

*Lautaro Leani*

## **Thinking Ableism through Heterocissexism. A Critical Review of Fraser's Redistribution-Recognition Pair from a Queer-Crip Perspective**

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Over the last centuries, social justice has become a crucial philosophical issue. The urgency of the answers to social problems rarely coincides with the times of philosophy, which requires a detailed reflection of the causes, effects, and connections. In our globalized and changing context, social theories that describe and provide answers to deep social inequalities, cross-cultural contacts, and the diversity of identities and value horizons become necessary. Nancy Fraser's perspectival dualism allows us to think of two equally relevant dimensions of justice that have been expressed in the struggles for social change: redistribution and recognition. The first is associated with the possession of goods and the distribution of economic resources among social groups. The second is associated with the assignment of value and prestige to these groups, i.e., social status. Both justice dimensions are interpreted positively so that redistribution and recognition are desirable among multiple social actors (N. Fraser, 2003). Under this framework, redistribution injustices entail maldistribution, while recognition injustices entail misrecognition.

In practice, the dimensions of redistribution and recognition do not exist separately (N. Fraser, 2003). First, economic aspects of a society are always culturally codified. Likewise, cultural aspects of a society structure its modes of production and reproduction of life, as well as its ways of distributing social benefits and burdens. Secondly, social changes that

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a translated and revised version of a paper previously published in Spanish: Leani, L. (2023). El heterocissexismo como clave conceptual del capacitismo. Una revisión crítica del par redistribución-reconocimiento de Fraser desde una perspectiva queer-crip. *Revista Argentina de Ciencia Política*, 1(30), 190-214. <https://publicaciones.sociales.uba.ar/index.php/revistaargentinienciapolitica/article/view/9009>.

produce redistributive effects have consequences for recognition and vice versa. As a result, the dualism proposed by Fraser is not ontological, but perspectivist. Thus, the distinction between redistributive and recognition dimensions allows for a more complex analysis of social injustices without reducing either of these to the other, nor eliminating the differences and losing the depth of analysis (Almeida, 2009).

In the present paper, I will analyze Fraser's two-dimensional framework, so I will leave aside her further three-dimensional theorizing, which incorporates political representation (N. Fraser, 2008, 2020). This decision is based on two reasons. First, I believe that considering political representation as a dimension separate from redistribution and recognition is a major contribution to the analysis of the scope of justice and the globalization of social injustices. However, since this paper does not intend to deal with this aspect, its incorporation would imply making the analysis unnecessarily complex. Second, my interest is to critically review the category of "despised sexuality", which is deployed during the development of its two-dimensional framework but subsequently disappears.

In this paper, I will argue that heterocissexism<sup>2</sup>, what Fraser calls a "despised sexuality", is grounded in both inequalities of recognition and redistribution, and that ableism<sup>3</sup> shares a similar constitution. A queer-crip perspective<sup>4</sup> will provide arguments for pointing out that these two systems of oppression underpin, define, and naturalize the capitalist economy in productive terms while being functional to that economy in distributive terms. I will begin by distinguishing affirmative and transformative strategies to show that Fraser's perspectival dualism is useful in identifying and explaining false solutions to particular social injustices. In that section, I will take pinkwashing and cripwashing as relevant

<sup>2</sup> Heterocissexism is a system of oppression structured by beliefs, processes, and practices that privilege heterosexual and cisgender identities over others. This system conditions institutional access, permanence, and participation as well as people's subjectivity and self-perception. Heterocissexism is based on two normative regimes that distinguish the human from the non-human: heteronormativity, which establishes as normal and desirable those patterns of gender, sexuality, practices, and desires associated with heterosexuality (Warner, 1991), and cisnormativity, which "sustains the prejudice that cis people are better, more important, more authentic than trans people" (Radi, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> For now, it will suffice to conceive of ableism as disability oppression. I will develop this concept further later.

<sup>4</sup> The theoretical postulates of a queer-crip perspective are based on the questioning of the stability of identities and bodily normalization (García-Santesmases Fernández, 2017). From this perspective, categories about bodily and psychic functioning, as well as gender and sexuality, are produced in unequal social conditions that fix a certain functional and sexual ideal, while defining alternative attributes as deficiencies (Kafer, 2003; McRuer, 2002). Taking these theoretical developments as a perspective implies using them not so much as a theoretical corpus but rather as a toolbox, an interpretative strategy, for thinking about reality (Pérez, 2021b).

examples of strategies that are advertised as transforming the causes of injustice but only deal, at best, with alleviating some of its effects. Second, I will show, in opposition to Fraser, that heterocissexism also has an economic basis, whether we understand the economy in terms of the social production and reproduction of life, or the distribution of social benefits and burdens. Finally, I will use a queer-crip perspective to explain the functioning of ableism and its connection to heterocissexism, with particular emphasis on their similarities and the Fraserian distinction between exploited persons and eliminated persons. In doing so, I will show that both ableism and heterocissexism are intrinsically linked to the economic structure of capitalist society and are functional to its expansion. Furthermore, I will argue for the actual importance of reflecting on the effects of heterocissexism, ableism, and neoliberalism simultaneously.

### **I. Political strategies from a dualistic framework**

In this paper I will understand the economy in a broad sense: it consists of both the social organization of the means of production and reproduction of life and the distribution of social benefits and burdens. Moreover, redistributive injustice encompasses the subjects exploited by the economic structure but also the subjects displaced to informal, poorly paid, unpaid work or directly eliminated from the economic circuit. In turn, I will conceive of culture as the modality of social integration and the institutionalized patterns of cultural value and assignment of prestige to social actors (N. Fraser, 2003). The injustice of recognition encompasses both those individuals undervalued by the scales of cultural value, as well as those who are directly invisible or unrecognized. Under this interpretation of injustice, it is possible to be, for example, economically exploited but culturally invisible. Feminist demands for the recognition of care work, historically assigned to women, is an evident example of how a social group can be economically exploited while being culturally devalued or unrecognized (Bolla and Queirolo, 2021).

According to Fraser, the objective of economic redistribution demands a homogenizing conception of the population, i.e., as a uniform mass that deserves a fair share of the goods produced or of the available resources. On the other hand, cultural recognition requires thinking of humanity as necessarily diverse and valuable in its differences, composed of individuals who are not interchangeable, and who have different needs and interests (N. Fraser, 2003). Hence, many schools of thought have viewed redistribution and recognition as opposing, even contradictory, objectives (Barry, 2001; Rorty, 2000; Taylor, 1994)

Those political strategies that focus on the visible effects of social in-

justices are called “affirmative”, while those that focus on the causes that generate them are called “transformative” (N. Fraser, 2003). Affirmative strategies encourage the expansion of one dimension of justice, either redistribution or recognition, but tend to undermine the other. Their objective is to alleviate inequalities but not to modify the underlying social structure that generally operates as their cause. In contrast, transformative strategies aim to change the underlying structure, which makes it possible to broaden both dimensions of justice, so that redistribution and recognition do not cancel each other out. In a small-scale example, a wage increase for a company’s workers is an affirmative strategy. Alternatively, the transition from a traditional enterprise to a worker-managed cooperative is a case of a transformative strategy. Although in the resolution of injustices, transformative strategies show a clear political advantage over affirmative ones, in most cases, the socio-political context limits the capacity for action of the social movements that implement or demand such strategies. Moreover, there are cases in which a set of affirmative strategies has had transformative effects, so that “in fact, the distinction between affirmation and transformation is not absolute, but contextual” (N. Fraser, 2003, p. 78).

From an intersectional point of view<sup>5</sup>, it can be glimpsed that affirmative strategies usually take a single axis of oppression, while transformative ones attend to several of these. The univocity of affirmative strategies often leads to undesired social effects. Thus, for example, when solutions to gender-based violence are considered solely in terms of the gender variable, it is common to propose increased penalties for male perpetrators of violence. When these punitive demands take the leading role, victims who have different needs, who cannot denounce and expose themselves to the criminal justice system and police surveillance, or who depend, in part, on the economic income of those same men who are denounced, are not considered. Consequently, the increase in punitive measures strengthens a penal system that protects only a reduced portion of “women”: those who do not need to resort to “drug dealing” to have an income that allows them to subsist, “or whose actions, even if classified as crimes, are not prosecuted, or whose containment structures prevent them from falling into trafficking networks for sexual exploitation or to work as ‘mules’” (Pérez, 2021a, p. 530)<sup>6</sup>. Thus, these affirmative measures have an unequal

<sup>5</sup> Although already circulating in the activist field since the 1970s, “intersectionality” is a concept introduced to the academic field by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) from critical race theory. Here I will understand intersectionality broadly, that is, as a way of conceiving social inequalities along multiple axes of social division. As consequence, in each subject there is a complex and relational combination of simultaneous oppressions and privileges (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> This and the following translations of the texts quoted in Spanish are my own.

impact on the social group they claim to protect and reinforce a penal-penitentiary system whose selectivity and scope particularly disadvantage trans, poor, racialized, and/or immigrant women (Álvarez, 2018; Davis, 2003). Therefore, when punitive measures are supported by the most disadvantaged groups, the result is the paradox of “appealing to the criminal law to protect a group that will ultimately end up being penalized by the instrument that is supposed to protect it” (Larrauri, 2011, p. 4)<sup>7</sup>.

One of the main problems faced by social movements when demanding better living conditions is the false advertising of political strategies that are affirmative but are presented as transformative. Many strategies are advertised as ways to intervene in the causes of social injustices but restrict their impact to the effects. This is problematic because while they devote the greatest efforts to alleviating the unjust results already produced, they relegate to the background the dismantling of the underlying conditions that continue to generate them. Moreover, these deceptive strategies generate a feeling of exhaustion and satiety in the demands for better living conditions, since the advertising installs the illusion that a definitive and stable conquest in the defense of the rights of the most disadvantaged people has been progressively achieved. Phenomena such as pinkwashing and cripwashing show recognition strategies that, far from benefiting the oppressed group, deepen the economic gap between the most privileged and the least privileged people within the affected group. As I will show, the analysis of these examples from the redistribution-recognition pair shows the richness of a conceptual framework that allows us to detect, in a given social phenomenon, maldistribution and misrecognition as forms of injustice that cannot be reduced<sup>8</sup>.

Pinkwashing<sup>9</sup> consists of a marketing strategy that promotes certain companies and States as allies of LGBT+ movements to undermine other

<sup>7</sup> For Wendy Brown, this paradox that blocks us from thinking of individuals as traversed by more than one form of social power is found in the very terms of civil rights legislation (2000). While these rights promise to remedy, for example, gender-based violence, at best, they only do so by fragmenting violence and hierarchizing subjects. This occurs according to the abstraction of the discursive experiences and truths of a small set of people, marked by a very specific notion of gender, and their inscription in law, as a representative sample of the whole (Brown, 2000; Wisky and Pagani, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Fraser’s dualism differs from monist theories of justice, i.e., those that consider that one of the dimensions of justice can be reduced to the other. An example mentioned by the author is the normative monism of recognition, or “culturalism”, developed by Axel Honneth (1996).

<sup>9</sup> This concept was initially used to identify “a deliberate strategy used by Israel’s government, agencies, and the Israeli LGBT community to exploit Israel’s relatively progressive stance on gay rights, and to deflect international attention from its gross violations of human rights and international law” (Shafie, 2015, p. 83). The usage I propose here is broader and considers other latitudes while encompassing more subtle pinkwashing strategies.

rights of the population, including those who make up these movements (Pérez-Sánchez, 2017). This promotion is generated from minimal concessions to these groups, mainly through visibility in campaigns and advertisements, the institutionalization of Pride Day, scarce economic benefits, or the implementation of homonormative rights<sup>10</sup>, such as equal marriage and anti-discrimination laws. These concessions fulfill Fraser's description of affirmative strategies, as they consider a single axis of oppression and, consequently, while fleetingly expanding the recognition of LGBT+ people, they reinforce redistributive inequalities. Thus, they entail economic and political benefits for corporations and States, as well as entailing conformism in emancipatory struggles and widening the economic gap between LGBT+ people who assimilate to homonormative standards and those who do not (Shafie, 2015). Pinkwashing allows companies and States to continue exercising violence and exclusion towards the most vulnerable portions of this social group through a discourse of progress that presents the current situation as egalitarian and depoliticized, which generates the illusion that the blame for the injustices that persist is individual. Far from improving the situation of LGBT+ people who are also vulnerable to other types of oppression, when homonormative concessions serve as pinkwashing they reinforce the institutions that cause social injustices, such as the free market, marriage, and prison.

On the other hand, crippwashing consists of the use of the rights of people with disabilities as a tool to undermine other rights of the most disadvantaged portion of the population, among whom are those very same people (Moscoso Pérez, 2016, 2017). States and companies practice crippwashing when they advertise their small concessions, such as visibility in campaigns and advertisements, national awareness days, scarce economic benefits, or unfulfilled accessibility laws, intending to cover up their austerity measures from the general population. This deepens the economic gap and establishes hierarchies among disabled people. As pinkwashing, this practice uses discourses of progress to mask affirmative strategies and present them as transformative, as it pretends to redistribute and recognize a vulnerable population, but only makes minimal legal and recognition concessions that encourage competition among people to access them, which develops a meritocratic and depoliticized

<sup>10</sup> Homonormativity refers to the introduction of heteronormativity into LGBT+ culture and subjectivity. This normative regime consists of a set of policy measures that maintain neoliberalism through the preservation of heteronormative practices and institutions (Duggan, 2002), such as monogamy, procreation, romantic love, white and thin faces, financial freedom, and so on. These standards hierarchize people within their social groups, so that those who assimilate and come closer to homonormative standards are considered more legitimate to receive rights and those who are unable, or unwilling to do so, are considered problematic, non-conformists or obstacles to equality.

common sense. Thus, the Fraserian framework, which distinguishes affirmative strategies from transformative strategies, allows us to understand that both pinkwashing and cripwashing are strategies used to present measures that reinforce social injustices as if they effectively dismantled their causes.

## II. Heterocissexism as a two-dimensional category

A two-dimensional category is a hybrid social division whose resolution of inequality combines demands for economic redistribution with demands for cultural recognition (N. Fraser, 2003)<sup>11</sup>. According to Fraser, sexism and racism are two-dimensional categories since their injustices are based on both an inequitable distribution of goods and an unequal social status system. Thus, if we want to reverse gender injustices, we will have to carry out, on the one hand, social transformations that restructure the gendered modes of production and reproduction of life, as well as the gendered distribution of social benefits and burdens. On the other, social transformations that alter the gendered modes of social integration and the institutionalized patterns of gendered cultural value. However, when Fraser studies the category of “sexuality” she argues that “the ultimate cause of heterosexist injustice is the status order, not the economic structure of capitalist society” (N. Fraser, 2003, p. 24). To reconstruct and refute this position, I will focus on her central argument: the regulation of sexuality is relatively decoupled from the economic structure of capitalist society.

Although Fraser clarifies that, in practice, heterocissexist<sup>12</sup> injustices generate both maldistribution and misrecognition, she asserts that the ultimate cause of these effects lies in an unequal social status system. In

<sup>11</sup> Consider the distinction between the earlier notion of “bivalent collectivity” (N. Fraser, 1995) and the later notion of “two-dimensional category”. While the former was intended to describe certain social groups, the latter describes systems of social subordination. The fact that Fraser has chosen to replace her earlier notion with the “two-dimensional category” is explained, among other reasons, by her dialogues with queer theory. Further on, I will give some reasons about the advantages of this choice.

<sup>12</sup> Although Fraser uses the notion of “heterosexism”, in her analysis her conception of “sexuality” as a theoretical category presupposes both sexual orientation and gender identity, so not including the category of “cissexism” would inhibit a more precise inquiry. Indeed, when Butler (1997) responds to Fraser (1995), she also considers the social subordination of trans\* people. Moreover, cissexism defines and marks the limits of heterosexism but also sexism. The social reproduction of the species through the nuclear family presupposes a sexual division that hierarchizes males and females, but which only makes sense when the obligatory desire is heterosexual, and the obligatory identity is cissexual.

other words, although heterocissexism has redistribution effects, these can be causally reduced to recognition injustices, so that to combat heterocissexist injustices it is sufficient to focus on the status system in place. This is explained by the fact that the regulation of sexuality is relatively decoupled from the economic structure of capitalist society so such regulation is not necessarily functional to the expansion of capital (N. Fraser, 2003).

However, it is highly problematic to think of the sexual division of labor between males and females as constitutive of capitalism without recognizing that such a division is underpinned by two other social divisions: heterosexual-homo/bisexual and cisgender-transgender. As Butler asks:

Is there any way to analyze how normative heterosexuality and its ‘genders’ are produced within the sphere of reproduction without noting the compulsory ways in which homosexuality and bisexuality, as well as transgender, are produced as the sexually ‘abject’, and extending the mode of production to account for precisely this social mechanism of regulation? (Butler, 1997, p. 275).

If the “private” sphere of social reproduction guarantees the place of the category of “gender” within the framework of the capitalist political economy, then sexual regulation, which sustains, defines, and naturalizes the sphere of reproduction, necessarily occupies a place in that economy. Just as social reproduction sustains and defines the contours of the production of goods in a capitalist society, the elimination or exclusion of surplus subjects stands as the sustenance, the definition of the limits, and the naturalization of capitalist exploitation, insofar as its constitution is necessarily heterosexual and cissexual. The first dividing line distinguishes the public sphere, made up of those who are in charge of producing, from the private sphere, made up of those who are in charge of reproducing, while the second distinguishes the exploitable sphere, made up of those who must produce and reproduce, from the eliminable sphere, made up of those who must neither produce nor reproduce. Thus, the productive and reproductive social order of life encompasses both exploited populations and populations eliminated for the benefit of capital. The advantage of this broadening of the economic dimension lies in the fact that it allows us to connect, for example, gender violence with the capitalist system, since the violence exercised on gendered people is the end of a chain of capitalist profits that culminates in the murder of those who do not fulfill their role and who are not profitable. If only the exploited people are considered but not the people eliminated or excluded



from the economic structure, a constitutive and functional aspect of the capitalist economy is lost.

Furthermore, heterocissexism is not only a system of social subordination that structures the economic order to mark people as excluded and as punishment signals for the rest, but it also marks and privileges people as reproducers. In this sense, if we take the case of the gender variable, “women” precisely fulfill the economic role of reproduction because heterocissexism constitutes them as cisgender and heterosexual. This fact becomes even more relevant if we apply the Fraserian dimensions to the injustices, not to the affected populations. As Fraser states in later texts, it is not advisable to think of gender “differences” as pre-existing realities on which capitalism then assigns roles, but rather they should be understood “in a pragmatic, de-substantialized way, as outcomes rather than givens” (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018, p. 111). What is constitutive of capitalism is the generation of economic roles rather than the assignment of those roles to specific identities, hence it becomes less relevant to assess who actually occupy those roles today. Thus, given that the operability of sexism to generate reproductive roles in the social division of labor is a structural characteristic of the economic order of our capitalist societies and it constructs these roles from the dualisms of heterosexuality and cissexuality, “then not only patriarchy but also hetero[cis]sexism would regularly accompany capitalism” (Nahuel Martín, 2020, p. 178). In this sense, even if heterocissexism does not assign specific roles to LGBT+ people, its contribution to the constitution of the social division of labor of a capitalist society is sufficient to consider it as a two-dimensional category. Although heterocissexism may not operate under the same redistributive logic or with the same degree of influence on the social division of labor as sexism, that does not cancel out the fact that it is a structural part of it.

But if instead of understanding the economy from the modes of production and social reproduction of life, we also understand it as the patterns of distribution of benefits and social burdens, it is possible to argue that a non-heterocissexist redistribution represents an obstacle to the expansion of capital. In other words, heterocissexism is functional to capitalism because it guarantees its profitability through sexual patterns of unequal distribution of benefits and burdens. However, Fraser argues that contemporary capitalism does not need heterocissexism to continue to increase its profits since for a political struggle to be a threat to capitalism the oppressed group must occupy a place as an exploited, but not excluded, population (1997, p. 285).

According to Fraser, there is a segmentation between, first, the economic and family order, and second, kinship and personal life. Thus:

capitalist society now permits significant numbers of individuals to live

through wage labor outside of heterosexual families. It could permit many more to do so provided the relations of recognition were changed. (1997, p. 285)<sup>13</sup>

But the grouping of the family with the economic order, which relegates sexuality to kinship and personal life, implies a questionable division, like the distinction between public and private life that feminism has criticized. This split produced in the capitalist system to order social groups does not mutilate the effective connections between economic order and kinship. As I argued above, the sexual order is intrinsically inscribed in the family order as its sustenance, definition, and naturalization, in the same sense that the family order is inscribed as the sustenance, definition, and naturalization of the economic order.

Furthermore, Fraser argues that capitalist society allows numerous individuals to live on a wage outside of heterosexual families to argue that capitalism does not require heterocissexism. This assertion is as erroneous as arguing that capitalism does not need racism because it allows numerous individuals to live on a wage outside of participation in skilled jobs or hierarchical positions. These exceptions are empirical evidence to the contrary. If we approach it from an intersectional perspective, we can understand that in capitalist countries LGBT+ people, like racialized people, are overrepresented among the poorest and most incarcerated populations (B. Fraser et al., 2019; Morán Faundés, 2015; Pérez and Bissutti, 2021; SOGI Task Force and Koehler, 2015). Capitalism is not economically sustainable if it allows these huge portions of the population to live on a wage. Contrary to Fraser's interpretation (1997, p. 285), the benefits granted by multinational corporations such as Apple and Disney to LGBT+ people do not constitute proof that heterocissexism is not functional to capitalism, but rather proof of the new ways in which large corporations can obtain economic benefits at the cost of appearing "friendly" and, consequently, a new mode of mass exploitation. In the same way, can be thought of as the "racial compromises" that Google (2022). Are these commitments, then, proof that racism is not functional to capitalism? As we have seen with pinkwashing, minimal concessions to oppressed social groups are functional to the expansion of capital and, far from implying a transformation of the economic and cultural order, they reinforce the institutions that produce social injustices.

In later texts, Fraser recognizes that seemingly progressive concessions of recognition devolve into a meritocratic order that enables the rise of a few "women, people of color, and sexual minorities" to higher economic

<sup>13</sup> Although this argument is no longer advocated by Fraser today, it is still relevant to develop a convincing counterargument.

strata while masking the deepening conditions of economic precarization and austerity that deepen capitalism (2017). Because of these same economic conditions, capitalism could not allow the majority of LGBT+ people, selectively harmed by precarization and austerity, to “live through wage labor outside of heterosexual families” (1997, p. 285).

Finally, heterocissexism shares with racism an aspect that the author establishes as a racial characteristic of political economy: “structures access to official labour markets, constituting large segments of the population of colour as a ‘superfluous’, degraded subproletariat or underclass, unworthy even of exploitation and excluded from the productive system altogether” (N. Fraser, 1995, p. 80). In contrast to the author’s arguments (1997, p. 285), a large part of LGBT+ people have occupied specific places in the capitalist economy, developing activities in the informal economy, whether it is the scarcely paid work in bars, hairdressing salons, discos, cafes, spas and call-centers, sex work, self-employment, and micro-entrepreneurship, or directly unpaid labor (International Labour Organization, 2015; Jiménez-Castaño et al., 2017). If the relegation of huge portions of the population to the status of superfluous is a constitutive racial characteristic of the economy, why when this happens in relation with heterocissexism it is only an issue of recognition and status? According to Almeida, the capitalist social order is founded on the need to ensure economic gains and keep its profitability intact. In this context, “exclusion does not constitute an undesired effect of this mode of production [and distribution], but is in fact absolutely necessary to it” (Almeida, 2009, p. 217)<sup>14</sup>. This is due to, if the expansion of capital is built as much on those it exploits as on those it eliminates or excludes, it is evident that heterocissexist oppression is not founded solely on injustice of recognition.

Having argued that heterocissexism is a two-dimensional category, I assert that just as gender and race equity require, in redistributive terms, the abolition of differences, and, in terms of recognition, the revaluation of their specific differences, sexual justice also requires this. In these two-dimensional categories, the universalization of rights is as fundamental as the valuation of differences. From here on I will go on to give reasons to

<sup>14</sup> The author also shows another relevant aspect of the connection between excluded populations and the capitalist economic order: the rehabilitation industries. Drawing on a quote from Karl Marx, Almeida argues that some social categories, such as disability, found a complex web of institutions, areas of knowledge, technological devices, and commodities that feed back into and renew the profitability of the current economic system. These industries may not be a relevant factor in the productive aspect of capitalism, but it is a relevant factor in the distribution of burdens and benefits.

justify that heterocissexism, as a two-dimensional category, can function as a conceptual key to think ableism.

### III. Ableism as a two-dimensional category

As Fiona Campbell states, ableism is “a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produce a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical, and therefore essential and fully human” (2001, p. 44). Like other social structures, ableism functions as a system of oppression that delimits the human from the non-human and privileges “able-bodied” identities to the detriment of “disabled” identities. This entails presenting disability as a diminished state of the human being. If we look at its ideological aspect, ableism is instituted from the naturalization of social subordination and the concealment of its historical traces by reducing it “to an undervaluation towards a person or groups, or as something that is transmitted through representations and cultural discourses that circulate freely, and not as an institutionalized relationship” (Almeida, 2009, p. 223)<sup>15</sup>.

A queer-crip perspective focuses on the multiple connections between ableism and heterocissexism: first, people harmed by these systems share a history of pathologization, since their identities, bodies, and behaviors have been subjected to normalization processes<sup>16</sup> from a medical-rehabilitative perspective, while they have not been considered as epistemic subjects or authorized voices (McRuer, 2006). Secondly, both systems are constituted based on social mechanisms of dehumanization, even more so when both axes intersect. According to García-Santesmases (2017), the sexuality of people with disabilities is exoticized or made invisible, so that they are constructed as either “asexual” or “hypersexual”. Thirdly, ableism, like heterocissexism, hierarchizes social groups through standards of effectiveness in relation with social production and reproduction, and establishes that those who do not align themselves with these requirements “have their equivalent in moral and social ‘undervaluation’ [...] and, consequently, they should also ‘reproduce less’ or, directly, not reproduce at all” (Arnau Ripollés, 2016, pp. 55–56). Finally, both systems

<sup>15</sup> For an in-depth inquiry into the harmlessness of civil rights claims that conceive of social subordination in terms of mere attitudes or prejudices, see Russell (2002).

<sup>16</sup> Canguilhem argues that normality consists in a therapeutic ideal that regulates medical practices and interventions (1978). Since their emergence in disciplinary societies, the processes of normalization focus on making subjects docile, predictable, and useful, which legitimizes the marking, control, and punishment of those who deviate from the ideal of normality (Foucault, 2003; Venturiello, 2016).

of oppression conceive of the human body as a machine, with specific functions: “lungs for breathing, legs for walking, eyes for seeing, ears for hearing, a tongue for speaking and [...] a brain for thinking” (Vincent, 1999 in McRuer, 2002, p. 91) but also genitals to penetrate or be penetrated, an uterus to gestate, and breasts to lactate. This implies conceiving ability and heterosexuality as the natural and universal order of the species, which presents able-bodied and hetero-sexual identities as non-identities.

Ableism has deep roots in the capitalist system, with its main impetus during the First European Industrial Revolution. In this context of mass production of goods and services, the demand for useful, productive, and fit individuals for work became central (Oliver, 1996). With the advent of this social order, a sector of the population in which poverty and disability converge emerges: “not only those who cannot enter the labor force as wage earners but also those who are expelled from the labor force as a result of injuries and illnesses, acquired while working or because of poor living conditions, overcrowding, malnutrition” (Joly, 2008, p. 35). Hence, disability, which requires an architectural and social design that considers multiple forms of functioning, has been inscribed in the social imaginary as an obstacle to the expansion of capital and economic “development”, and as a “personal tragedy” that must be, at best, rehabilitated (Yarza de los Ríos et al., 2019). Similarly, LGBT+ people have been conceived as obstacles to the social reproduction of the species, because the traditional family has been the main nucleus of social ordering that guarantees the offspring for future production and consumption (Curiel, 2013).

In consequence, if we consider the inclusion of eliminated or excluded people in the distributive dimension of the capitalist system, the oppression of certain social groups in such a system would be structured as follows:

*Productive order:* A. The first link is made up of individuals exploited in the production of goods and their distribution. B. The second link is made up of individuals excluded from the production of goods and their distribution.

*Reproductive order:* A. The first link is formed by the individuals exploited in the social reproduction of life. B. In a second link, made up of individuals eliminated from the social reproduction of life.

Unlike the Fraserian conception, where the economic dimension of capitalism is constituted solely between those in charge of producing and those in charge of reproducing, this alternative way of thinking about the economic dimension considers its sustenance and contours informed by heterocissexism and ableism while allowing for the inclusion in the analysis of other two-dimensional categories, such as racism and colonia-

lism. The location of individuals in this alternative economic scheme will depend on their multiple social group membership.

From this economic framework, it is possible to understand that just as social reproduction guarantees the place of the category of “gender” in the framework of the capitalist political economy, so functional regulation and sexual regulation, which sustain and define the contours of production and reproduction, occupy fundamental places in this economy. If we consider that transformative responses demand the use of multiple axes of oppression simultaneously, the inclusion of these categories in the economic scheme allows us to think about singular forms of distributive injustices, which previously remained hidden. However, I consider it essential to emphasize that the usefulness of the Fraserian framework that distinguishes redistribution from recognition should not result in a unidimensional identity interpretation of the social groups affected. There are no disabled people without gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or social class. The dimensions of redistribution and recognition are useful for analyzing systems of oppression and phenomena of social subordination, but direct application to their effects on social groups can generate interpretations that are too rigid and inaccurate. Even if one were to defend the hypothesis that the injustices of heterocissexism are reduced to injustices of recognition, the heterogeneous composition of social groups negates the possibility that recognition strategies alone will resolve the injustices to which LGBT+ people are subjected. I agree with the author in her two-dimensional approach to social injustices to think of axes of oppression as two-dimensional categories. Nevertheless, I differ from her direct application on social groups that she proposes in her past notion of “bivalent communities” (N. Fraser, 1995), which she then abandons, but which has been taken up again by other authors (Almeida, 2009).

A queer-crip perspective argues that both heterocissexism and ableism intersect to contribute to the current capitalist order, which has become neoliberal<sup>17</sup>. In this context of deepening unjust inequalities but diversification of social actors, paying attention to both dimensions of justice becomes essential. As pinkwashing and cripwashing show, the flexibility

<sup>17</sup> I understand neoliberalism as a governmental practice structured in an ideological project that promotes, on the one hand, submission to the “free market” and, on the other, “the deployment of punitive and proactive law-enforcement policies targeting street delinquency and the categories trapped in the margins and cracks of the new economic and moral order coming into being under the conjoint empire of financialized capital and flexible wage labor” (Wacquant, 2009, p. 1). Under a neoliberal framework, then, the state functions as a “centaur state”: “liberal at the top and paternalistic at the bottom, which presents radically different faces at the two ends of the social hierarchy” (2009, p. 312).

of the neoliberal institutions may be hiding the expansion of new forms of subjugation. As McRuer argues:

Neoliberalism does not simplistically stigmatize difference and can in fact celebrate it. Above all, through the appropriation and containment of the unrestricted flow of ideas, freedoms, and energies unleashed by the new social movements, neoliberalism favors and implements the unrestricted flow of corporate capital. International financial institutions (IFIs) and neoliberal states thus work toward the privatization of public services, the deregulation of trade barriers [...], and the downsizing or elimination (or, more insidiously, the transformation into target markets) of vibrant public and democratic cultures that might constrain or limit the interests of global capital. These cultural shifts have inaugurated an era that, paradoxically, is characterized by more global inequality and raw exploitation and less rigidity in terms of how oppression is reproduced (and extended). (2006, p. 3)

In this context, although the political strategies carried out by social institutions no longer discursively present LGBT+ and people with disabilities as aberrant and eliminable, in practice, they contribute to the exclusion of the most vulnerable portions of that population. Companies and States reappropriate, mainly through marketing strategies, the identity brands of oppressed groups to exacerbate distributive inequalities without ethical-political costs. These complex processes no longer make it possible to distinguish easily between economically exploited social groups and economically eliminated social groups, but rather the intersection of the axes will give different results and trigger differential distributive injustices. Thus, whether a person with disabilities has access to a hierarchical position depends on other social privileges, such as social class, gender identity, or sexual orientation. Far from being proof of the possibility of an “inclusive capitalism” (McKenna, 2018), these exceptions demonstrate the pervasiveness and compulsion with which social demands operate. Under this social order, fitting into identity privileges implies the possibility of realizing the rest of social aspirations, such as access to education, health, paid work, being subject and object of desire, to be recognized as an epistemic subject, etc. (Warner, 2000).

From a crisp position, Maldonado Ramírez argues that the success with which the flexible institutions of today’s capitalism operate is based on a neoliberal ideology. This neoliberal rationality exhibits the most oppressed populations “as guilty and responsible for their situation, to incorporate competition and self-management as attitudinal links of positive thinking” (2020, p. 50). Thus, social inequalities are reduced to individual problems that can only be solved by the individual himself (Wisky and Pagani, 2021). Consequently, this neoliberal model favors affirmative strategies and civil rights, as long as they prove to be sufficiently inoffen-

sive to the underlying social structure (Russell, 2002). For these reasons, the connections between redistribution and recognition require simultaneously theorizing the effects of heterocissexism, ableism, and neoliberalism. This reveals the relevance of nurturing a queer perspective from the contributions made by crip theory and activism in the design of political solutions to various social injustices.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I showed the virtues of Fraser's perspectival dualism in identifying and explaining the economic and cultural dimensions of political strategies that seek to reduce social injustices, while pointing out its limitations in explaining the injustices arising from heterocissexism and ableism. Unlike the author, I argued that these two systems of oppression are rooted in both an unequal status system and an unequal economic system. Understanding them as two-dimensional categories allows us to underline the place and functions they occupy in the current economic system, as well as to glimpse constitutive aspects of their historical emergence and development.

Thus, the effects of heterocissexism cannot be solved only by addressing the dimension of recognition, since the preservation of an economic order based on the social reproduction of life and the imperatives of monogamy, procreation, filiation, binarism and the privatization of sexuality does not allow for the eradication of heterocissexist redistribution injustices. In the same sense, it is not possible to remedy the effects of ableism only by changing how disabled people are valued and institutionally admitted. Firstly, because these people also belong to other social groups. Secondly, it still underlies an economic order that produces ableist redistribution injustices through the privilege of capital and the configuration of the ways and times of accessing institutions, producing goods, and providing services, as well as remunerating care. When we think from multiple axes of oppression, we can understand that politicizing only the dimension of recognition entails the exclusive benefit of the most privileged portion of that social group, while condemning the rest to the deepening of violence and neoliberal austerity. A queer-crip perspective provides relevant tools to detect these effects and provide transformative responses.

Finally, in this critical review of perspectival dualism, it has become clear that the distinction between redistribution and recognition is fundamental to thinking about the origin and development of systems of oppression but can be counterproductive if we apply it directly to affected communities. Although both heterocissexism and ableism have



redistributive and recognition dimensions that are important to distinguish, thinking of LGBT+ and disabled people as homogenous social groups that are targeted by a single axis of oppression, but not privileged or oppressed by any other, negates a thorough analysis. Thus, perspectival dualism must be a framework for analyzing social injustices that do not redound to an identitarian conception of social groups. In this sense, a queer-crip perspective, which questions the stability of identities and focuses on normalization devices, allows us to think of social groups from a dynamic and intersectional perspective. This non-identitarian conception of social struggles for justice does not call for the dissolution of identity-based political organizations, but rather for the opening of new political alliances that are organized around the transformation of the causes that produce social injustices and their resolution, not as a point of arrival, but as a horizon and guide for action.

## References

- Almeida, M. E. (2009). Exclusión y discapacidad: Entre la redistribución y el reconocimiento. In A. Rosato and A. Angelino (Eds.), *Discapacidad e ideología de la normalidad* (pp. 215–230). Noveduc Libros.
- Álvarez, M. (2018). *Persecución penal de mujeres trans y travestis en la provincia de Buenos Aires: El caso de La Plata. Una aproximación sociológica* (Memoria académica – Repositorio institucional FaHCE-UNLP). Universidad de La Plata.
- Arnau Ripollés, M. S. (2016). Teoría Crip: De la segregación a la inclusión. Transitando por la re-apropiación y re-significación. *Revista Pasajes*, 1(2), 48–65.
- Barry, B. (2001). *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism*. Harvard University Press.
- Bolla, L., and Queirolo, G. (2021). Pensar el trabajo hoy. Reconocimiento, redistribución... ¿y ahora qué? In M. Campagnoli, M. M. Herrera, and A. Valobra (Eds.), *Feminismos plurales, conflictos y articulaciones* (pp. 103–129). Tren en Movimiento.
- Brown, W. (2000). Suffering Rights as Paradoxes. *Constellations*, 7(2), 208–229. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00183>
- Butler, J. (1997). Merely Cultural. *Social Text*, 52/53, 265–277. <https://doi.org/10.2307/466744>
- Campbell, F. K. (2001). Inciting Legal Fictions: ‘Disability’s’ date with Ontology and the Ableist Body of Law. *Griffith Law Review*, 10(1), 42–62.
- Canguilhem, G. (1978). *On the Normal and the Pathological*. D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Curiel, O. (2013). *La nación heterosexual. Análisis del discurso jurídico y el régi-*

- men heterosexual desde la antropología de la dominación*. Brecha lésbica y en la frontera.
- Davis, A. Y. (2003). *Are prisons obsolete?* Seven Stories Press.
- Duggan, L. (2002). The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism. In *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics* (pp. 175–196). Duke University Press.
- Foucault, M. (2003). *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*. Verso.
- Fraser, B., Pierse, N., Chisholm, E., and Cook, H. (2019). LGBTIQ+ Homelessness: A Review of the Literature. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(15), 2677. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16152677>
- Fraser, N. (1995). From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age. *New Left Review*, 1/212, 68–93.
- Fraser, N. (1997). Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler. *Social Text*, 52/53, 279–289. <https://doi.org/10.2307/466745>
- Fraser, N. (2003). Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation. In N. Fraser and A. Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (pp. 7–109). Verso.
- Fraser, N. (2008). *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World*. Polity.
- Fraser, N. (2017). From Progressive Neoliberalism to Trump—And Beyond. *American Affairs Journal*, 1(4). <https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2017/11/progressive-neoliberalism-trump-beyond/>
- Fraser, N. (2020). *Los talleres ocultos del capital: Un mapa para la izquierda*. Traficantes de Sueños.
- Fraser, N., and Jaeggi, R. (2018). *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*. Polity Press.
- García-Santemeses Fernández, A. (2017). Cuerpos (im)pertinentes: Un análisis queer-crip de las posibilidades de subversión desde la diversidad funcional [Ph.D. Thesis, Universitat de Barcelona]. In *Tesis Doctorals en Xarxa*. <http://www.tdx.cat/handle/10803/402146>
- Google. (2022). *Our commitments to racial equity*. <https://about.google/commitments/racialequity/>
- Hill Collins, P., and Bilge, S. (2016). *Intersectionality, 2nd Edition*. Polity Press.
- Honneth, A. (1996). *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. MIT Press.
- International Labour Organization. (2015). *Discrimination at work on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity: Results of the ILO's PRIDE Project*. Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Branch (GEDI). [https://www.ilo.org/gender/WCMS\\_368962/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/gender/WCMS_368962/lang--en/index.htm)
- Jiménez-Castaño, J., Cardona-Acevedo, M., and del Pilar Sánchez-Muñoz, M. (2017). Discriminación y exclusión laboral en la comunidad LGBT: un estudio de caso en la localidad de chapinero, Bogotá Colombia. *Papeles de Población*, 23(93), 231–267. <https://doi.org/10.22185/24487147.2017.93.028>
- Joly, E. (2008). Por el derecho a ser explotados. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 34–36. <https://www.eldiplo.org/112-el-ocaso-de-washington/por-el-derecho-a-ser>

- explotados/
- Kafer, A. (2003). Compulsory Bodies: Reflections on Heterosexuality and Able-bodiedness. *Journal of Women's History*, 15(3), 77–89. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2003.0071>
- Larrauri, E. (2011). La intervención penal para resolver un problema social. *Revista Argentina de Teoría Jurídica*, 12, 1–22.
- Maldonado Ramírez, J. (2020). Sentir la discapacidad en tiempos neoliberales: Optimismo cruel y fracaso. *Nómadas*, 52, 45–59. <https://doi.org/10.30578/nomadas.n52a3>
- McKenna, B. (2018). *Dreamforce 18: Benioff calls for 'inclusive capitalism'*. ComputerWeekly.Com. <https://www.computerweekly.com/news/252449344/Dreamforce-18-Benioff-calls-for-inclusive-capitalism>
- McRuer, R. (2002). Compulsory Able-bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence. In S. L. Snyder, B. J. Brueggemann, and R. G. Thomson (Eds.), *Disability studies: Enabling the humanities* (pp. 88–99). Modern Language Association of America.
- McRuer, R. (2006). *Crip Theory. Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. New York University Press.
- Morán Faúndes, J. M. (2015). Géneros, transgéneros: Hacia una noción bidimensional de la injusticia. *Andamios*, 12(27), 257–278.
- Moscoso Pérez, M. (2016). Cripwashing: Undermining Civil Liberties in the Name of Disability Rights in Contemporary Spain. *Critical Disability Discourses*, 7, 89–108.
- Moscoso Pérez, M. (2017). Cripwashing. In R. L. Platero Méndez, M. Rosón Villena, and E. Ortega Arjonilla (Eds.), *Barbarismos queer y otras esdrújulas* (pp. 107–115). Ediciones Bellaterra.
- Nahuel Martín, F. (2020). Nancy Fraser: De la redistribución a la crítica del capitalismo. *Diánoia*, 65(85), 161–192. <https://doi.org/10.22201/ijfs.18704913e.2020.85.1740>
- Oliver, M. (1996). A sociology of disability or a disablist sociology? In L. Barton, (Ed.). *Disability and Society* (pp. 18–42). Routledge.
- Pérez, M. (2021a). Interseccionalidad y estrategias feministas de reivindicación de derechos: Un ejercicio de equilibrio reflexivo. In M. Herrera, S. Fernández, and N. De la Torre (Eds.), *Tratado de Géneros, Derechos y Justicia. Vol. V: Políticas Públicas y Multidisciplina*. Rubinzal Culzoni.
- Pérez, M. (2021b). Queer. In S. B. Gamba and T. Diz (Eds.), *Nuevo diccionario de estudios de género y feminismos* (pp. 481–485). Biblos.
- Pérez, M., and Bissutti, C. (2021). Investigar en contextos de encierro: Notas sobre privilegio, lugar de enunciación y violencia estructural. *RUNA, archivo para las ciencias del hombre*, 42(1), 227–245. <https://doi.org/10.34096/runa.v42i1.8510>
- Pérez-Sánchez, G. (2017). Pinkwashing. In R. L. Platero Méndez, M. Rosón Villena, and E. Ortega Arjonilla (Eds.), *Barbarismos queer y otras esdrújulas* (pp. 348–355). Ediciones Bellaterra.
- Radi, B. (2015). Economía del privilegio. *Página 12, Suplemento Las 12*. <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/las12/subnotas/10062-951-2015-09-25.html>

- Rorty, R. (2000). Is 'Cultural Recognition' a Useful Concept for Leftist Politics? *Critical Horizons*, 1(1), 7–20. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156851600510390>
- Russell, M. (2002). What Disability Civil Rights Cannot Do: Employment and political economy. *Disability & Society*, 17(2), 117–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687590120122288>
- Shafie, G. (2015). Pinkwashing: Israel's International Strategy and Internal Agenda. *Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research*, 1, 82–86. <https://doi.org/10.36583/kohl/1-1-7>
- SOGI Task Force, and Koehler, D. (2015). *LGBTI people are (likely) over represented in the bottom 40%*. Governance for Development. World Bank Website. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/governance/lgbti-people-are-likely-over-represented-bottom-40>
- Taylor, C. (1994). The Politics of Recognition. In *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (pp. 25–74). Princeton University Press.
- Venturiello, M. P. (2016). *La trama social de la discapacidad: Cuerpo, redes familiares y vida cotidiana*. Editorial Biblos.
- Wacquant, L. (2009). *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*. Duke University Press.
- Warner, M. (1991). Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet. *Social Text*, 29, 3–17.
- Warner, M. (2000). *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Harvard University Press.
- Wisky, L., and Pagani, C. (2021). Identidad y derechos: Los límites en la demanda y legislación de la Ley para la Interrupción Voluntaria del Embarazo. *Resistances. Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 2(3), e21047. <https://doi.org/10.46652/resistances.v2i3.47>
- Yarza de los Ríos, A., Angelino, A., Ferrante, C., Almeida, M. E., and Passada, M. N. M. (2019). Ideología de la normalidad: Un concepto clave para comprender la discapacidad desde América Latina. In A. Yarza de los Ríos, L. M. Sosa, and B. P. Ramírez (Eds.), *Estudios críticos en discapacidad. Una polifonía desde América Latina* (pp. 21–44). CLACSO. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1gm00ws.4>

## **Thinking Ableism through Heterocissexism. A Critical Review of Fraser's Redistribution-Recognition Pair from a Queer-Crip Perspective**

The philosophical framework of justice proposed by Nancy Fraser during the 1990s establishes two equally crucial dimensions of justice: redistribution, linked to the allocation of economic goods, and recognition, linked to the assignment of social status. This division makes it possible to distinguish between transformative strategies that intervene in the causes of social injustices and affirmative strategies that focus on their effects. However, the author's treatment of her notion of "two-dimensional category", which combines inequalities of redistribution and recognition, has limits for thinking about the functioning of certain systems of social subordination and the situation of certain social groups. In this paper, I will use a queer-crip perspective to argue that both heterocissexism and ableism are two-dimensional categories, since they structure an unequal status system, but also sustain, define, and naturalize the capitalist mode of production and are functional to its distribution of economic goods. This critical review allows us to adapt the Fraserian framework to the current socio-political context.

**KEYWORDS:** Heterocissexism; Ableism; Redistribution-Recognition; Queer-Crip Perspective; Neoliberalism.