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Between experience and structure: Social suffering, collective identities and justice in Iris Marion Young

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the role of phenomenology in Iris Marion Young´s model of critical theory through a discussion of the different strategies she mobilizes in articulating the notions of identity and social collectivities in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990) and *Inclusion and Democracy* (2000). By reconstructing the debate Young had with Nancy Fraser during the 1990s, we seek to demonstrate that, although Fraser mischaracterizes *Justice and Politics of Difference* as representative of the "cultural turn" in social theory, her criticisms can illuminate some of the tensions and shortcomings of the text. Moreover, we argue that the emphasis in a structural-analytical strategy of argumentation, characteristic of Young´s later work, can be traced back to the contentions formulated by Fraser. Nonetheless, it is sustained in a final step that Young never completely abdicated the phenomenological approach as a tool for social criticism. Although the argument of *Inclusion and Democracy* is developed primarily in a structural way, Young repeatedly mobilizes the experiences of social suffering and the demands for justice voiced by social movements as the basis of her large scale democratic proposals.

Keywords

social groups, identity, critical theory, phenomenology, social suffering

Entre experiencia y estructura: sufrimiento social, identidades colectivas y justicia en Iris Marion Young

Resumen

Este artículo analiza el papel de la fenomenología en el modelo de la teoría crítica de Iris Marion Young a través de una discusión de las diferentes estrategias que utiliza para articular las nociones de identidad y colectividades sociales en La justicia y la política de la diferencia *(1990) y en* Inclusion and Democracy *(2000). Al reconstruir el debate que Young tuvo con Nancy Fraser durante la década de los 90, buscamos demostrar que, aunque Fraser malinterpreta* La justicia y la política de la diferencia *como representante del "giro cultural" en la teoría social, sus críticas pueden iluminar algunas de las tensiones y defectos del texto. Además, sostenemos que el énfasis en una estrategia estructural-analítica de la argumentación, característica del trabajo posterior de Young, puede rastrearse hasta los argumentos formulados por Fraser. Sin embargo, se sostiene en un paso final que Young nunca abdicó completamente del enfoque fenomenológico como herramienta para la crítica social. Aunque el argumento de* Inclusion and Democracy *es desarrollado principalmente de manera estructural, Young utiliza repetidamente las experiencias de sufrimiento social y las demandas de justicia expresadas por movimientos sociales como base de sus propuestas democráticas a gran escala.*

Palabras clave

grupos sociales, identidad, teoría crítica, fenomenología, sufrimiento social

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In the second half of the 20th century, we witnessed the emergence of a wide variety of practices of political contestation that challenged the ways in which questions of social justice were theoretically approached. As the so-called new social movements put forth demands articulated around feminist, black, gay, lesbian and cultural minority organizations, it became progressively clear that mainstream normative theories, structured around the distributive paradigm of justice, should be modified or altogether abandoned if we were to fully appreciate the implications of these activists' claims to political philosophy.

A group of philosophers identified with the tradition of critical theory has sought to face the challenge of producing categories that would give expression to these flourishing utopian social energies. Among them, Iris Marion Young has worked through this question from a perspective that foregrounds the political dynamics of contestation, struggle, and claims-making characteristic of the activities of social movements. Her argumentative path has made possible not only a moral appreciation of the social demands voiced by these political actors, but also an acknowledgment of the experiences of injustice and social suffering that influence the emergence of social groups and collective identities. In other words, Young's work encompasses the normative as well as the experiential aspects of late 20th century political praxis: the question of social justice is thus considered in a way that echoes the feelings and self-understandings of political subjects.

Young argues for the establishment of a critical-theoretical link between social suffering, domination and oppression on the one hand, and political action and collective identities on the other. This connection is achieved through a phenomenologically thick modality of social critique, developed through an eclectic articulation of continental political thought, Anglo-American feminist theory and a "citizen-theoretical" (Risse, 2011) view of democracy, which "encompassed the frustrated utopian hopes of new social movements" (Benhabib, 2006, p. 441).

Although deeply influential, this subjectively anchored model of critical theory was strongly criticized by other thinkers associated with that philosophical tradition, most notably Nancy Fraser. In view of some of the most pungent critical arguments proposed by Fraser, this paper analyzes Young's theoretical approach regarding the struggles for social transformation organized around social movements and collective identities. Whereas Young privileges a framework that expresses the social perspectives of the oppressed or dominated subjects, Fraser proposes a normative analysis stemming from a non-subjective understanding of justice. As a result, Young is able to articulate the question of collective subjectivation within the scope of her reflections on justice; Fraser, by contrast, suggests arguably compatible but ultimately separated ways of dealing with the prevalence of social collectivities and the moral validity of their claims.[1]

We shall proceed in two different steps. First, we discuss some of Fraser's critical contentions to Iris Marion Young's seminal 1990

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1. An at length discussion of Fraser's singular theoretical contributions to the themes of social justice and collective identities falls beyond the scope of this paper, as we shall here focus primarily on the work of Young. For Fraser's approaches to questions of redistribution, recognition and representation, as well as her normative criteria of parity of participation, see Fraser (2003, 2013). For her proposal of a Bakhtin-Foucauldian inspired Discourse Theory, and its importance for understanding how social groups and identities are fashioned and transformed over time, see Fraser (1997b, 1989).

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opus, *Justice and the Politics of Difference (JPD)*. The relational concept of social groups developed in that book, as well as Young´s emancipatory political proposal based around a positive reclaiming of the meaning of difference, constitute the focus of our analysis in this segment, as Fraser takes issue with both these theoretical developments. Although Fraser loses sight of one of the most important aspects of Young's proposal, namely, the constitution of political collectivities and group identities as a result of subjects' social situation and the struggles they engage in, we consider her critique illuminating of some of the theoretical tensions found in *JPD*. Hence, in a second step, we disclose some of Young's later philosophical modulations as attempts to overcome the theoretical shortcomings pointed out by Fraser, which seems to bring her closer to a more structural and less experiential approach to social justice.

I

As Amy Allen (2008, p. 156) has aptly phrased it, "Iris Marion Young's *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990) was a watershed text in social and political theory that presented a bold challenge to contemporary theorizing about justice". With a devastating critique of the "distributive paradigm", as well as an inspired rebuttal of the ideal of community, this book has opened a path for normative thinking that cuts right through the terms that for decades had dominated the North-American academic debate on social justice. In exposing "modern political theory´s tendency to reduce political subjects to a unity" (Young, 1990, p. 3), Young´s text has carved a space for a relational concept of the social group that allows for the normative theorizing of the political implications of claims for justice expressed by social movements such as feminism, Black liberation and LGBT activism.

While *JPD* was widely acclaimed for its innovative approach to the theory of justice, many strands of criticism on the book´s proposals have come to light since its publication. One of the most thorough critical readings has been that of Nancy Fraser (1997a, 1997c). Interestingly, Fraser takes issue with Young´s conception of groups, claiming the latter has tried to lump together a wide variety of social collectivities under a single, not sufficiently differentiated concept. According to Fraser, as Young´s conception of justice seeks to attend to injustices rooted both in political economy and in culture, she should have advanced a more nuanced concept of social group; namely, one that would not collapse "culture-based groups" together with "political-economy-based groups". Moreover, Fraser suggests that although Young´s mode of theorizing collectivities could, in principle, attend to both of these forms of groups, throughout her argument the latter tends to privilege an understanding that takes ethnic culture-based social groups as the model for all others. In Fraser´s words:

> (…) the ethnic group surreptitiously becomes the paradigm not only for such collectivities as Jews, Irish Americans, and Italian Americans, where it is clearly apt, but also for such collectivities as gays and lesbians, women, African Americans, old people, people with disabilities, Native Americans, and working-class people, where it distorts. (Fraser, 1997a, p. 196)

Fraser concedes that, in doing so, Young attends to the self-understanding of many of the new social movements she supports. However, she proposes that, if Young succeeds in "articulating the implicit theories of such groups" (Fraser, 1997a, p. 196), she also risks taking their political understanding at face value. The result, according to Fraser, is an incapability of producing a sufficiently critical argument for justice, as those social actors themselves may misunderstand the roots and forms of the injustices to which they are subjected. Moreover, the variety of forms oppression may take in contemporary society would make Young´s arguments in favor of a politics of difference suitable only for redressing the cultural side of the spectrum of injustices.

In order to attend to Fraser´s critique, it is paramount that we briefly present the main arguments of Young´s text. The first pages of *Justice and the Politics of Difference* already contain one of its most radical and methodologically productive proposals: to analyze justice primarily in terms of *injustice*. With this single argumentative move, she manages to turn contemporary theories of justice on its head. Rather than starting from a series of principles of justice rooted on the nature of human beings, societies, and reason, Young proposes a reflection rooted on non-idealistic conditions: social subject's experiences of injustice in Western capitalist societies. The result is thus a negative approach to justice developed as a critical theory of society, understood here as "a normative reflection that is historically and socially contextualized" (Young, 1990, p. 5).

This reflection must always begin, according to Young, from a *situated* interest in justice. In other words, she defends an immanent modality of critique in which normative ideals, unrealized but felt in a particular social reality, are considered in light of their potentialities. For Young, a discourse about justice must not emerge from a dispassionate account of society; it should also not make claims to universality or pose as knowledge in the way of seeing or observing, as an unveiling of the truth. Rather, the sense of justice should arise from an act of *listening*:

> Normative reflection arises from hearing a cry of suffering or distress, or feeling distress oneself. (…) With an emancipatory interest, the philosopher apprehends given social circumstances not merely in contemplation but with passion: the given is experienced in relation to desire. Desire, the desire to be happy, creates the distance, the negation, that opens the space for criticism of what is. This critical distance does not occur on the basis of some previously discovered rational ideas of the

good and the just. On the contrary, the ideas of the good and the just arise from the desiring negation that action brings to what is given. (Young, 1990, p. 6)

In the specific case of *JPD*, this act of listening, as Fraser rightly argues, is exercised in relation to the North American social movements that arose in the 1960s. A desirable conception of justice, for Young, should somehow take into account the social claims put forth by those movements in their own terms, or rather, in their own voices. As we shall later argue, however, this does not mean Young thinks one should immediately accept those demands and calls for justice in a non-reflexive way. In fact, she argues in favor of a political mode of deliberation in which those voices find institutionalized conditions for having their experiences and perspectives taken into account; institutional sites where these groups can articulate and discuss their demands, listen and be listened to, so that decisions can be made according to a grammar of justice.

Contrary to Fraser, who seems to adhere to a certain ideal of theoretical parsimony, aptly expressed by her single normative criterion of *parity of participation*, Young tends to embrace complexity in her reflections about justice, arguing around a proliferating number of categories. In some ways, this tendency of Young´s thinking can be traced back to her engagement with Adorno´s critique of the logic of identity. That logic, according to Young, is as an operation of reason that seeks to reduce categories, especially those that relate to political subjects, to a unity (Young, 1990, p. 98). Through it, the particular, the heterogeneous and the non-identical are repressed or conceived as absolute *otherness* (*ibidem*.). The result is a transcendental understanding of political subjects: their bodily and sensuous experiences and perspectives are denied, expressed as deviation, in favor of a unifying principle of universal reason.

Wanting to take specific and situated perspectives of social suffering into account in her reflection about justice, Young expresses a profound disagreement towards the logic of identity. Instead, she advocates for the notion of *difference*:

Understood as different, entities, events, meanings, are neither identical nor opposed. They can be likened in certain respects, but similarity is never sameness, and the similar can be noticed only through difference. Difference, however, is not absolute otherness, a complete absence of relationship or shared attributes. (Young, 1990, p. 98)

In the model of difference, categories emerge in terms of processes and relations rather than in terms of substance. This has profound implications for Young´s thinking: on the one hand, it allows her to conceive subject's capacities and identities as products of social-political processes, rather than its origin; on the other, it opens up the path for an anti-essentialist concept of social groups.

To articulate this argument into a reflection about justice, Young, as we have stated above, suggests that we start from concrete instances of injustice, which she distinguishes in terms of oppression (conceived through a phenomenological account of the experience of the oppressed) and domination (understood in stuctural-institutional fashion). Oppression, she notes, hinders self-development, whereas domination hinders self-determination. Although both are intertwined, Young advocates these forms of injustice should be analytically distinct. Whereas domination can affect anyone, "purely as a function of their position within economic and social relations of production and authority in modern, Western, technologically advanced societies" (Allen, 2008, p. 161), oppression affects people as structural disadvantages stemming from their membership in despised or devaluated social groups.

Young famously analyzed oppression as a differentiated phenomenon, proposing a reflection on the forms it takes in contemporary Western societies. She deems those forms as the five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. If oppression is intimately related to the idea of membership in despised collectivities, it seems only natural that a concept of social group should be at the center of Young´s argument. The concept she proposes is relational, rather than substantive: groups are the expressions of social relations that *constitute* certain subjects as members and others as non-members. These collectivities exist only in relation to one another, emerging as a shared *sense of identity* (Young, 1990, p. 44) among its members. Group relations constitute individuals: their sense of history, modes of reasoning and expression, and perception of affinity and separateness. This, however, does not mean "persons have no individual styles, or are unable to transcend or reject a group identity. Nor does it preclude persons from having many aspects that are independent of these group identities" (p. 45). In fact, as social processes, groups should not be interpreted as monolithic entities. Especially in highly differentiated contemporary societies, groups cut across one another. In other words, they are heterogeneous, as each individual can have, at any given time, multiple group identifications.

In different passages of *JPD*, Young presents possible articulations of her concept of groups. In chapter 2, for instance, she writes:

A social group is a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life. Members of a group have a *specific affinity with one another* because of their similar experience or way of life, which prompts them to associate with one another more than with those not identified with the group, or in a different way. Groups are an expression of social relations; a group exists only in relation to at least one other group. Group identification arises, that is, in the encounter and interaction

between social collectivities that experience some differences in their way of life and forms of association, even if they also regard themselves as belonging to the same society. (Young, 1990, p. 43, *our emphasis*)

Elsewhere, in the context of her argument for democratic group representation, Young states "a social group is a collective of people *who have affinity with one another* because of a set of practices and way of life" (p. 186, *our emphasis*). As we can observe, there is a fundamental *tension* overlying her conception of social collectivity. She productively escapes a substantive understanding, based around the sharing of a set of asocial or pre-political "natural" characteristics. Hers is a conception that highlights relation and transformation. Groups can come into being and disappear, depending on societies' dynamics of social interaction and contestation. Moreover, Young pays attention to the heterogeneity of today's collectivities, avoiding, on a certain level, the temptation of collapsing difference under homogenous identity categories.

Nevertheless, regarding this last aspect, can one really say Young is consistent throughout her argument? Agreeing, in part, with Fraser, we argue her proposal alternates between a commitment to difference and an attachment to groups self-understanding (which includes cultural, identitarian and, sometimes, reifying patterns of identity).

Most saliently, Young's own critical methodology, based on an exercise of *listening to* social movement's claims for justice, brings this tension to the fore: a certain dissonance between her Adornian critique of the logic of identity and her tendency towards a conception of group structured around some notion of identity. In fact, it appears Young's concept of group is profoundly influenced by social movement's self-understanding: one based around the ideas of a shared sense of identity and reciprocal affinity. In other words, we are suggesting that Young's account of social groups ends up collapsing the broader question of membership under the narrower notions of affinity and identity positively articulated by social movements. If her relational take on groups is to be able to conceptualize such broad collectivities such as women or disabled people, for example, it should move beyond the models of affinity and identity and account for the possibility of intra-group hostility and heterogeneity.

We take this to be one of the central arguments of Fraser's critique. If Young's concept of groups leans so heavily on the self-understanding of social movements, it is no wonder the "culture-based group" ends up being the paradigm for all collectivities. Young seemed to be conscious of these problems, especially of the danger of reification underlying group identities. One of the main characteristics of the modality of oppression she names cultural imperialism is, after all, that of reducing the individual lives and experiences of members of certain collectivities to a single and despised notion of identity. Hence, under cultural imperialism

vastly differentiated groups are unified around one demeaning stereotype. Nevertheless, sometimes the term identity takes on a more positive connotation in the scope of her argumentation. Let us not forget, for instance, that a shared sense of identity is one of the characteristics she attributes to social groups. Given Young's insistence on the advantages of thinking with the notion of difference rather than that of identity, at times it can be hard to grasp what she means by the latter.

The following passage seems to be particularly instructive in dealing with this issue, namely, the tension between identity and difference in Young's text:

Such a relational understanding of difference entails revising the meaning of group identity as well. In asserting the positive difference of their experience, culture, and social perspective, social movements of groups that have experienced cultural imperialism deny that they have a common identity, a set of fixed attributes that clearly mark who belongs and who doesn't. Rather, what makes a group a group is a social process of interaction and differentiation in which some people come to have a particular *affinity* for others. My "affinity group" in a given social situation comprises the people with whom I feel the most comfortable, who are more familiar. Affinity names the manner of sharing assumptions, affective bonding, and networking that recognizably differentiates groups from one another, but not according to some common nature. The salience of a particular person's group affinities may shift according to the social situation or according to changes in her or his life. Membership in a social group is a function not of satisfying some objective criteria, but of a subjective affirmation of affinity with that group, the affirmation of that affinity by other members of the group, and the attribution of membership in that group by persons identifying with other groups. Group identity is constructed from a flowing process in which individuals identify themselves and others in terms of groups, and thus group identity itself flows and shifts with changes in social process. (Young, 1990, p. 172)

Different elements of that paragraph should be noticed. When Young claims "social movements of groups (…) deny that they have a common identity", identity should be understood in a reifying sense: as an operation that denies difference, clearly establishing a fixed border that constitutes the inside as sameness and the outside as absolute otherness. However, when partaking in a politics of reclaiming the meaning of difference, groups are to be considered social processes of interaction rooted around the idea of affinity. Thus, members may acknowledge internal differences, cherish singularity and heterogeneity within the group, while affirming a flowing and ever-changing identity, here understood in a contingent and less unitary fashion. An identity as a sense of identification that is dependent on social events and

particular engagements group members may profess at any given time. An identity as a (re)claiming of the "definition of the group by the group, as a creation and construction, rather than a given essence" (Young, 1990, p. 172). That contextual understanding of identity and difference, moreover, reaffirms the fact that in a plural society, social groups have group differences that cuts across them. Women, for example, may be Latina, rich, homeless, disabled. These differences produce varying identifications as well as potential conflicts. Moreover, they may produce affinities, even with members of other groups.

Young accomplishes a remarkable task through those arguments. She manages to produce an extremely insightful case for the social and political (re)constitution of collective subjects. One that elegantly expresses the question of subjectivity as a political one. Group identities are the result of the historically and socially situated political engagement of its members. As a *result*, they cannot be conceived in substantive fixed terms: they are contingently formed and transformed in a dynamic and ever undetermined fashion. Moreover, this theory of collective subjectivation is developed within the same frame of a democratically informed normative reflection on social justice.

As fruitful as Young arguments are, some problems remain. Although deeply productive for dealing with the political identities of socially engaged subjects such as social movements, her concept of social groups still seems inadequate, as Fraser argues, for dealing with more permanent, structural collectivities rooted on broad social structures as gender, race and ability. The problem seems to lie in Young's reliance on the idea of affinity. While perfectly fine for dealing with politically active individuals and groups, the notion of affinity seems too demanding for encompassing those subjects that do not positively take part in social struggles. As Young herself would later admit, even her contextualized, difference-affirming notion of group identity would prove somewhat partial for encompassing all women in terms of a social collectivity, for example. Those questions were already in her mind by the time she was writing *JPD*. For example, in the introduction she notes:

> My own reflections on the politics of difference were ignited by discussions in the women´s movement of the importance and difficulty of acknowledging differences of class, race, sexuality, age, ability, and culture among women. As women of color, disabled women, old women, and others increasingly voiced their experiences of exclusion, invisibility, or stereotyping by feminist discourse, the assumption that feminism identifies and seeks to change the common position of women became increasingly untenable. I do not at all think this means the end of specifically feminist discourse, because I still experience, as do many other women, the affinity for other women which we have called sisterhood, even across differences. (Young, 1990, p.13)

As a response for acknowledging difference within feminist discourse, and more specifically, among feminists, Young´s concept of group is surely successful. But what of those women who do not share such an affinity? Those for which sisterhood is nothing more than an empty word. Are they still to be considered women? Young would most definitely say yes! However, the close attachment to new social movements and the methodology of listening prevalent in *JPD* seems to have come in the way of her conceiving of a more encompassing understanding of social groups.

As cogent as Fraser´s arguments are in regards to Young´s understanding of groups, she fails to grasp the meaning of the latter´s conception of a *politics of difference*. In an attempt to encompass Young´s theoretical developments within her own bipartite framework of justice, Fraser ends up considering this conception as representative of a "culturalist turn" in normative philosophy: she takes it to be an artifact for the appreciation of new social movements' claims for the recognition of their (cultural) specificity. Hence, Fraser understands it as an appropriate notion for dealing with the "cultural" aspects of oppression, typically advanced in the form of identity politics; but an inappropriate one for dealing with injustices rooted in political economy.

Young´s framework, however, is not structured in those terms. Starting from a negative notion of justice, as the overcoming of instances of oppression and domination, Young articulates her normative stance as follows:

> justice is the institutionalized conditions that make it possible for all to learn and use satisfying skills in socially recognized settings, to participate in decisionmaking, and to express their feelings, experience, and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen. (Young, 1990, p. 91)

Thus, democratic deliberation, both in government and in other institutions of collective social life (factories, offices, universities, etc.), is "both an element and a condition of social justice" (ibidem). In those contexts, to consider difference means that individuals do not have to abandon group identifications in order to participate as political subjects. In fact, it means they must participate as actual people, with affiliations of gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, and so on, taken as resources for expressing distinct perspectives on social issues and institutions.

That model of democracy means we should abandon the ideal of impartiality, according to which subjects are considered as "generalized others", in favor of an ideal of a *heterogeneous public*. In fact, Young criticizes Habermas' work on the public sphere for occluding the bodily and experiential dimensions of injustice, such as affects, emotions and suffering. As Benhabib has noted,

> she rejected the ideal of "impartiality" in liberal and contemporary critical theory for banishing bodily particularity

and affectivity into the private realm. For her, this move implied the denial of the subjectivity of those, like women, gays, blacks, and other ethnic groups, whose public appearance was necessarily marked by the "difference" through the filter of which their embodiedness would be perceived in the public sphere. (Benhabib, 2006, p. 441)

By contrast, in a heterogeneous public, subjects "stand forth with their differences acknowledged and respected, although perhaps not completely understood" (Young, 1990, p. 119), and discuss issues according to principles of justice, that may encompass both "cultural" and "economical"[2] impediments for their self-development and self-determination.

A politics of difference is thus one that accounts for those distinct social perspectives and group affinities. Such politics, however, is not specifically conceptualized in a way that would be unable to attend to questions of exploitation, marginalization and powerlessness, as Fraser argues. On the contrary, it is a democratic modality of political participation in which such experiences of oppression have a specific articulation: one that takes into account the distinctive experiences connected to group membership. The politics of difference entails a group-specific form of political participation and deliberation, but not a group-specific form of institutional action to remedy injustices. *Contra* Fraser, Young´s model seems to be capable of dealing with both "cultural" and "economic" instances of injustices.

In fact, for Young justice is intimately linked to a notion of democracy, as the concept of justice somewhat coincides, in her work, with the concept of the political: "Politics (…) includes all aspects of institutional organization, public action, social practices and habits, and cultural meanings insofar as they are potentially subject to collective evaluation and decision-making" (Young, 1990, p.34). A satisfying conception of justice must then attend to a four-fold set of issues: *distribution, decision-making, division of labor,* and *culture.* The three latter criteria should, according to her, be interpreted not only as domains of practices and relations to be normatively analyzed, but also as background institutional and structural conditions determining social patterns of distribution.

Moreover, as Young makes clear via some of her examples, these criteria should also be interpreted as perspectives from which concrete situations of injustice are to be analyzed. That being the case, the situation of women in the labor market, for example, could and should be approached from each of these four standpoints, whereas the others should appear as background conditions to the criteria in question at each time. That said, we argue that while Fraser (2003) is right in considering *JPD*'s approach to contemporary society one that stresses the deep connection between economy and culture, presenting them as

mutually constitutive domains, she fails to recognize the subtlety of Young´s argument. In fact, with this four-fold characterization, Young is actually defending a perspectivist approach similar to that advanced by Fraser in the context of her debate with Axel Honneth (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). However, whereas Fraser (2003) stresses the contradicting paths issues of culture and political economy seem to take in contemporary society, via her "redistribution-recognition dilemma", Young tends to stress the mutual implication for justice of issues of distribution, decision-making, division of labor and culture. *Contra* Fraser, Young writes:

> For evaluating the justice of social institutions, I propose a four-fold categorization. Societies and institutions should certainly be evaluated according to the patterns of distribution of resources and goods they exhibit; but, no less important, they should be evaluated according to their division of labor, the way they organize decision-making power, and whether their cultural meanings enhance the self-respect and self-expression of all society's members. (Young, 1997a, p.153)

Even if it fails to fully appreciate Young's proposal, Fraser critique is still capable of illuminating some of the fragilities in *JPD*'s arguments on social groups and collective identities. In fact, Young's proposal of a structural concept for groups, articulated in *Inclusion and Democracy* (2000), seems to be an answer to the shortcomings identified by Fraser, as shall be discussed in the next section.

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II

Fraser's critique appears to play a fundamental role in directing Young´s later political-theoretical work. More specifically, even if she immediately defended the model developed during the 1990s, Fraser's challenges to her phenomenological-subjectivist approach seem to influence, albeit indirectly, her main political-philosophical elaborations from the 2000s.

In this sense, Young reacts to the criticisms directed at her work through theoretical modulations that aim to avoid the most controversial points of her former elaborations. Hence, she proposes a more careful treatment of social groups, in order to establish differentiations between cultural and structural collectivities, as well as between groups and identities. Partly adhering to the criticisms received by Fraser (1997a) and Deustche (1996), Young establishes a more precise differentiation between, on the one hand, ethnic and national cultural groups and, on the other, structural groups. The former would be effectively organized around a shared self-understanding and solidarity among its

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2. Young herself does not adhere to those terms, which she considers dichotomizing. Here they appear as an argumentative resource to address Fraser´s critique.

members, who seek to make explicit the uniqueness of certain values, modes of expression and reiterated cultural practices (Young, 2008). In theoretical terms, the analysis of the "politics of difference" articulated by these groups gains expression through the reflections of multiculturalism theorists, especially Charles Taylor (1994) and Will Kymlicka (1995). According to them,

> the situation of political conflict [...] is one in which a dominant group can limit the ability of one or more of the cultural minorities to live out their forms of expression; or, more benignly, the sheer ubiquity of the dominant culture threatens to swamp the minority culture to the extent that its survival as a culture may be endangered, even though the lives of the individual members of the group may be relatively comfortable in other ways [i.e. material]. (Young, 2008, p. 91)

Although she recognizes the importance of a politics of difference expressed in cultural terms, Young seeks to clarify that her work is better understood if considered under a *positional* prism. Thus, we must consider that her approach to the politics of difference

> primarily concerns issues of justice regarding structural inequality. Persons suffer injustice by virtue of structural inequality when their group social positioning means that the operation of diverse institutions and practices conspires to limit their opportunities to achieve well-being. […] Some institutional rules and practices, the operation of hegemonic norms, the shape of economic or political incentives, the physical effects of past actions and policies, and people acting on stereotypical assumptions, all conspire to produce systematic and reinforcing inequalities between groups. People differently positioned in structural processes often have unequal opportunities for self-development and access to resources, to make decisions about both the conditions of their own actions and that of others, or to be treated with respect or deference. (Young, 2008, p. 80)

Since the publication of *Inclusion and Democracy* (2000), the notion of difference is thus discussed through a modified concept of social group, independent of the sense of identity or affinity expressed by its members. In this text, Young considers collectivities no longer according to their self-understanding, but rather through their relative position in social structures. These structures determine the social conditions of the subjects, limiting or expanding their possibilities of self-determination and self-development, which makes the normative basis of her social

criticism rooted primarily on "objective" grounds. Structural groups are thus defined in terms of the "social organization of labor and production, the organization of desire and sexuality, the institutionalized rules of authority and subordination, and the constitution of prestige" (YOUNG, 2000, p. 94). These elements are taken as structural due to their relative permanence: "Though the specific content and detail of the positions and relationships are frequently reinterpreted, evolving, and even contested, the basic social locations and their relations to one another tend to be reproduced" (Young, 2000, p. 95).[3]

Although this concept of social group presents conspicuous differences compared to the one developed in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, we should not lose sight of the fact that certain characteristics of the previous model remain. Young again proposes a *relational* understanding of collectivities, since one's social position only exist in relation to others. Moreover, she proposes once again that groups should not be thought of as fixed elements, as the structures that determine them, though relatively constant, do not constitute states, but processes and socio-historical conditions determined by collective past actions (Young, 2000, p. 96). Therefore, the new concept of collectivity does not conform to an associative model, since the social positions occupied by the individuals are not the result of a utilitarian voluntarism in pursuit of particular goals; nor is it a conformation to the aggregative model, as the members of a collectivity are grouped according to social processes that, to a large extent, constitute them:

> a group is much more than an aggregate, however. An aggregate is a more or less arbitrary collection of individuals according to one or more attributes; aggregation, when it occurs, is from the point of view of outsiders, and does not express a subjective social experience. […] When constituted as aggregates, individuals stand in no determinate relations to one another. The members of groups, however, stand in determinate relations both to one another and to non-members. The group, therefore, consists of both the individuals and their relationships. (Young, 2000, p. 89-90)

With this insistence on the relational character of groups, Young can thematize intragroup differences, avoiding a homogeneous conception of collectivity. After all, a relational perspective does not argue for concrete boundaries that distinguish the members of a group from the members of another in an absolute way: "conceiving group differentiation as a function of relation, comparison, and interaction, then, allows for overlap, interspersal,

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3. Although the differentiation between cultural and structural groups is important for Young to characterize her project as an argument for "a politics of positional difference", rather than for "a politics of cultural difference", she explicitly considers the possibility of intersections among different kinds of collectivities and political activities. However, she argues that the structural element should be foregrounded when one reflects about justice through her model of critical theory (Young, 2000, 2008).

and interdependence among groups and their members" (Young, 2000, p. 91).

Having considered the common features between the understandings of collectivity presented in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990) and *Inclusion and Democracy* (2000), it is interesting to look at a remarkable distinctive characteristic: the way Young articulates the notions of group and identity in each text. As we have seen, the concept of social group mobilized in the work of 1990 presupposes the notion of group identity, although this identity is considered in a way that foregrounds ideas of interactive processes, re-signification, and differentiation. Moreover, in that text, the notion of intragroup affinity was an important element for the identification of a collectivity. In *Inclusion and Democracy*, however, Young presents this articulation in a more careful way: in proposing the concept of structural group, she leaves behind the *prima facie* privilege given to the self-understanding of social movements in favor of a non-phenomenological approach to collectivities. In this sense, the notions of affinity and identity cease to operate as determinant components of her democratic-normative argumentation. Thus, the *politics of difference* must be conceived through an idea of heterogeneous public in which social perspectives, that is, groups differently positioned in relation to institutions, values, and social practices, can be represented. In this way, groups should not be understood primarily in terms of identity: their members do not necessarily share an understanding of themselves, nor do they necessarily establish internal relations of affinity and solidarity.

These theoretical modulations seem to make her theory more tenable against the criticisms that have been directed against its former elaborations throughout the decade, but they do leave us with some open questions: how far is Young from her earlier strong commitment with the act of listening and the experiential basis of social justice? What role do collective identities play in the new argumentative framework? Moreover, is there any possible articulation between the structural analysis of social injustices and the phenomenological consideration of subjective experiences?

Young's continued engagement in investigations of feminist phenomenology (Young, 2005) points to an affirmative answer to the last question. Indeed, Sonia Kruks (2008) argues that disregarding Young's phenomenological work, as most of her commentators do, hinders an appreciation of her "binocular vision" in regards to injustice: for Young, injustice must be understood and resisted as a structural and as an experiential phenomenon simultaneously. But even Kruks admits a difference between Young´s large-scale works on justice and democracy, found especially in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* and *Inclusion and Democracy*, and the more strictly phenomenological work on women´s embodied end sentient experiences, developed along her entire career and recollected in *On Female Body Experience* (2005). Most important here, Kruks seems to admit as well a potential conflict between both theoretical perspectives, as long

as the phenomenological method "challenges the adequacy of purely structural analyses, in which problems are diagnosed and political agendas then are arrogantly constructed a priori and top-downward" (Kruks, 2008, p. 338).

In this regard, although it seems correct to affirm the possible connection and desired complementarity between an orientation to the subjectively lived aspects of injustices, on the one side, and large scale structural observation, on the other, it seems undeniable that *Inclusion and Democracy* has strengthened this second aspect of Young's "binocular vision". This can be evinced not only by the new emphasis given to structural inequalities in the theoretical apprehension of social groups (which displace the central role played by their members' self-comprehension, as highlighted before), but also in the new set of positive, stronger normative principles that accompanies the ideal of deliberative democracy, presented now as a general pattern to identify and combat injustices in the decision-making structures. In her words, "deliberative democracy implies a strong meaning of inclusion and political equality which, when implemented, increases the likelihood that democratic decision-making processes will promote justice" (Young, 2000, p. 6).

In light of this, it can be restated that even if not completely accurate, Fraser´s criticisms seem to have played an important role in Young´s later political work. Although a direct influence is not completely acknowledged by the latter, the main transformations carried out in *Inclusion and Democracy* at least coincide with the direction suggested by the challenges Fraser placed to the phenomenological-subjectivist model of social criticism. A similar movement can also be found in Fraser's dialogue with other critical theorists of her generation, most notably with Axel Honneth (Fraser and Honneth, 2003) However, unlike Honneth, who explicitly abandons the "empirically controlled phenomenology" that animated *Struggle for Recognition* (Honneth, 1996) in his later work, Young never abdicated the phenomenological approach as a tool for social criticism. Although the argument of *Inclusion and Democracy* is developed primarily in a structural way, Young repeatedly mobilizes the experiences of social suffering and the demands for justice voiced by social movements as the basis of her proposals. In a certain way, therefore, it is possible to affirm that the methodology of listening and the consideration of injustices from the perspective of concrete subjects continue to inform her model of critical theory, although modulated by a more robust structural analysis:

It is a mistake to consider the public assertion of experiences of people located in structurally or culturally differentiated social groups as nothing but the assertion of self-regarding interest. I suggest that this misconstrual derives in part from misunderstanding such group-based public expressions solely and entirely as assertions of a group 'identity'. I review arguments that question such a notion of group identity,

and argue that most group-based movements and claims in contemporary democratic policies derive from relationally constituted structural differentiations. When so understood, it becomes clear that socially situated interests, proposals, claims, and expressions of experience are often an important resource for democratic discussion and decision-making. (Young, 2000, p. 9)

The demands publicized by feminist, anti-racist, anti-ableist, gay and lesbian movements determine Young´s research agenda, setting an approach that thematizes justice through the notion of difference. However, her theoretical-structural turn made her consider the notions of identity invoked by such collectivities under a new prism. If, previously, identity categories were taken as representative social groups as a whole, they constitute, in the new framework, partial and contingent categories that should not be extended to the totality of the individuals composing a collectivity (Young, 1997b). This does not mean, however, that Young disregards the political importance of identities. On the contrary, they are taken to be politically relevant, as organized discourses and cultural expressions aimed at reversing the stereotypes and evaluative depreciations attributed by the dominant culture to oppressed groups: "they are explicit projects that individual persons take up as an affirmation of their own personal identities in relation to group meaning and affinity with others identified with the group" (Young, 2000, p. 103). As such, identities encourage solidarity and a sense of political agency that allows structurally disadvantaged groups an idiom for making justice claims to the wider society.

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