse from a system in crisis. Trump and Sanders, Podemos and Brexit, Bolsonaro and AMLO–all are signposts of an ongoing process, as capital's victims slough off establishment commonsense and begin thinking outside the box–for better and worse. Today, in other words, the objective blockages of the previous period are acquiring a subjective face. The crisis of financialized capitalism is now no longer "merely" structural but also hegemonic.

An integral part of this political shift, feminism is transforming as well. Liberal corporate feminism, heretofore dominant, is losing its credibility along with the larger progressive neoliberal bloc to which it belongs. No longer able to represent feminism as such, the lean-in crowd, pant-suited advocates of equal-opportunity domination, are increasingly thrust aside by new generations of militant feminists–anti-racist and ecological, pro-working-class and anti-austerity, anti-imperialist and internationalist, anti-neoliberal and often anticapitalist. These activists organize massive strikes and demos, while proliferating radical hashtags: #NosotrasParamos, #WeStrike, #VivasNosQueremos, #NiUnaMenos, #TimesUp, and #Feminism4the99. Rejecting gender identitarianism, they embrace wide ("intersectionalist") views of what counts as a feminist issue. Eschewing political separatism, they propose to join with other, like-minded emancipatory movements in a broad-based global insurgency. Spurning both progressive neoliberalism and reactionary populism, they militate to transform society root and branch.

Certainly, these developments alter the picture I sketched in the preface to *Fortunes of Feminism*. But they don't seem to me to invalidate it. They begin, rather, to put some flesh on the bare bones of what I there dubbed "act three," an account which, as Barbara Poggio rightly notes, appeared more as hope than social fact. Alternatively, depending on how things unfold, they might even herald a fourth act, as Jo Littler suggests. Without question, they embody that mix of demands and aims ("redistribution," "recognition," "representation"'; material, symbolic, practical) that Eric Fassin–indeed, all the contributors–advocate. It's early

days, of course, and things could still end badly. But the plot I outlined in *Fortunes of Feminism* has definitely thickened.

These developments cast new light on Barbara Poggio's excellent question: how can feminists create a project that "synthesizes" redistribution, recognition and representation today? An answer appears in the new feminisms I just described. What enables them to hold those seemingly fractious aims together is *anticapitalism*: a perspective that posits a single, overarching social system that non-accidentally generates massive injustices of several major types (economic, cultural, political, social-reproductive and ecological), along several entrenched social faultlines (gender, class, race; sexuality, age, nationality), and at several different scales (global, national, transnational; the city, the "terroir," the habitat, the planet). It was a version of this assumption, that the vast catalogue of injustices we experience is no mere miscellany, but the differentiated fallout from one and the same social system, that gave women's liberation of the New Left era its radical, capacious thrust. It is this assumption, too, that faded with the rise of neoliberalism, allowing the "economic" and the "cultural" to diverge; no longer held together in a common societal matrix, those dimensions of justice could be isolated from one another and posed as mutually antithetical. It is this assumption, finally, that radical feminists of the present are now rediscovering. Granted, young activists may be vague as to what exactly capitalism is, how precisely it gestates its multiple harms, and what specifically is required to effectively contest it. But their intuition is sound and affords real insight: the sense of a common enemy, the orientation to solidarity, and the thirst for broad visions and powerful alliances–all essential ingredients of a counterhegemony.

This point deepens my diagnosis of what went wrong in "Act Two." I can endorse Poggio's view that social movements have "lifecycles," provided we see these as unfolding historically, not naturally. What deradicalized feminism was not age-related energy loss, but its fateful convergence with financialized capitalism. The latter succeeded in resignifying some of the movement's signature memes for its own legitimation. In insisting on this point, I am not primarily interested in apportioning blame–although there's no denying that there *were*, and still *are*, powerful corporate, state and global femocrats who warmly embrace these developments. My point is rather to clarify the process by which neoliberal *hegemony* was constructed–in part by coopting feminism's emancipatory charisma. For me, accordingly, appeals to the plurality of "different feminisms" only get us so far. I take it as self-evident that Black feminists, socialist and Marxist feminists (including me!), and others steadfastly opposed neoliberalization throughout it rise. But as Littler notes, we lacked the heft to dictate the movement's overall trajectory. And I insist that there really *is* an overall trajectory–one in

which liberal feminism became hegemonic at the expense of more, radical competing currents. Thus, I reject both options proffered by Poggio: neither one single feminism nor many; rather, a struggle for hegemony.

This perspective also affords some answers to points raised by Eric Fassin. His admonitions to combine redistribution and recognition, economy and culture, come straight from my own playbook. The nub of our difference is not that agenda but how to operationalize it today–above all, how to understand and contest neoliberalism. For Fassin, following Feher, neoliberalism is a total worldview, comprising not only a political-economic perspective but also its own specific schemas of value and worth. For me, by contrast, as Littler notes, neoliberalism is a flexible political-economic module, which articulates to a variety of different schemas of recognition and cultural value. Assuming a Gramscian lens, we can distinguish Modi's Hindu-nationalist neoliberalism, Iranian theocracy's Shi'ite neoliberalism, Saudi Salafist neoliberalism, Macron's diversity-chic technocratic neoliberalism, Bolsonaro's hardline macho-militarist neoliberalism, and Trump's bad-boy hyper-reactionary neoliberalism, among many others. In each case, a neoliberal political-economic project articulates with a different cultural ethos and politics of recognition. These differences matter both in themselves and for efforts to build a counterhegemony. If we fail to reckon with neoliberal *opportunism*, its remarkable ability to *shape-shift*, we risk being taken in and hegemonized by it.

This is exactly what happened in the period I stylized in *Fortunes of Feminism* as "act two." As I see it, Fassin underestimates the degree to which progressive recognition politics (feminist and otherwise) became unmoored from egalitarian redistributive politics and got recuperated within the progressive-neoliberal bloc that ruled much of North America and Western Europe until quite recently. As a result, he may be inclined to miss analogous traps being laid in the present: for example, the current campaign by progressive-neoliberal politicians to convince feminists (and others) to abandon risky "far-left" projects and return to the liberal fold, which alone (so they claim) can protect us from the racist-misogynist Right. They neglect to mention, of course, that the *status quo ante* is precisely what spawned that Right. In my view, the only way to defeat the latter is to win over its winnable fractions to a project that combines progressive recognition with egalitarian redistribution. In the US, this means following the Sanders strategy of building an alliance between pro-working-class fractions of the new social movements and those Trump voters whose racism was opportunistic as opposed to "principled"–i.e., those who voted for Obama in 2008 and 2012 and for Sanders in the 2016 Democratic Party primaries before casting their lot with Trump in

the general election. My hope is that they, like the Yellow Vests invoked by Fassin, can be induced to combine demands for egalitarian redistribution with forms of recognition that do not rest on the depreciation of others.

On most of these points, Jo Littler and I are agreed. But she raises several trenchant questions, which deserve better answers than I can give here. Are some variants of what I call "reactionary neoliberalism" not really neoliberal at all? What about parties that oppose austerity, favor generous social provision, promise to create manufacturing jobs and claim to preserve national greenery, while opposing immigration, stigmatizing minorities, and purveying ethnonational chauvinism? Are these not better categorized as reactionary populists, ethnonational social democrats, supporters of eco-apartheid, or perhaps even (proto-)fascists? Certainly, there exist parties that campaign vigorously in such terms. Once in power, however, they tend to make their peace with Wall Street and the WTO. Clearly, that's been the case with Trump, who has ditched his economic populist promises, while doubling down on racist scapegoating. But of course, reactionary-populist regimes are possible in principle–and may still emerge in reality. In that event, leftwing feminists will need to craft a different strategy.

Littler also raises the pressing problem of climate change, which must be an integral part of the anticapitalist feminist project. On this point, we have much to learn from the women of the Global South: for example, the Water Protectors' fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline in the United States, Máxima Acuña's successful battle in Peru against the US mining giant Newmont, the North India Garhwali women who are fighting against the construction of three hydroelectric dams, those struggling across the globe against the privatization of water and seed and for the preservation of biodiversity and sustainable farming. In these cases, activists are modeling new, integrated forms of struggle that challenge the tendency of mainstream environmentalists to frame the defense of "nature" and the material well-being of human communities as antithetical. Refusing to separate ecological issues from issues of social reproduction, these women-led movements represent a powerful anti-corporate and anticapitalist alternative to "green capitalism." Unlike the latter, they address a world in which social justice, the well-being of human communities, and the sustainability of nonhuman nature are inextricably bound up together. They show us that liberation of women and the preservation of our planet from ecological disaster go hand in hand–with each other and with the overcoming of capitalism.

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