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Recognition and Redistribution

Rethinking Culture and the Economic

Jacinda Swanson

OVER THE last several years Nancy Fraser has elaborated a framework for analyzing different forms of oppression using the categories of redistribution and recognition. Interestingly, this framework has come under criticism, although from somewhat different directions, from Iris Marion Young and Judith Butler, despite the fact that all three theorists are similarly committed to the notion that justice is not reducible solely to economic justice and that struggles against ‘cultural’ forms of oppression are equally important (Butler, 1997c: 265–9; Fraser, 1998a: 4, 2000a: 22; Young, 2000: 85–6). Yet, both Young (1997) and Butler (1997c) find fault with Fraser’s categories of redistribution and recognition.

In this article, I examine the debate about Fraser’s framework, in order to explore how Fraser and her critics conceptualize economic relations and the relationship among economics, politics and culture. In addition to indicating their important contributions to understanding injustice, I identify where their frameworks are potentially problematic or do not go far enough in theorizing the complex interconnections among economics, politics and culture. Along the way, I argue for a somewhat different approach to analyzing the causes of various forms of oppression and the relation between culture and the economic. It is important to note, though, that my alternative framework is in many ways similar to the overall theoretical approaches of all three theorists – I readily acknowledge significant theoretical debts to each.

Following Claude Lefort’s (1988) criticism of political science’s and liberalism’s separation of society into different spheres that can be analyzed apart from each other, I borrow from a small, but growing body of anti-essentialist Marxian theory – as well as from Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and innovative new research in disciplines like history and anthropology – which analyzes the ways in which cultural and political

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processes affect economic relations (and vice versa). This form of non-economistic, non-deterministic theorizing holds that every practice or phenomenon in society is overdetermined – fundamentally constituted, not just affected or influenced – by a complex set of political, cultural and economic processes (or conditions of existence). In this way, no social practice is ever purely economic, cultural or political. Consequently, the search for root or singular causes, for example, of heterosexism or economic exploitation, is abandoned in favor of concrete explorations of the specific and numerous processes constituting and enabling any phenomenon. Related, because cultural, political and economic processes can be found in every aspect of the social world, the notion that there is anything like a cultural sphere or an economic sphere (e.g. ‘the economy’) where cultural or economic processes uniquely occur is rejected. Cultural processes – those social processes related to human meaning, values, identities and discourses – are instead theorized as occurring throughout society, just as the production and distribution of goods and services, that is, economic processes, are.

From this theoretical vantage point, Fraser’s binary economy/culture, her framework of recognition versus redistribution, and Young’s distinction between culture and structure are overly broad and potentially misleading. I argue that social relationships instead need to be disaggregated further, into more than just two (or three) categories (section I), and that the economic and the cultural (as well as the political) should be theorized as always complexly overdetermining each other (section II). Although Fraser, for example, explicitly eschews separating economics and culture ontologically, some of her conceptualizations of economic phenomena and her descriptions of the ‘ultimate’ causes of injustice being either economic or cultural are inconsistent with her commitment to making only *analytical* distinctions. Like Marx’s discussion of commodity fetishism, the concept of overdetermination demonstrates that economic practices are always dependent upon specific historical and contingent identities (e.g. as commodity exchangers and calculators of equal values) and knowledges – that is, upon cultural processes (Amariglio and Callari, 1993; Amariglio and Ruccio, 1994). Hence, ending even ‘economic’ forms of injustice means, among other things, not only criticizing the identities, knowledges and discourses that make economic injustice possible, but also replacing them with new identities, knowledges and discourses that will enable more just economic practices.

I also use my alternative theoretical framework to raise questions about Butler’s and Fraser’s conceptualizations of the economy and capitalism, and Fraser’s and Young’s theorizations of social structures (section III) and social groups/collectivities (section IV). Rather than viewing ‘the economy’ and capitalism in totalizing, essentialist and determinist ways, it is important to acknowledge both the diversity of economic practices and the fact that they occur throughout society, including in households, neighborhoods, government agencies and schools. Recognizing, for example, that non-capitalist production and non-market forms of distribution and

exchange – such as gifting, bartering and government allocation – occur is integral to better understanding economic (in)justice as well as the economic conditions of existence of political and cultural (in)justice. Finally, I argue that a Gramscian theory of hegemonic formations provides a better starting point for analyzing and struggling against oppression than either social structures or social groups/collectivities (section IV). A focus on social groups tends to obscure important issues concerning the politics of emancipatory struggles, and the language of social structures is theoretically untenable and politically debilitating insofar as it treats social practices like capitalism as autonomous and relatively intractable structures and leaves their complexity and contingency under-theorized.

Fraser’s Framework of Redistribution and Recognition

In proposing her framework of redistribution and recognition, Fraser has at least two primary goals. First, she is attempting to correct the different, but equally one-sided, approaches of, on the one hand, some orthodox Marxists and others on the ‘social’ – as opposed to ‘cultural’ – Left who view oppression as ultimately rooted in economic inequality and/or see cultural struggles against injustice as divisive of the Left or secondary in importance (cf. Gitlin, 1995; Harvey, 1996; Rorty, 2000; Bernans, 2002: 63–4). On the other hand, she criticizes those focusing on cultural sources of oppression as often neglecting economic issues. Second and closely related, Fraser seeks to define justice as involving issues of both economic distribution and cultural recognition, and to show that these two irreducible aspects of justice are not necessarily incompatible. Struggles for distributive and cultural justice can be made more compatible, for instance, if they are pursued through strategies that promote group de-differentiation rather than strategies that exacerbate the differences – and hence potential resentments – between individuals or between groups. Fraser argues that struggles for cultural and economic justice do not inevitably conflict and, further, should be combined (1997a: 127, 1997b: 11–13, 1997f: 181, 1998a: 4–6, 2000c: 95–7, 2003: 7–9).

Under the rubric of *maldistribution*, Fraser includes exploitation, economic marginalization and deprivation (1997b: 13, 1998a: 6–7, 2003: 12–13). Although Fraser’s theorization of misrecognition has evolved slightly over the past few years, in her latest work she defines both misrecognition and maldistribution as hampering *participatory parity*. She argues that justice requires parity of participation: ‘social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers’ (2000c: 108). Participatory parity has, in her view, both ‘objective’ and ‘intersubjective’ preconditions, which she traces to just patterns of economic distribution and cultural value, respectively. These latter preconditions are those Fraser associates with issues of recognition. Conceiving ‘recognition as a question of social status’ – where the notion of status is conceptualized in (updated) Weberian terms – she describes *misrecognition* as ‘social subordination in the sense of being prevented from participating as a peer in

social life' (2000c: 100). Status inequality is rooted, according to Fraser, in 'institutionalized patterns of cultural value [that] constitute some actors as inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible, hence as less than full partners in social interaction' (2000c: 101; see also 1998a: 8–9, 2000b: 113–14, 2003: 14–19, 29–30, 36–7).

Because misrecognition and maldistribution are rooted in different forms of injustice, that is, in the absence of different preconditions for participatory parity, their remedies are different. Maldistribution is addressed through 'economic restructuring of some sort. This might involve redistributing income, reorganizing the division of labor, democratizing the procedures by which investment decisions are made, or transforming other basic economic structures' (1998a: 7). Fraser acknowledges that these various remedies differ, but chooses to refer to them collectively as redistributive (1998a: 7, 2003: 13). In contrast, misrecognition or status inequality requires 'deinstitutionaliz[ing] patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation and . . . replac[ing] them with patterns that foster it' (2000c: 102). Fraser argues that this type of remedy for misrecognition or cultural injustice has several advantages over alternative solutions. For example, it avoids the tendency of 'identity politics' to essentialize marginalized groups' identities and to promote separatism (1998a: 7–8, 2000b: 114–15, 2000c: 101–2, 2003: 13–14, 17–18).

I. Disaggregating Redistribution and Recognition

Fraser's framework of redistribution and recognition is an important effort to bring the economy back into those theories and political struggles that have neglected it, as well as to insert culture into those theories and political movements that have denigrated or ignored it. It is also a valuable attempt to argue for combining economic and cultural struggles and to show how most forms of oppression have both cultural and economic aspects in need of remedy. Given these goals, I fully endorse Fraser's project.

Yet, like Young and like Anna Marie Smith, who has critically analyzed the debate between Fraser and Butler in *Social Text*, I argue that Fraser's framework falls short in subscribing to the analytical utility of only two categories and in remaining too abstract (Young, 1997: 152–3; Smith, 2001: 116, 121). While Fraser rightly insists that theorists should analyze the tensions between the various struggles against oppression, she traces the tensions between struggles against cultural and economic injustice primarily to the tensions between their different remedies and between their different tendencies to promote either group differentiation or de-differentiation (1997a: 129, 1998a: 44–7). In the face of many other types of tensions, I see no reason to assume that these tensions are either primary or the largest obstacle to uniting various movements for justice.

Because the multiple forms of oppression within each of Fraser's two categories are not theoretically disaggregated, the categories do not illuminate the possible tensions (and compatibilities) between different economic struggles (e.g. against exploitation and the division of labor) or between

different cultural struggles (e.g. against racism and sexism). Fraser resists Butler's (1997c) inclusion of sexual reproduction within the economy, because Fraser correctly concludes that struggles against heterosexism and capitalism will not necessarily correspond or reinforce each other (1997e: 284–5). Yet the same argument applies to various 'economic' struggles. I see no a priori reason why struggles, for example, against the (skill or professional) divisions of labor, against class exploitation, against the unequal distribution of economic resources or against oppressive forms of markets will 'automatically synergize' either. Nor do only two categories reveal how different economic struggles will conflict or line up with different cultural struggles in varying degrees (cf. Fraser, 1997b: 16, 34, fn. 9, fn. 14). In addition, subsuming all economic struggles under the category of redistribution may (inadvertently) conceal how truly radical many of the necessary economic changes are. One of Marx's crucial innovations within socialist politics and social theory was precisely to recognize that emancipation involves more than just *redistributing* wealth, income, property or even political power. In order to advance economic justice, Leftist political struggles need to be forthright about the extent of change needed.

Moreover, Fraser appears implicitly to assume that all struggles for economic justice are necessarily anti-capitalist (1997e: 285). Of course this judgment depends in part on what one means by capitalism (an issue I take up in section III), but it seems similarly the case that some economic justice struggles are also compatible with capitalism and/or can be absorbed into or accommodated by capitalism, including some of what Fraser identifies as 'transformative' economic remedies, for example, 'universalist social-welfare programs, steeply progressive taxation, macroeconomic policies aimed at creating full employment, a large nonmarket public sector, significant public and/or collective ownership, and democratic decision making about basic socioeconomic priorities' (1997b: 25–6, see also 2003: 73–8).

Instead of lumping various 'cultural' (or 'economic') forms of oppression together under one category, it seems far more productive to maintain separate analytical categories for distinct forms of oppression, an argument Young also makes with regard to Fraser's category of redistribution (1997: 152–3). While tensions between struggles and remedies may in part arise from whether difference is being asserted or denied, surely they also arise from the simple fact that different struggles want different or even opposed outcomes (see also Young, 1997: 153–4). Instead of abstractly focusing primarily on whether the outcomes they want are differentiating or de-differentiating, it is important also to examine the concrete goals of actual struggles, which a Gramscian theory of hegemony does (see also Smith, 2001: 116; Walby, 2001).

Fraser correctly insists that every practice, and thus every form of oppression or struggle against it, must be analyzed as 'simultaneously economic and cultural', but the perspectives of distribution and recognition are still too broad (Fraser, 1998a: 42, 2003: 63, 217–18). Closely related, her notion of a 'cultural logic' and an 'economic logic,' which need to be

analyzed for all phenomena, is similarly problematic in its overly abstract approach (1997b: 13, 1998a: 47–8, 50, 2003: 199, 214–18). I may be reading too much into her use of the term ‘logic’, but to posit the existence of anything like a general cultural or economic logic operating in society seems not only potentially deterministic – thus curtailing possibilities for human intervention and action – but also unrevealing, for reasons I hope in the next section to make clearer.

In lieu of the categories of redistribution and recognition, then, I would propose a multiplication of categories of oppression, thus disputing Fraser’s assertion of the necessary virtues of ‘scientific parsimony’ (1997a: 126–8). In order to differentiate various forms of oppression, I find the analytical framework of Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff (1989; Wolff and Resnick, 1987) to be highly suggestive. For analytical purposes, they categorize social processes into three types, economic, political and cultural – a categorization that serves as a shorthand method of naming the different aspects of social practices and institutions. As I further explain below in my discussion of Resnick and Wolff’s concept of overdetermination, this mode of designating, and distinguishing among, different types of social processes does not correspond to a presumed set of clear or sharp ontological distinctions. Rather, it is a way of making sense of the various dimensions that together comprise a ‘messy’ or ‘fuzzy’ material social reality. Resnick and Wolff define these processes as follows: *economic processes* involve ‘the production and distribution of the means of production and consumption for communities of human beings’ and include processes like commodity exchange, borrowing/lending, saving money, class processes, etc.; *political processes* indicate ‘the design and regulation of power and authority in such communities’, such as structures of command, the ordering of social behavior (rule-making and enforcing), property ownership, etc.; and *cultural processes* designate ‘the diverse ways in which human beings produce meanings for their existence’, such as the creation and promotion of values, theories, knowledges, discourses, etc. (1989: 19–22).

Although they do not by any means provide an exhaustive list of economic, cultural and political processes, Resnick and Wolff’s framework provides an extremely clear way of (analytically) specifying, distinguishing and relating different social processes. Such clarity is often helpful in disaggregating phenomena, which when indiscriminately grouped together, can lead to determinist and essentialist conceptualizations and notions of causality. For instance, Resnick and Wolff persuasively argue that class processes should be distinguished, for example, from political processes of ownership and economic processes of commodity exchange, since none of these processes necessarily entail or determine the others (1988, 1996; cf. Bernans, 2002).

Drawing from Fraser and Young, under cultural forms of oppression I would include norms of white supremacy and other forms of racism, various forms of ethnocentrism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, religious discrimination, and so forth. Again borrowing from Fraser and Young, under

economic injustices one might include class exploitation (which I discuss in more detail in section III) and hierarchical, de-skilling and other unjust divisions of labor. Although Fraser's categories of economic marginalization ('being confined to undesirable or poorly paid work or being denied access to income-generating labor altogether' [1998a: 7]) and deprivation ('being denied an adequate material standard of living' [1998a: 7]) and Young's partly similar categories of marginalization ('people the system of labor cannot or will not use' [1990: 53]) and the distribution of resources and goods may be useful categories for some analyses and/or for thinking about justice, they are still too broad, in my view, for analyzing the harmonious and/or conflictual relations among the causes and remedies of different forms of oppression (Young, 1990: 53–5, 1997: 151–3; Fraser, 1998a: 6–7, 2003: 12–13, 68–9). Resnick and Wolff's (1989) framework suggests, though, the utility of adding categories corresponding to unjust forms of economic processes like saving, the allocation of credit, market institutions and norms, the distribution of surplus, wage scales, hiring and employment practices, the organization and methods of production, and so forth.¹

In addition to disaggregating Fraser's categories of distribution and recognition, following Resnick and Wolff, I would also add a political category, which would itself also need to be further disaggregated into more specific types of political practices. While Fraser admits the need to include a political aspect into her framework – an omission Young rightly criticizes – it is strange that this addition is only initiated in the latest version of her framework (Fraser, 2003: 68–9, 73, 87–8), and that it was not incorporated from the beginning (Young, 1997: 151; Fraser, 1998a: 30–1, 2000b: 116; Feldman, 2002).² It is important to investigate, for example, how property rights and various political (or human) rights may sometimes, but not necessarily, conflict with economic redistribution, protecting racial and ethnic minorities and women from discrimination, or ending economic exploitation.

Under the rubric of political injustice, Young's category of 'powerlessness' ('lack[ing] the power to decide policy and results') does not seem specific enough for purposes of analyzing how different struggles and remedies relate (see also Fraser, 1997c: 197–202). Given that the term 'power' is often used to designate a wide variety of resources and phenomena, this category does not clearly identify the precise social processes that cause some people to have little say in deciding policies. On the other hand, Young's and Fraser's (recently added) category of 'decision-making' processes, especially if they are considered in terms of their democratic or hierarchical nature, is a useful analytic category for investigating forms of oppression and their remedies (Young, 1990: 56–7, 91–5; Fraser, 2003: 68–9, 73, 87–8). Under political practices, we might also add the various rights (whether economic, political or social) enforced by governments; electoral and party systems; governmental and representative institutions; coercive physical practices and violence; policing practices; civil and criminal justice systems; and legal rules concerning citizenship,

immigration, marriage, property, inheritance, professional licensing, taxes, government funding of social services and infrastructure, wages and workplace conditions, military service, medical decisions and eligibility for government benefits (Young, 1990: 61–3; Butler, 1997c: 273; Fraser, 1998a: 13–17, 55–7, 2003: 29, 73–4; Smith, 2001: 107–12). Because these different political practices can be organized in either just or unjust ways, they are relevant to the political and theoretical goals of Fraser, Young and Butler.

II. Theorizing the Relationship among Economics, Culture and Politics

In some ways Fraser's theorization of the relationship between economics and culture (or redistribution and recognition) is ambiguous. On the one hand, she insists her categories are only analytical, not ontological, and that in reality culture and economics are always imbricated. For example, she writes:

Culture and economy are thoroughly imbricated with one another. . . . Even our core economic practices have a constitutive, irreducible cultural dimension; shot through to the core with significations and norms, they affect not only the material well-being of social actors, but their identities and status as well. (1998a: 40, see also 1997a: 128, 1997b: 15, 17, 1997c, 1997e: 286, 289, 2003: 61–4, 67, 214–18)

On the other hand, she makes the distinction because she views the causes and the solutions to distributive and status injustices as different. Concerning the interconnections between distribution and recognition, Fraser writes that even (economic) class is probably a bivalent form of oppression:

The economic ideal-type I invoked for heuristic purposes occludes the real-world complexities of class. To be sure, the *ultimate* cause of class injustice is the economic structure of capitalist society. But the resulting harms include misrecognition as well as maldistribution. Moreover, cultural harms that originated as byproducts of economic structure may have developed a life of their own. (1998a: 19, my emphasis)

She goes on to describe heterosexism, and 'virtually all real-world' (1998a: 22) forms of oppression, as in reality bivalent, although some still have *ultimate* roots in either economic or cultural relations (1997e: 280–7, 1998a: 15, 19–23, 2003: 16–25). Similarly, in her example of an unemployed worker, Fraser asserts that 'the injustice of maldistribution has little to do with misrecognition. It is rather a consequence of imperatives intrinsic to an order of specialized economic relations whose *raison d'être* is the accumulation of profits' (2000c: 107, see also 2003: 35).

But her insistence on 'ultimate causes' that are either economic or cultural seems philosophically unwarranted and politically counterproductive. In this section, I argue that while it is of course possible and useful (maybe even necessary) to make *analytical* distinctions, it is misleading to

separate economics, politics and culture in the way Fraser effectively does, a separation Butler, Young and Smith criticize also (Butler, 1997c; Young, 1997: 148–52, 154–6, 160; Smith, 2001: 108–12, 116).³ To put it in Fraser's terminology, although she rightly favors 'perspectival dualism', at times her conceptualizations reflect the 'substantial dualism' she so correctly criticizes as untenably separating culture and the economic ontologically (2003: 60–4). More specifically, I want to argue against the notion of ultimate causes and for the notion that economic practices (and injustices) are always also political and cultural (and vice versa). Restated slightly differently, economic processes always have political and cultural conditions of existence, just as cultural processes have political and economic conditions of existence, and political processes have cultural and economic conditions of existence. To assume otherwise seems to suggest that at some level economic, political and cultural processes operate independently or, even more implausibly, that at some level the economy, politics and culture exist as separate spheres of society.

Theorizing Social Relations as Overdetermined

Precisely in order to avoid the philosophical and political problems, for example, determinism and essentialism (including economism), associated with liberalism's and orthodox Marxism's division of society into separate realms, many theorists – including political, especially post-structuralist, theorists and scholars in disciplines like economics, anthropology and history – argue that social relations should be conceptualized as *constituted* by the multiple social processes surrounding them.⁴ Again, I find Resnick and Wolff's work useful for theorizing such a concept of causality (or ontology). They conceptualize society as a complex, overdetermined set of social relationships (or events or practices), and each relationship (or practice) as a specific, overdetermined set of social processes. According to their concept of *overdetermination*, no social practice/relationship, much less sphere or realm of society, determines or exercises a special effectivity on any of the others or is ontologically more important. Like Lefort (1988) and Gramsci (1997), with their concept of overdetermination – which I incorporate within my Gramscian theory of hegemonic formations – Resnick and Wolff definitively abandon the notion that society can be conceptualized as consisting of distinct and separate spheres such as 'the economy', culture or politics. Furthermore, the specification of particular practices/relationships as 'cultural', 'political' or 'economic' is purely an analytical choice that is ultimately arbitrary in the sense that it has no (ultimate, metaphysical) ontological or epistemological (e.g. empirical or 'real') foundations. Each practice/relationship constitutes all the others and all the others constitute it; there are no independent, autonomous practices (or essences) that remain unaffected. Consequently, *no relationship or practice is ever purely economic, political or cultural* (Wolff and Resnick, 1987: 15, 19–20; Resnick and Wolff, 1989: 2–5, 19–23; Gibson-Graham, 1996: 25–9).

Analyses implicitly or explicitly employing a concept of overdetermination are particularly useful for understanding and emphasizing the complex and contradictory conditions of existence of any social relation, and therefore how that social relation is historical, contingent and always changing, even if only incrementally. It is important to point out that my above disaggregation, multiplication and specification of various types of political, cultural and economic injustices are therefore themselves potentially misleading: because each form of injustice is fundamentally constituted by multiple and specific economic, political and cultural processes, none of them are ever uniquely or solely economic, political or cultural. Hence, the proposed typology is ultimately arbitrary in its categorizations (designations) of different unjust practices as either ‘economic’, ‘political’ or ‘cultural’, with the proposed categorizations following from Resnick and Wolff’s definitions of these terms, not from any empiricist or transcendental claims about reality or the nature of these practices.

If the concept of overdetermination is applied to Fraser’s example of the injustice of unemployment and the economic hardship it often causes, an analysis fairly different from hers emerges. She traces unemployment (arising from a speculative corporate merger) to ‘the structure of capitalism’, but its conditions of existence are arguably far more diverse and complex (2000c: 107; 2003: 35). For example, when considering the ‘economic’ processes constituting (un)employment, rather than pointing to something called ‘capitalism’, one could trace the more specific and concrete processes of banking, lending and savings, domestic and foreign commodity exchange, market/trade institutions, class processes, production processes, etc. that affect employment conditions, who engages in wage-labor versus who does not need to or is prevented from doing so, patterns of business ownership and management, what commodities get produced and at what rates of profit, how and to whom profits are distributed and so forth.⁵

Overdetermining (un)employment in various and sometimes contradictory ways are also ‘political’ (including legal) processes permitting workers to exchange their labor for wages, managers (or owners or shareholders) to manage their businesses largely as they see fit and often without the input of workers, and businesses’ wide latitude to lay off and fire workers; establishing and enforcing the property rights of businesses and shareholders; controlling permits and zoning; funding and operating schools and vocational programs; regulating and controlling the availability of credit; regulating the organization and influence of unions, mergers and other interactions between businesses, and domestic and international trade; levying and collecting taxes and fees, etc.

Similarly, various (cultural) norms, values and knowledges also contribute to the conditions in which employment and unemployment become possible. These conditions include, for example, ‘cultural’ processes enabling individuals to trade their labor for wages; justifying and valorizing wage-labor; normalizing hierarchical management of businesses; justifying certain domestic and international trade practices; legitimating a

large degree of private (not public) control over economic production, distribution and consumption; linking income and economic self-sufficiency to wage-labor or economic proprietorship, etc. Some of these cultural processes are related to particular forms of values and knowledges concerning economics, politics and their interrelation: for example, economic knowledges that discursively link cutting labor costs to business success and/or to profits; economic norms that value profit maximization over other economic and social values; economic knowledges and political norms that limit political ‘intervention’ into ‘private’ economic relations; political values that stress individualism and individual rights over collective goods and deliberation, etc.

Rethinking Analytical Distinctions between Economics, Politics and Culture

It is thus misleading to suggest that social relations are ever solely economic, political or cultural, or that the causes of and remedies for unjust social arrangements are singular (see also Butler, 1997c: 273, 276; Young, 1997: 154–6; Sayer, 1999). Although Fraser insists on the thorough imbrication of culture and economics, her emphasis on the two categories of redistribution and recognition and on root causes undermines the more complex understanding she articulates elsewhere.⁶ Moreover, despite her commitment to perspectival dualism – and thus her rejection of substantive dualism and economism – in several instances Fraser describes the economy and capitalism in economically reductionist and determinist terms (2003: 53, 58, 214–18). For instance, although she correctly insists that capitalism and culture interact, she often appears to conceptualize capitalism and other economic activities as in themselves *fundamentally economic* practices that function independently of political and cultural processes, and, related, appears to conceive economic behavior/phenomena as devoid of values. To cite just a few examples, Fraser provides the following conceptualizations: ‘In this marketized zone, interaction is not directly regulated by patterns of cultural value. It is governed, rather by the functional interlacing of strategic imperatives, as individuals act to maximize self-interest’ (2003: 58); ‘system integration, in which interaction is coordinated by the functional interlacing of the unintended consequences of a myriad of individual strategies’; and ‘a quasi-objective, anonymous, impersonal market order that follows a logic of its own. This market order is culturally embedded, to be sure. But it is not directly governed by cultural schemas of evaluation’ (2003: 214).

As the concept of overdetermination shows, ‘economic’ practices themselves depend on specific (cultural) knowledges, values and discourses, as well as specific (political) rules and regulations (and vice versa). Values are therefore not confined to the cultural status order.⁷ In addition to discourses and knowledges, values, for example, constitute ideas and behavior related to business enterprise success and purposes, rational considerations and calculations, individual self-interest, appropriate and

desirable objects of economic production and exchange, etc. (Amariglio and Ruccio, 1994; Watkins, 1998). The theoretical perspective I am advocating here thus urges both the multiplication of analytical categories and concrete empirical investigations of the numerous conditions of existence (located throughout society) of any unjust practice (see also Smith, 2001: 121). It consequently suggests that overcoming any given form of oppression most likely will require transforming a wide range of cultural, economic and political practices.

Although Young's (2000) distinction in *Inclusion and Democracy* between structural and cultural groups (and injustices) differs significantly from Fraser's economic/cultural distinction, I have somewhat similar concerns about its theorization and the purpose it serves.⁸ According to Young:

Cultural groups are differentiated by perceived similarity and dissimilarity in language, everyday practices, conventions of spirituality, sociability, production, and the aesthetics and objects associated with food, music, buildings, the organization of residential and public space, visual images, and so on. (2000: 91)

While structural groups 'are often built upon and intersect with cultural differences', structural differences are irreducible to cultural differences and 'concern structural relations of power, resource allocation, and discursive hegemony' (2000: 82–3, 92). Young argues, 'Basic social structures', like class, gender, race, sexuality and ability, 'consist in determinate social positions that people occupy which condition their opportunities and life chances.' These social positions 'are constituted through the social organization of labour and production, the organization of desire and sexuality, the institutionalized rules of authority and subordination, and the constitution of prestige' (2000: 92, 94). For Young, these social positions are structural, not cultural, because 'they are relatively permanent'. She insists that it is 'misleading, however, to reify the metaphor of structure' (2000: 95). In some ways echoing Fraser, Young concludes that many political theorists have mistakenly focused too much on cultural difference as the source of political conflict and disagreement, thus 'divert[ing] attention from a more common source of deep disagreements: structural conflicts of interest' (2000: 118).

I do not have space to elaborate my concerns here, but, roughly put, I am skeptical of the basis for Young's structural/cultural distinction and suspect that it may be misleading, especially since Young includes various 'cultural' processes – for example, 'discursive hegemony', 'the organization of desire and sexuality' and 'the constitution of prestige' – under the category of structural. From a certain perspective, it appears that what her distinction actually gets at is just and unjust differences: what she includes under cultural groups may be those differences that should, in her judgment, be recognized and permitted space to function; what she includes under

structural groups appear, on the other hand, to be those differences she judges unjust, for example, gender, racial and economic inequalities. While it is theoretically and normatively important to distinguish between differences deserving recognition and those that should be eliminated, I am not sure this distinction is best captured under the rubric of structure versus culture.

Given the theoretical approach I am advocating, it is perhaps not surprising that, like Smith, I am also wary of conceptions of capitalism that emphasize its relative autonomy from culture and/or that view the capitalist economy as disembedded from cultural relations (Polanyi, 1957; Butler, 1997c: 274; Fraser, 1997e: 280–7, 1998a: 19–20, 39–40, 63–4, 2000b: 111–12, 117–18, 2003: 35, 51–3, 58, 214–18; cf. Boyd, 1999; Smith, 2001: 108–12, 116). To be sure, neither culture practices nor economic practices fully determine the other, and, under conditions of social plurality and modernity, the relationships among cultural and economic (and political) practices are more complex. But it is important not to exaggerate the ‘gap’ between the economic and the cultural. In this sense, the notion of the two realms being relatively ‘decoupled’ or of the economy being disembedded from culture under capitalism is more mystifying than revealing, because it tends to downplay or obscure the numerous cultural and political conditions of existence of *all* economic processes. Rather than saying that, with the rise of capitalism, ‘the economy’ is more autonomous from culture, I would argue that it remains just as constituted by culture as ever – it is just that cultural and political practices have multiplied and diversified, and thus their relationship to and effects on economic practices (and vice versa) are far more complicated and contradictory than in less pluralistic times.⁹ Criticizing empiricist portrayals of the distinction between embedded and disembedded economies ‘as if it were an underlying feature of economies and societies’, anthropologist Stephen Gudeman argues that it is rather the *languages* used to describe these economies, including the theoretical models used to explain them, that cause some economies to appear embedded and others disembedded. Modern, Western models of economic relations tend to portray economies as disembedded and to view ‘the economy’ as ‘a separate sphere of action founded upon a certain kind of behavior’ (1986: 44–5).

Rethinking the Need for Recognition and the Importance of Identity

As my last point concerning Fraser’s theorization of the relationship between redistribution and recognition, I want to suggest that even seemingly ‘economic’ forms of injustice – which, I argue above, are never only economic anyway – may require just as much in the way of recognition (or cultural revaluation) as ‘economic’ change.¹⁰ Furthermore, while Fraser defines recognition – in many ways persuasively – as a question of status and thus of participatory parity in order to avoid the problems with ‘identity politics’, I argue that *certain* kinds of identity struggles remain a crucial aspect of all emancipatory movements. To be sure, Fraser’s concerns about

essentialist/reifying and repressive, communitarian forms of identity politics are well founded. Identities that ‘pressure individuals to conform to a group type, discouraging dissidence and experimentation’, and that deny ‘the multiplicity of [individuals’] identifications, and the cross-pulls of their various affiliations’ should be criticized and opposed as unjust (Fraser, 2003: 76).

But Fraser appears to go too far in evacuating issues of identity not only from (so-called) ‘economic’, but also from ‘cultural’ struggles for justice. For instance, Fraser writes that in place of identity politics, ‘what is needed . . . is an alternative politics of recognition, a *non-identitarian* politics that can remedy misrecognition without encouraging displacement [of redistributive struggles] and reification [of group identities]. The status model, I have argued, provides the basis for this’ (2000b: 119–20, emphasis in original). But the status model falls short, in my view, by not adequately theorizing the role of identity in social practices, politics and resistance. On this issue, I at least partly follow theorists like Butler, Smith, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe who argue that ‘politics is not a power struggle between natural subjects’ – with natural or pre-given identities, values and interests – ‘it is a struggle around the very process of constructing and contesting identity’, values and interests (Smith, 1994a: 228, see also 2001). As post-structuralist theorists and some of those working in the Marxian and Gramscian traditions have argued, if ahistorical, asocial notions of truth, reason and choice are rejected, (both just and unjust) discourses and practices only become established socially if people come to identify with them, or at least not to identify with other, competing worldviews and practices more, or if they are imposed by force. In other words, if humans are not conceptualized as voluntaristically and rationally standing outside their values and practices – coolly contemplating all possible ways of organizing social practices and how they correspond to their own personal values and interests – then it is important to understand, for instance, why so many people identify with practices and norms others judge oppressive (Williams, 1977; Foucault, 1980; Hall, 1985; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Resnick and Wolff, 1989; Smith, 1994b, 1998, 2001; Butler, 1995).¹¹

Consequently, in order for people to be able to resist existing practices, there must be new or different social practices with which they can identify and on which they can draw as the basis for their resistance. This also means that an emancipatory social movement can create all the new knowledges and practices it wants, but it can only win people over to them, without resorting to force, by getting people to *identify* with its alternative social imaginary and practices. Thus a movement must encourage people to switch their identifications, to dis-identify with existing or competing social formations and to identify with the new, emancipatory social formation struggling for hegemony (Amariglio et al., 1988; Brown, 1995: xii; Smith, 1998: 53, 70; Gibson-Graham et al., 2000: 9–16; Madra, 2000, 2001; Community Economies Collective, 2001; Gibson-Graham, 2003).

Theorists should therefore analyze the various identities – as well as

knowledges and discourses closely related to them – associated with any form of oppression, whether it be ‘economic’ or ‘cultural’. In the case, for example, of economic exploitation, one might argue that managers’ (or owners’ or shareholders’) identities as the sole, rightful appropriators and distributors of the surplus created by others, as well as exploited workers’ identities as wage laborers, need to be altered. Laborers producing within capitalist class processes might instead see themselves and be recognized as exploited, as producers of surplus, as having a rightful claim to participate in the appropriation and distribution of the surplus they produce, as creating the conditions of possibility of various activities in their community through their production of surplus, etc. (Graham, 2000). Similarly, unpaid care workers, for example, of children, the elderly or sick relatives, might identify themselves and be recognized as performing socially valuable labor that deserves, among other things, respect and financial and social support (Fraser, 1997d: 42–50). One might likewise argue that the laid-off worker in Fraser’s example of unemployment suffers from being misrecognized as an expendable commodity and misrecognized as having no legitimate role in participating in production, employment, and other decisions made within ‘private’ businesses (see also Fraser, 2003: 68–9).

In sum, replacing unjust practices with more just ones also requires recognizing and valuing different types of social roles, contributions, relationships, and encouraging the transformation of individual and collective identities. If a voluntarist notion of the individual and choice is to be avoided, it is not a matter of getting away from identity, but a matter of fostering those forms of identity that contribute to more emancipatory social practices and ways of looking at the world and our relationship to others. It is not clear that Fraser would necessarily reject this point (see e.g. 1998b). My argument, though, is that her analytical framework would benefit from theorizing the role of identity more thoroughly.

III. Theorizing Capitalism and Economic Relations

Another limitation of the analytical frameworks proposed by Fraser, Young and Butler is their potentially problematic conceptualizations of capitalism and ‘the economy’. First, they sometimes tend to write about capitalism as if it were a totalizing and unitary social order – or structure – and as if it were the only relevant form of economic practice. Second, while I do not exactly agree with Butler’s recommendation that the social reproduction of persons (including gender and sexual formation) be included within ‘the economy’, I concur with her impulse to expand the realm of the economic, although I would also call for simultaneously deconstructing (deconstructing) the economy (Butler, 1997c: 272). (And given my arguments above, the same would hold for culture and the political: cultural and political processes occur throughout – everywhere in – society.)

Fraser, for instance, cites the utility of ‘the Marxian idea of the “capitalist mode of production” as a social totality’ (2000b: 117) and defends her ‘strategy of restricting the term *economic* to its capitalist meaning’ (1997e:

289, fn. 5). Butler seems to accept the theoretical need to identify a ‘defining moment’ or ‘defining structure’ of political economy (1997c: 273). And Fraser repeatedly refers to the economy, capitalism and the market as a ‘structure’, sometimes even as a structure with a single and/or governing logic. Likewise, she describes capitalism and markets as operating according to purely (economic) ‘strategic’ considerations, ‘imperatives’ and ‘system mechanisms’ such as profitability and self-interest (Fraser, 1997b: 13, 17, 24–5, 35, 1997e: 283–7, 1998a: 21, 29, 40, 47–8, 50, 1998b: 98, 2000b: 111–12, 117, 2003: 35, 50–3, 58, 214–18). With regard to Young’s (2000) framework, I have less of a problem with her conceptualizations of the economy and capitalism and more of a general concern with her reliance on the term ‘structure’. I do not want to read too much into these theorists’ brief references to economic relations, so instead of insisting that their conceptualizations are clearly flawed, in this section I want to suggest briefly how economic relations and capitalism might be more productively theorized.

Expanding, Disaggregating and Taming ‘the Economy’

Recalling Resnick and Wolff’s definition of economic processes as ‘the production and distribution of the means of production and consumption for communities of human beings’, economic processes could be seen as occurring throughout society, not just in formal markets (i.e. institutionalized sites of commodity exchange) and business enterprises, but also in households, government bodies, informal markets, neighborhoods, etc., which Fraser at least partly does (2003: 86). Similarly, various forms of economic processes could be differentiated from each other: different forms of production and class processes, product and commodity exchange and distributive processes, borrowing/lending, saving money, etc. could be distinguished and analyzed for their different consequences and different social conditions of existence. For instance, although many theorists ignore non-capitalist forms of production in the United States and other so-called capitalist countries, slave, ancient, feudal and communal class processes also occur (McIntyre, 1996: 232).

I should note that I am employing here very specific definitions of *class* and of *capitalism* (cf. Fraser, 1997c: 195–6, 1998a: 11–12, 19–20, 2000b: 117; Young, 2000: 95–6). Consistent with my various arguments for theoretical disaggregation, instead of a concept of *class* that refers to particular groups of people or to types of economic interests, or that focuses on domination or on inequalities of power or property, the concept of class I adopt refers solely to the (overdetermined) ‘economic’ process of *the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus labor* (or surplus value or surplus product). Consequently, *exploitation* refers to those class processes in which laborer(s) do not appropriate the surplus labor they produce, someone else does; *capitalism* designates an exploitative class process in which laborers sell their labor power as a commodity to capitalists who appropriate the surplus produced by the laborers as profit. Within this definitional framework, capitalism therefore does *not* refer to a form of ownership or

control/management, nor to commodity exchange (e.g. in markets) (Resnick and Wolff, 1989: 20, 109–15, 159–63; cf. Bernans, 2002).¹²

By recognizing the wide variety of different economic processes occurring throughout society, we are better able to understand and challenge economic injustice and the specific economic factors contributing to political, economic and cultural injustices. For instance, if one includes, as many feminist economists are now doing, the household in the sphere of economic activity, the sum total of economic activities in, for example, the United States appears far less capitalist. According to one accounting, ‘more hours of labor (over the life course of individuals) are spent in noncapitalist activity’ in the household than in capitalist production anywhere in the economy (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 13). Similarly, many worker cooperatives could be seen as engaging in communal class processes, as could some professional partnerships of doctors and lawyers and some small start-ups in the high-tech industries.¹³ One could also include the sphere of illegal economic activity, such as prostitution and drug trafficking, or the volunteer, gift and barter economies existing, for example, in extended families or in some neighborhoods (Community Economies Collective, 2001).

By assuming that economic relations in the United States (or in other countries) are capitalist and the economy is ‘an economy’, that is, a unified totality, many theorists contribute, whether or not they realize it, to the reproduction of capitalist exploitation and other existing economic injustices. Theories (as well as popular knowledges) that only see capitalism, for example, have certain political effects. They may reinforce capitalist hegemony by portraying capitalism as unchallenged and dominant. They may make non-capitalist alternatives seem more exotic and/or unfeasible than they necessarily are. Likewise, theories that portray all, or nearly all, existing social processes as supportive of capitalism also portray capitalism as all-powerful (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 2–6, 38, 258, ch. 11; Watkins, 1998; cf. Bernans, 2002).

Another political effect of seeing the economy as a uniform totality is that political change is typically conceived as requiring whole-scale ‘structural’ transformations and small, local changes are seen as useless. But if the notion of a (capitalist) ‘economy’ is rejected, there are many different sites in which specific capitalist class processes, for example, can be, and have been, challenged and ended. And because all social processes are overdetermined, local changes in class (or political or cultural) processes can have effects on other aspects of society, even if they do not necessarily or always initiate a ripple effect that radically transforms all of society (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 58–9, 160–1, 172–3).

Potential Problems with the Concept of ‘Structure’

As discussed above, Young relies heavily on the concept of structure, although she cautions against conceiving social structures in a reified manner. Young rightly insists that ‘social structures exist only in the action and interaction of persons; they exist not as states, but as processes’ (2000:

95). Young's reference to processes is particularly persuasive and parallels the analytical framework I borrow from Resnick and Wolff. At the same time, the notion of social structures remains under-theorized within Young's framework. For instance, Young does not appear to theorize either the permanent or evolving nature of structures, that is, how or why they are, in some senses, relatively stable, but also changing. Similarly, she does not theorize the exact relationships and connections among the 'differentiated social positions' that she defines as forming a social structure, that is, what it is about some, but presumably not all, social positions that makes them form a specific structure (2000: 94–5).

Aside, though, from Young's specific use of the term 'structure', I am inclined to argue more generally that the use of terms like 'structure', 'system' and 'logic' is often problematic and tends to promote deterministic and inadequate theorizations of social formations, particularly in the case of capitalism. Economistic and mechanistic notions of an autonomous capitalist logic, strategic imperatives, system mechanisms or structure seem grossly simplistic and untenable when one considers the following issues, which the Gramscian concept of hegemony I advocate puts at the center of its framework: the sheer volume and complexity of the conditions of existence of capitalism (or of sexism, racism or heterosexism); how these conditions are located throughout society; and how they are themselves contradictory and overdetermined.¹⁴

Yet why capitalism (or any other form of oppression) does not constitute a relatively autonomous or intransigent structure is, in my view, made even more evident by incorporating Butler's concept of *reiteration* into a Gramscian conception of hegemony, which, as I discuss briefly in the next section, may provide a more useful unit of analysis than 'groups', 'collectivities' or 'structures'. (Hence, rather than referring to different forms of oppression as social structures, I recommend conceptualizing them in terms of *hegemonic formations*, and instead of discussing oppression primarily in terms of the groups suffering injustice, I propose focusing on unjust practices and their conditions of existence.) In an exchange with Laclau, Butler explicitly notes the parallels between her notion of reiteration and a Gramscian notion of hegemony. She writes that through Laclau and Mouffe's 'theoretical rearticulation of structure as hegemony', 'a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure' (1997b: 13, see also 2000: 13–14). Derrida's (1982) notion of reiteration similarly emphasizes the issue of temporality and is the basis for Butler's theorization of structure in terms of reiteration:

... a structure gains its status as a structure, its *structurality*, only through its repeated reinstatement. The dependency of that structure on its reinstatement means that the very possibility of structure depends on a reiteration that is in no sense determined fully in advance, that for structure ... to become possible, there must first be a contingent repetition at its basis. Moreover, for

some social formation to appear as *structured* is for it to have covered over in some way the contingency of its own installation. (1997b: 13; see also 1997a: 19–20, 139–40, 1999: 168; Brown, 1995: 117)

For instance, like Gibson-Graham (1996) and Evan Watkins (1998), Butler recognizes that notions of capitalism that see it as an eternal system or colonizing structure, rather than as depending on contingent reiterations, contribute to the continued existence of capitalism (1997b: 13–14; cf. Fraser, 2003: 61–2). Too often, conceptualizing social relations or institutions as ‘structures’ amounts to treating them as given, intractable, that which must be accommodated, at least for the foreseeable future. As a result, such views not only curtail the possibilities for human action and intervention and thus for different social relations, they also obscure the need for concrete empirical investigations of the complex and multiple social processes overdetermining unjust practices.

For reasons of space, I cannot elaborate Butler’s concept of reiteration here, but, as I read it, it deepens an understanding of social practices and oppression by providing a useful theorization of how social relations both endure over time and change (Swanson, 2002: ch. 4). At its most basic level, the concept of reiteration emphasizes a rather simple, but crucial point: neither social practices nor ‘structures’ reproduce themselves automatically, that is, they do not continue to exist by definition or simply because they exist now, as the terminology of ‘logics’ and ‘imperatives’ all too easily implies. For any practice to continue to be socially recognized and meaningful, it must be repeated – reiterated – by a sufficient number of actual individuals (Butler, 1993: 10, 1997a: 139–40, 2000: 41; Williams, 1977: 112–13). Thus, ending oppression means convincing and enabling individuals to cease reiterating unjust social practices and to engage instead in more just economic, cultural and political practices.

IV. Theorizing Oppression and Emancipatory Politics

In their theorizations of various forms of oppression, Fraser and Young often utilize social groups/collectivities as their unit of analysis. For example, they typically refer to members of structural, economic or cultural groups being similarly situated with respect to economic structures, social structures or patterns of cultural value (Fraser, 1997a: 129, 1997b: 30–2, 1997c: 202, 1998a: 8–23, 2000b: 117, 2003: 14–15; Young, 2000: 82–3, 86–102). Fraser, Young and Butler all rightly assert that oppressed groups usually suffer from both cultural and economic injustices. But the politics of individuals’ responses to these injustices is far more complicated than a focus on groups indicates. First, as Young and Fraser realize, even members of the same racial, gender or socio-economic group are differently situated, so that they are privileged or oppressed by various social formations differently (Fraser, 1997b: 32, 2003: 26; Young, 2000: 87–92). For instance, women are differentiated by race, ethnicity, sexuality, socio-economic status, professional status, etc. Second, those who are oppressed experience and

interpret their oppression in a wide range of ways: they may deny that they are oppressed, they may justify their oppression as natural or socially beneficial, they may actively resist their oppression (although this resistance will also come in a variety of forms), etc. For both of these reasons, the political goals and identities of members of the same group are likely to vary widely. As a result, those oppressed by the same social formation are not necessarily *political* collectivities/groups with common aims or understandings, which Fraser and Young themselves recognize (Fraser, 1998b: 97; Young, 2000: 87–102; see also Walby, 2001).

My concern is that Fraser's and Young's focus on groups tends to obscure the complexity of the politics of emancipatory struggles, despite their awareness of this complexity. One of the primary political challenges facing those fighting for justice involves recruiting actual political subjects to the goals and strategies Fraser advocates. Among other things, this requires convincing more people – regardless of whether they are members of oppressed groups or not – that particular social practices, like heterosexism or the existing division of labor, are oppressive. Because they are differently positioned and make sense of these positions differently, subjects are unlikely to be recruited as whole groups.

As indicated in the previous section, in lieu of focusing on economic, structural or cultural groups, I propose that a Gramscian concept of hegemony may be a more productive approach to analyzing various forms of oppression, their numerous political, cultural and economic conditions of existence, and ways of transforming them. The concept of hegemonic formations may be better at illuminating the political obstacles to mobilizing subjects against injustice, because, among other things, it does not obscure the political diversity of social groups or the diversity of responses to oppression. A focus on oppressed groups, for instance, is not necessarily helpful for thinking about who might be mobilized to fight oppression since, for a variety of reasons, not all victims of injustice may necessarily seek to end their oppression, and many non-victims may be eager to eliminate unjust practices. Furthermore, a Gramscian notion of hegemony theorizes the role of knowledges, discourses, forms of common sense and identities in supporting and undermining oppression, that is, in encouraging oppressors, the oppressed and bystanders to accept, valorize, excuse, challenge or question unjust social practices. And, as discussed above, it avoids the reifying and static connotations of the term 'structure' by explicitly recognizing the need to investigate the specific historical and contingent social (i.e. economic, political and cultural) conditions of existence of unjust practices. Related, a Gramscian concept of hegemony avoids the under-theorizing and determinism that typically follow from conceptualizing society as consisting of separate spheres or realms.

Joseph Buttigieg – one of the participants at the controversial 1998 'Left Conservatism' workshop at the University of California at Santa Cruz, a workshop that was in many ways closely related to the Fraser–Butler–Young debate – in fact asserted, at the end of his presentation, the

utility of the concept of hegemony for theorizing the interrelation of economics and culture.¹⁵ Buttigieg stated:

I have no doubts whatsoever about the need to resist the creation of a division between what one may loosely call a ‘cultural left’ and a ‘socio-economic left’. One would have thought that given the widespread use of the concept of hegemony by so many different currents of the intellectual left, there would be no longer any doubts about the inseparability of the ‘cultural’ from the ‘economic’. Unfortunately, however, the full significance and fruitfulness of this valuable concept are not widely recognized. (1998: paragraph 15)

He then quoted Stuart Hall on this topic:

All those who therefore gloss Gramsci’s concept of hegemony with the qualifying idea that it is ideological are doing a great disservice to his breadth of thought. Gramsci is deeply alive to the ethical, moral, intellectual, ideological, and cultural *dimensions* of the struggle for hegemony, but hegemony as a concept is not ethical and cultural alone. The culturalist reading of Gramsci has done profound damage. On the other hand, for Gramsci, hegemony cannot be economic alone, in either the first or the last instance. (Hall, 1988: 54; cf. Fraser, 1997d: 95, 153–4)

At least as I conceptualize them, hegemonic formations are messy, complicated, contradictory webs of social relations and practices that shape different parts of the social world in specific and diverse ways, and thus interpellate and affect individuals differently (Swanson, 2002). This conceptual approach enables researchers or activists to choose one aspect of society, for example, capitalism or heterosexism, and to map out some of its *concrete* multiple and contradictory conditions of existence. These conditions of existence (hegemonic apparatuses) are thereby *analytically* grouped together as part of a specific hegemonic formation, but this grouping does not mean that the social processes overdetermining a specific hegemonic formation are ontologically connected or that they necessarily determine or imply each other (Williams, 1977; Buci-Glucksmann, 1980; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

Instead of a theory that makes robust substantive claims about how specific political, economic and cultural processes always and necessarily interact and what their effects are – claims that would risk being ahistorical abstractions, determinist and/or essentialist – a Gramscian theory of hegemony is more like a conceptual framework and analytical method, which emphasizes the contingency of human practices and the need for concrete examinations of the actual social processes overdetermining hegemonic formations. Although Smith does not explicitly invoke the concept of hegemony in her critique of the debate between Fraser and Butler, her insistence on the need for ‘structured empirical research about specific historical configurations’, in order to understand oppression and the politics of opposing it, exactly parallels a Gramscian approach to

hegemony, which she often relies upon herself (2001: 121, see also 1994b, 1998).

By viewing a particular form of oppression as a specific hegemonic formation, the task of politically struggling to change it involves, then, analyzing which political, cultural and economic processes in society tend to contribute to the formation and which tend to undermine it. It also requires formulating alternative practices, discourses and identities that not only are more just, but are also persuasive to people and mobilize them to political action. In this way, Butler's notion of *translation* may be helpful in considering the political tasks associated with counter-hegemonic struggles. Forming alliances between different counter-hegemonic struggles may require 'a difficult labor of translation in which social movements offer up their points of convergence against a backdrop of ongoing contestation' concerning their different strategies and goals (1997c: 269–70).

In my view, Butler's notion of translation and her agonistic, radical vision of democratic politics are more theoretically persuasive and politically promising than Fraser's conceptualization of a comprehensive Left political agenda. Fraser's framework usefully aims at demonstrating that redistributive struggles and struggles for cultural recognition do not necessarily conflict, and that many forms of injustice often have both economic and cultural consequences and causes. But she then claims that, because most forms of oppression are bivalent, at a minimum 'real-world collectivities' should be attentive to issues of both distribution and recognition or, better, 'should prefer socialism plus [cultural/status] deconstruction', that is, a 'doubly transformative approach should become the orientation for a broad range of disadvantaged groups' (1997b: 32, see also 2003: 86–8, 109, 217; Bernans, 2002). Moreover, Fraser has recently argued that her redistribution-recognition framework has the advantage of being a universalist, deontological theory of justice – that is, of being a moral theory instead of an ethical conception of justice – 'that is compatible with a plurality of reasonable views of the good life' (2003: 228–9, see also 2000c, 2001). Although I personally wholeheartedly share Fraser's normative commitment to a wide range of economic and cultural transformative remedies, middle- and upper-class African-American males, for example, will not necessarily conclude that, in addition to struggling against racism, they should also organize against sexism, class exploitation or the unequal distribution of property. They may be fairly indifferent to these latter struggles, because, for example, these struggles continue to appear significantly removed from the problem of racism. Or, they may be deeply invested in perpetuating these forms of oppression, because, for example, they benefit from or see nothing unjust about them.

Smith is probably correct in observing that, at least on this point, Fraser's 'political subject is implicitly constructed in a rational, instrumental, and voluntarist manner'. Smith goes on to ask a series of pertinent questions:

Under what conditions would subjects find themselves drawn to Fraser's progressive course of action? What if radical social change requires more

than simply convincing existing subjects on the basis of rational arguments that it is in their best interest to fight oppression and exploitation? What if there are no fully self-conscious subjects who can disentangle themselves entirely from the seduction of assimilatory political incitements and coolly decide between ‘affirmative’ and ‘transformative’ strategies? What if ‘ideology’ and ‘the unconscious’ often play important roles in shaping the subject’s investment in a political position? What if the attainment of a political goal requires not just the mobilization of existing subjects but the difficult work of *bringing a whole new subject into being* in the first place? (2001: 116–17, my emphasis)

In order to build a movement struggling for both redistribution and recognition, Fraser sees that it is necessary ‘to envision social arrangements that could transform the identities and harmonize the interests of diverse, currently fragmented constituencies’ (1997d: 4). Yet, her framework does not contribute sufficiently to the complexities of this specific task. Nor is it clear to what extent the demands of diverse constituencies can be harmonized if we take the value and identity pluralism characteristic of modernity seriously. Hence, the goal of mobilizing a large movement in which *all* members are equally and fully committed to a unified agenda of transformative recognition and redistribution – as Fraser’s framework, or at least earlier versions of it, appears to aim for – or even to an agenda including both redistribution and recognition more generally may be illusory, oppressive and divisive (Smith, 1994a; Butler, 1997c; cf. Bernans, 2002).

At the same time, Fraser’s conceptualization of emancipatory politics has been improved by her recent emphasis on a dialogical aspect to struggles for justice. Rather than the normative theorist monologically applying the standard of justice as participatory parity, or monologically determining whether the objective (economic) or intersubjective (status/recognition) preconditions for parity of participation exist, the affected parties are to dialogically and discursively apply the norm of participatory parity. Citizens themselves must evaluate the arguments of those claiming they are being denied the economic or status preconditions for participatory parity. Although Fraser does not explain in detail what is open to debate within the dialogical application of participatory parity, presumably it would include not only ‘what forms of interaction’ (2003: 45) should be organized according to parity of participation, as Fraser mentions, but also *who* deserves to participate as equals, for example, whether criminals, children, pregnant women, sexual minorities, the mentally or physically disabled, and so forth should be ensured parity of participation in specific activities (2001: 41, 2003: 38–45, 229–32).

But (rightly) opening up these basic questions again raises the issue of actually garnering widespread support for these diverse struggles against cultural, political and economic injustice. For instance, women fed up with the sexist division of care work in the household will not necessarily easily or ever come to oppose exploited workers’ exclusion from the appropriation and distribution of the surplus they produce within economic

enterprises. My concern is that, *despite* her insistence on democratic deliberation, Fraser's claim that she is offering a universalist, deontological theory of justice – a moral conception free of ethics and neutral on questions of the good life – minimizes, if not obscures, deep and possibly partly ineradicable disputes about both *who* deserves to participate and *what practices* should be open to the participation of more people (Fraser, 2003: 228–32).

Similarly, Fraser's approach seems to paper over the profound disagreements among citizens, especially in the United States, concerning the cultural, political and economic preconditions of participatory parity (Fraser, 2003: 228–32). For instance, with their faltering support for elements of the welfare state, downplaying of racial discrimination, and strong notions of individualism and self-sufficiency, all too many Americans do *not* consider 'formal notions of equality as insufficient', appearing to deny that 'economic resources and . . . social standing' are 'institutional prerequisites of participatory parity' (2003: 229). Fraser seems to diminish the properly dialogical character and the political challenges of emancipatory politics, for example, when she argues that:

. . . equal autonomy, *properly understood*, entails the real freedom to participate on a par with others in social life. Anything less fails to capture the full meaning of the equal moral worth of human beings. That idea is not adequately embodied, for example, in equal formal rights that lack 'fair value' due to the absence of the necessary preconditions for their exercise. (2003: 231, my emphasis)

It is not that I disagree with Fraser's account of equality and freedom, but insisting on the 'historical "truth" of the liberal norm of equal autonomy' is not necessarily going to convince all those who are excluded from participatory parity, much less other citizens, that justice involves both redistribution and recognition (2003: 232).

Butler's criticisms of allegedly universalist theories of justice and her subsequent call for translating between the 'competing universals' of different emancipatory struggles therefore seem, to me, to offer a more promising approach. Butler argues that because different counter-hegemonic struggles may be articulating different universalist values (or social imaginaries), understanding the commonalities and differences among these different struggles requires translating between their different universals:

. . . it may be that . . . alternative visions of universality are embedded in so-called particular political formations of resistance to begin with, and that they are no less universal than those that happen to enjoy hegemonic acceptance. . . . Thus, the question for such movements will not be how to relate a particular claim to one that is universal. . . . It may be, rather, one of establishing *practices of translation* among competing notions of universality which . . . may nevertheless belong to an overlapping set of social and political aims. Indeed, it seems to me that one of the tasks of the present Left is precisely

to see what basis of commonality there might be among existing movements, but to find such a basis without recourse to transcendental claims.

The translation between these different emancipatory universals ‘will have to be one in which the terms in question are not simply redescribed by a dominant discourse. . . . [T]he dominant discourse will have to alter by virtue of admitting the “foreign” vocabulary into its lexicon.’ It will involve ‘a threading together of those competing terms into an unwieldy movement whose “unity” will be measured by its capacity to sustain, without domesticating, internal differences that keep its own definitions in flux’ (2000: 166–8; see also 35–8, 162–4, 177–9, 1997a: 87–91, 1997c: 268–70, 276–7; Smith, 1994a, 1998; Tully, 2000).

Conclusion

Given that Young, Butler and especially Fraser explicitly state that they do not do or intend many of the things I have questioned or criticized here, it may be that my analysis of their frameworks identifies not so much major problems as apparent ambiguities and tensions in their theories. That is, if their frameworks are pushed in certain ways, it is not clear that their concepts necessarily function in the way they intend. Although I propose the use of additional concepts and a somewhat different analytical framework, I believe that, at least in part, there are similar resources elsewhere in these theorists’ work for similarly resolving the tensions I identify.

Notes

I would like to thank David Ruccio, Mike Featherstone, and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions.

1. Economic (in)justice might also or alternatively be conceptualized in terms of the normative categories recently proposed by George DeMartino (2003). Building on Resnick and Wolff’s anti-economistic Marxian framework, DeMartino constructs an innovative normative scheme involving three distinct aspects of economic justice: productive justice, appropriative justice and distributive justice.

2. It may be that Fraser has only recently added a ‘political’ category of justice partly because her framework has been attentive to many types of unjust political processes from early on. For instance, she criticizes the androcentric organization of the welfare state, as well as culturally unjust ‘marital, divorce, and custody law’; ‘immigration, naturalization, and asylum policy’; and ‘exclusion or marginalization in public spheres and deliberative bodies’ (1998a: 13–14). Yet, in the earlier versions of her framework, Fraser appeared to criticize political processes only insofar as they contributed to economic and cultural forms of injustice, suggesting that she was theoretically neglecting specifically *political* injustices or subsuming them to economic and cultural injustices (1998a: 13–17, 55–7; see also Feldman, 2002).

3. For a related, but somewhat different critique of Fraser on this point, see Phillips (1997), who suggests – correctly, in my view – that Fraser may (inadvertently) end up prioritizing economic justice over cultural justice through her distinction between the cultural and economic. For Fraser’s responses to Butler’s and Young’s

criticisms, along with Fraser's criticisms of Young's categories of injustice, see Fraser (1997a: 126–8, 1997c: 197–202, 1997e).

4. See, for example, Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Appadurai (1986), Gudeman (1986), Kopytoff (1986), Amariglio et al. (1988), Callari (1988), Lefort (1988), Ruccio (1991), Amariglio and Callari (1993), Butler (1993), Dallmayr (1993), Amariglio and Ruccio (1994), Zelizer (1994), Buttigieg (1995), Gramsci (1997), Smith (1998) and Watkins (1998).

5. The quotation marks around economic, political and cultural in this example indicate, as just discussed, the *analytical* nature of these categories.

6. Consistent with the notion of overdetermination, Fraser, for instance, argues that not only do various ideologies about contribution and job fit affect wage rates, but so do:

... political-economic factors such as the supply of and demand for different types of labor; the balance of power between labor and capital; the stringency of social regulations, including the minimum wage; the availability and cost of productivity enhancing technologies; the ease with which firms can shift their operations to locations where wage rates are lower; the cost of credit; the terms of trade; and international currency exchange rates. (2003: 214–15)

7. Honneth makes a similar point (2001: 54–5, 2003: 142, 153–8, 250–6). For instance, he states:

Contrary to her assurances that she is restricting herself to a 'perspectival dualism', at times Fraser succumbs to the temptation of talking about 'social integration' and 'system integration' in an essentialist sense... [S]he sketches a picture of two different ways of coordinating social action... which can certainly influence one another, but nevertheless represent separate domains of reality. (2003: 253)

At the same time, even though Honneth sometimes theorizes 'economic' practices in more detail and the mutual constitution of the economic and cultural in a more persuasive manner than Fraser, he still appears to under-theorize economic practices, as seen, for example, in his discussion of profit maximization (2003: 255–6; cf. Gibson-Graham, 1996: 179–86).

8. This addition to Young's theoretical framework may (or may not) in part be a response to some of Fraser's (1997a, 1997c) criticisms of Young's conceptualizations of groups, affirmation of difference and (alleged) prior neglect of economic sources of inequality.

9. Related, Fraser's allowance that economism or cultural determinism might accurately describe some societies, although neither applies to capitalist societies, is questionable (1998a: 39, 2000b: 111, 2003: 51–3). For either economism or culturalism to be a plausible analytical approach, a society would seemingly have to be, among other things, fully unified and self-contained, and the single social order/formation determining all its social relations would have to be fully consistent and totalizing. I am doubtful that such conditions ever existed, even in early societies, and even more skeptical that they could ever come about again.

10. Tully (2000), Honneth (2001: 53–5, 2003), Yar (2001) and Bernans (2002) make similar arguments on this point, although Honneth and Yar seemingly go too far in tracing all justice claims back to issues of recognition, which may have the effect of prioritizing culture processes over economic processes.

11. As I elaborate elsewhere, I – along with many of the post-structuralist and Marxian theorists upon whom I draw – maintain that, for both political and theoretical reasons, it is important and possible to simultaneously reject voluntarism and insist on individuals' ability to criticize and judge practices as oppressive or not (Swanson, 2002: ch. 4). Although constituted (overdetermined) by the practices and discourses into which they have been interpellated, all people can and do selectively draw on the values and traditions circulating in their social setting in order to guide their own actions and to evaluate critically the social relations surrounding them (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 154, 159; Resnick and Wolff, 1989: 33–7; Smith, 1998: 103–9, 184; Laclau, 2000: 85). As Mouffe explains:

... it is always possible to distinguish between the just and the unjust, the legitimate and the illegitimate, but this can only be done from within a given tradition, with the help of standards that this tradition provides; in fact, there is no point of view external to all tradition from which one can offer a universal judgment. (1993: 15; see also Lefort, 1988: 2–3, 11–12)

12. This is not to say that a surplus labor definition of class is the only valid concept of class, since a particular concept is to be preferred for specific theoretical, political and ethical reasons (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 52).

13. This latter conceptualization is developed by economist Kenneth Levin in his work on communist/capitalist class hybrids.

14. Although I do not have space to outline my formulation of a Gramscian concept of hegemony in this article, it is based heavily in Gramsci, but is then modified and supplemented by the analytical framework I borrow from Resnick and Wolff (and similar work in political economy) and by the insights of post-structuralist political and feminist theory, especially with regard to concepts of power, the political and subjectivity (Swanson, 2002). Although it has many similarities with Smith's empirically informed Gramscian approach (1994a, 1994b, 1998), it has fewer similarities with Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) theory of hegemony, especially with Laclau's more formalist version (e.g. 2000).

15. The other workshop participants were Chris Connery, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler and Paul Bové. The transcripts of their remarks and of the workshop question and answer period are published in vol. 2, issues 2 and 3 of the online journal *Theory & Event* (1998).

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