

## Entretien avec Nancy Fraser

**Mouvements : Quels sont les principaux débats politico-intellectuels dans la gauche américaine aujourd'hui ?**

**Nancy Fraser:** The U.S. left is terribly weak, so anything I describe has to be adjusted! It's not clear that there is much of a left, unfortunately. But what there is, is occupied with internecine struggles, and I would say that there's a big division between what you might call the «social left» and the «cultural left». The social left is typically somewhat older, comes from the '68 generation or before, and in one way or another was very influenced by Marxism - even if they have since become anti-Marxists - but is oriented to the fundamental importance of economic exploitation and social inequality and thinks of the left project as one that is trying to rectify that. The cultural left is a younger generation that has grown up in the age of identity politics, which has never had the experience of a mixed left that could include men and women, blacks and whites, and whose only experience of left activism has been oriented toward affirming the particularity of one group or another; and it is very focused on issues of culture, representation and identity, and so is very oriented toward multiculturalism and other forms of identity politics, such as sexuality...

**M : Est-ce que vous pouvez définir ce que c'est que la «identity politics»?**

**NF :** Identity politics is a term often used negatively by people either on the social left or on the right who want to criticize multiculturalism or the way people are divided into categories instead of looking for universal interests, for turning away from economics and focusing too much on the self, on culture. A broad sector of the cultural left would reject this label, «identity politics», and say they are for «queer politics», for example, which means they reject any specific definition of an identity - they would claim they are interested in subverting all identities. But nevertheless, the phrase has stuck as a way of very rapidly characterizing a terrain and thereby of dismissing it.

**M : Qu'est-ce qu'on entend par «queer politics»?**

**NF :** After the liberal phase of equal rights, the original gay and lesbian rights movement developed into gay identity politics; that is, the creation of a separate and distinct gay culture, and a separate and distinct gay and lesbian identity. In reaction against that, a segment of the gay and lesbian movement declared itself to be *queer* - which had previously been a derogatory word like «faggot» or something. They took this as a word of pride and used it to say: «We don't want to impose some new, confining definition of gayness or homosexuality, we want rather to critique the whole idea that there are two different categories of people: homosexuals and heterosexuals». So, they went back to the original Freudian idea that everybody is really bisexual, or that sexuality is really very ambiguous, and focused on deconstructing this overly neat opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality. And so that's the idea of queer politics as opposed to a more traditional gay identity politics. But it's still a cultural politics. In other words, there have been a lot of debates between proponents of traditional identity politics and these deconstructive variants like queer politics. But, these remain debates within the cultural left because none of them are talking about the political economy.

**M : Quels sont les mouvements qui sont associés à la «gauche sociale»? Et quels sont ceux qu'on identifie à la «gauche culturelle» ?**

NF : Well, it's easier to answer the question for the cultural left because there really are movements: there's a very active gay and lesbian rights movement; there are various currents of feminism that fit on that side; there are all sorts of ethnic-pride and anti-racist movements; indigenous peoples' movements, and so on. On the social side it's more difficult because the whole drift of U.S. politics has been away from social egalitarianism - and this is not just the left, but a much more general phenomenon, stemming from the Reagan and Bush years. So, in the case of the social left, the socialist-feminist current - which I myself had identified with in the past - has ceased to exist as an actual movement. The labor movement, of course, is the paradigm case of a social left movement and is in a kind of interesting state after many years of losing members, and taking a terrible beating in terms of losing strikes, de-industrialization and plant closings. Recently, for the first time since the 1930s and 40s, the labor movement has committed a lot of money to organizing unorganized workers - especially women and workers of color, especially in service industries where such workers are concentrated. And those are the growing sectors of the work force. It's too soon to know whether there are going to be any real results from this «new labor movement». There's energy and commitment, but I can't help but feeling there's something counter-historical about this effort now, given the larger drift toward a neo-liberal political economy. It's very much an up-hill fight.

**M : Does this shift in focus reflect the change in leadership within the American labor movement?**

NF : Very much so. This orientation came out of some of the efforts to democratize unions that were very anti-democratic. The leadership of the A.F.L. has a new orientation: they claim to be less focused on trying to protect existing jobs of union workers while neglecting everyone else, and more focused on trying to organize new workers and build the union movement that way. As I say, it's a shift away from the white male industrial base to service-sector workers who are largely workers of color and female. I only mention this as a symptom of the intense *animosity* between the social left and the cultural left. Over the last few years, there have been attempts to bring together people from these two different orientations, to organize meetings between the A.F.L. leadership and a representatives of the cultural left - which, of course, is centered in the universities - with titles like «Academic Leftists and the Labor Movement». And they led to nasty explosions, recriminations, accusations back and forth of racism.

Another, very interesting and important symptom is what is known as the «Social Hoax», involving a journal called *Social Text* - one of the very best journals of the cultural left. Before publishing his book critiquing French impostures in the philosophy of science, Alan Social submitted an essay to *Social Text* that was made up of complete gobbledygook. He wrote a whole article about how you could use ideas from physics to deconstruct Eurocentrism - just the sorts of things your stereotype of a pretentious French philosopher would say about science when he understands really nothing about science! The editors were so happy to have an article by a scientist that they accepted to publish it in a special issue they were doing on the culture of science. Then, as soon as it had been published, he revealed that it had all been a hoax. Now Social believed that he was acting on the basis of the *real* left - the *social* left which cares about *serious* issues like the economy - in order to expose the phoniness and silliness of the *false* left, the *cultural* left. This provoked horrible arguments and battles between these two camps and was

a big blow to the cultural left. They were made fun of in the *New York Times* and everywhere else.

**M : With the American left so dichotomized, is there any reconciliation possible, and how would that come about?**

NF : I think there is a possibility, in theory, and a lot of my recent work has been aimed at exactly this problem. My idea was that behind all this fighting, at the theoretical level, there are really two competing ideas of justice, two different analyses of what injustice is, and two different ideas about how one might remedy it. The traditional, social-left picture of justice is the picture of *distributive justice*; about the unfairness in the distribution of burdens and benefits, whether we are talking about income, property, health care - you name it. And the cultural left is largely assuming what has been called a *paradigm of recognition* - clearly articulated in Charles Taylor's famous essay, «Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition». It's premised on the idea that there can be kinds of social harms and injustices that derive not from the economic structure of society but rather from what you might call the «relations of recognition»: the ways in which a majority or dominant cultural identity gets treated as normative and everybody else is regarded as deviant and second class.

So, the idea then is that what one needs is some way of adjusting the relations of recognition in order to give additional respect or value to the feminine, the non-white or the non-European forms and characteristics that have been under-valued. My idea was that both of these paradigms have some very important insights. Although I myself come very much out of the western Marxist tradition - and my own historic formation was very much in the so-called distributive paradigm - I never subscribed to the kind of vulgar Marxian economism that would say that issues of recognition, culture and identity and so on are merely super-structural. I think they both have independent weight and my idea was to find a way to show that these don't have to be opposed, that this is not really an either/or choice. Right now it's constructed as if these are in contradiction with one another, as if you can't be both a democratic socialist on the one hand and a multiculturalist on the other. I've been trying to say that in fact these things don't have to be opposing and that it is possible to connect and indeed integrate a social politics oriented toward equality and redistribution with a cultural politics aimed at the recognition of difference.

**M : Où en est le mouvement féministe américain ?**

NF : The feminist movement is in a curious state. It no longer exists in the sense of a mass movement as it did in the 1970s where you had big street demonstrations. But that is a bit deceptive because feminist ideas are very broadly diffused at every level of civil society. In every profession - whether it's legal, medical, psychological, social work - there are strong and active feminist caucuses and organizations that are oriented toward either defending the rights and interests of the women working in those professions or in forwarding an agenda around equalizing gender relations. One of the strongest institutional spaces for feminism is the university. And in fact this is part of a more general phenomenon: I would say the university is, in general, the strongest place where one finds *anything* on the left. The left from the era of 1968 has a strong institutional foothold in the university now, and that's part of the reason there has been so much conservative attack on the universities. But, women's studies programs and departments are now an absolutely entrenched, normalized and legitimate part of American universities - in every major and even minor university in the country. Not only does it have a

separate existence, but it has profoundly changed how the mainstream of other disciplines - including history, anthropology, literature - is studied. As an intellectual phenomenon, feminism is very secure.

**M : Comment, au-delà de l'université, le mouvement réagit-il par rapport aux thèmes de société ?**

NF : I would say that the Catherine MacKinnon anti-pornography initiatives are dead. They were not only rejected by the courts as being unconstitutional, but I think the idea that pornographic representations of female sexuality were somehow the core of sexism, and therefore the most important thing to change - which for a while was a surprisingly popular idea - has been discredited. And I'm happy about that, because it was always a dumb idea.

I also think there might be some relation between that and the Clinton story, because MacKinnon's allies in the pornography struggle were often fundamentalist-Christian conservatives who didn't want obscenity and smut in their communities. Clinton's story was a very interesting and somewhat difficult thing for feminism because what it really represented was the *hijacking* of a legitimate feminist issue of sexual harassment by a very anti-feminist group: here we had a case of a legitimate feminist issue being taken over as a weapon of this extreme anti-feminist, right-wing Congress in order to attack a president who has shown some friendliness toward feminism and is, by comparison to Congress anyway, liberal. Feminists were in a very difficult double-bind of wanting to insist on the importance of the general issue of sexual harassment while lending no aid to this right-wing attack - what I call the «American Taliban». I think that the feminist movement was initially confused and silent, but quickly began to defend Clinton's privacy rights to a consensual sexual affair - which may have shown very poor judgment, but was in no way sexual harassment, in the sense of a legal form of sex discrimination in which one uses a position of power to exploit subordinates. I mean, this was clearly a consensual affair, and if anyone was exploiting it one could say that Monica Lewinsky was trying to get a job out of it! So, that was a scrambling of all the usual lines in which the Christian right was suddenly talking about sexual harassment and feminists were having to say, «No, no, that's not it.»

**M : C'était donc la différence principale par rapport à l'affaire Clarence Thomas.**

NF : The Clarence Thomas Affair was a legitimate case of sexual harassment, because this was someone who wanted to have some kind of a sexual liaison with someone who worked for him and was directly under his supervisory authority. She, Anita Hill, rejected this and did not want this. He didn't accept that and continued to pursue it until it became so intolerable to her that she felt she had to leave the position. Now, this is not the most obvious kind of sexual harassment. The most obvious kind in the law is called *quid pro quo* harassment in which you say, «If you don't sleep with me, I'll fire you.» That's not what Clarence Thomas did; it was never such a direct threat, it was what's called «hostile climate» harassment in which you make somebody's life so miserable by constantly sexualizing everything that they are at a disadvantage in relation to other workers. And so the idea is that women - if it's in a university or in a job - who are subject to that kind of harassment have lost their equal-opportunity rights even though no one is really threatening to fire them.

**M : Et cela peut être légalement poursuivi ?**

NF : Certainly. That is one of the kinds of sexual harassment. The problem is that it has been left somewhat vague; you can see that there's a problem knowing when it really is a hostile climate in a way that really compromises equal rights to a workplace free of harassment, and when it is something more like flirting. Conservatives have attacked the whole idea of sexual harassment, in some cases claiming it is an infringement of men's free-speech rights. There's been some legal argument back and forth about how to define this in a more workable way: you don't want it to be too broad, because then you really would have a problem of state control of work culture that is too illiberal.

**M : Selon l'image que nous en avons en France aujourd'hui, le mouvement noir s'est réduit à un mouvement identitaire voire fascisant.**

NF : Well, there's certainly important strands like that, including strands of what you might call Black cultural nationalism - some of which have very anti-Semitic tendencies. But, there also remains a civil-rights establishment and old organizations like the NAACP who have a more social-democratic agenda. But, in general, I would say that the civil rights movement - which is part of the social left - is in decline. It is certainly less able to define the Black agenda today. If you talk about very poor ghetto youth with zero connection to the labor market, then of course it's the Farakhans who speak to them. And you can see, for what it's worth, in rap music and so on, the kind of mentality that is not the traditional integration-oriented, social-democratic civil-rights movement. So there's a case in which you've got a kind of split between a social and a cultural movement where I really don't think the cultural side can be identified with the left in any way.

**M : L'administration Clinton est souvent présentée en France comme étant favorable à la gauche culturelle - droits des homosexuels, droits des femmes - mais sur le plan social, en revanche, gagnée au néo-libéralisme. S'agit-il d'un avis déformé ?**

NF : It's hard for me to give a straight yes or no answer. I would say «yes» in the case of Blair, the case of Clinton is more complicated. That is, Blair's neo-liberalism is aimed at keeping up one's left-labor credentials by being active on the cultural-recognition side, including various anti-discrimination laws and so on - which are important and represent progress - while, at the same time, very much changing the traditional social-democratic agenda in a more neo-liberal direction. Clinton was the pioneer of that, except he tried and failed to do the most important social-democratic reform since Johnson's War on Poverty, namely to establish a national health care system. Of course it was a single-payer system that had neo-liberal elements but, even so, it was a serious social-democratic initiative. The other thing that Clinton has done which has been very important has been to fight to raise the minimum wage which is a very important demand of the labor movement and of the social left because under Bush the minimum wage had not been raised in almost twenty years. And that helped to raise wage levels throughout society, especially for lower paid workers. So, it's not a straight neo-liberal policy.

On the other hand, Clinton's great crime was the abolition of welfare entitlements for families, of a guaranteed federal entitlement for every child. He started out with a more social-democratic vision in which there was to have been a limited time - five years - in which you could claim this benefit, but that was going to be connected with a federal jobs program - which would have been good. What happened was that in the negotiations with Congress all of those other things were

dropped; the only thing that survived the so-called welfare reform was the time limit. And so that was in effect an abolition of a federal entitlement and therefore a major attack on what limited social rights Americans have - we lost one that was part of the 1935 civil-rights package that had been enacted by Franklin Roosevelt. So that's a mixed record.

I believe that in terms of his actual commitments, Clinton is on the social democratic side, but that in his character he gives in very easily. The only thing one could say in his defense is that, unlike Lyndon Johnson and unlike Franklin Roosevelt - who are our two other great reform presidents of the twentieth century - Clinton had no mobilized social left pushing him, so he was not in a position to say to the business interests, «You'd better do what I say otherwise you're going to have the Communist Party, you're going to have the A.F.L., you're going to have the civil rights movement - I'm you're best chance.» He didn't have that ability because he had a hostile Republican-controlled congress. I don't like Clinton very much but you have to understand historically that he did not have a very good situation to work with.

**M : The assault on welfare was disguised as a drive to eliminate what was referred to as «dependency», which became one of the «keywords», as you call them, in contemporary American political discourse which you argue it is the role of a committed intellectual - like yourself - to debunk genealogically.**

NF : In the whole period leading up to welfare reform in the United States there was a huge critique that began on the right but soon was everywhere in the media - including in the so-called liberal media like the *New York Times* - a critique of welfare dependency. Previously there had been a critique of *poverty*; suddenly everyone began to talk about a war on *dependency*, meaning that poor people were too dependent on the state for hand-outs: that is, overly generous welfare benefits were making people dependent, it was destroying their initiative, they no longer wanted to work, they just wanted to sit back and be lazy and let the government give them money that they didn't earn. So, this completely ideological discourse evacuated any discussion of the structural bases of poverty, of de-industrialization. This is a characteristic American theme: if you're poor, it's your own fault. There is no recognition of the structural dimension of the economy.

**M : Est-ce particulièrement américain, ou est-ce anglo-saxon, ou tout simplement protestant ?**

NF : It's very Protestant. But the difference is the labor movement in Britain, for example, was stronger for awhile at offering alternative interpretations of the reasons for poverty and unemployment. In the United States it's always been an up-hill struggle for the left to insist on a structural interpretation of poverty. The depression of the 1920s and 30s changed this for a time because so many people became unemployed and poor - and not just Black people and not just immigrants, but ordinary middle-class people. Then people had to notice, «Ah, it's not just the individual! There's something about capitalism that is doing this.» During the 30s and 40s that understanding was well entrenched, but then in the 50s it went away again, it came back again in the 60s and it's been lost again now; and the weakness of the social left has been such that we don't have it back. So, working with the historian Linda Gordon - and this was a way of connecting the social and the cultural - we tried to analyze the way social policy, poverty and unemployment were being represented in the media, including the way the conservative think-tanks were putting a lot of money into funding research on dependency. We tried to analyze the

history of this word, *dependency*, over many centuries and show how in pre-industrial usage, in the English language, dependency was a very normal state of affairs. No one was independent, except maybe the aristocracy or the gentry. Then in the industrial period, working men succeeded in establishing that they were independent even though they worked for someone else and had a boss. They changed the meaning of independence. In the post-industrial period, it's now been changed again so that everybody is supposed to be independent. Dependency is no longer understood as a structural condition of being under the power of someone else; it's become a psychological and characterological problem. The American Psychiatric Association even has an official classification of mental illness called DPS, «Dependent Personality Syndrome»!

**M : La «political correctness» est souvent identifié, en France, comme symptomatique de la folie de la gauche culturelle américaine.**

NF : «Political correctness» is another very interesting keyword: the term itself originated on the left as a kind of almost humorous self-critique - I think one can even find cases in the 50s and early 60s of this usage - and then it got taken up in a very big way, in the last ten years, above all by American neo-conservatives opposed to the academic left, the cultural left. And I would say 90 % of this is complete hogwash. There have been these same anecdotes about how some good liberal professor at Harvard - usually Stephen Thurnstrum - was viciously attacked by students for using some word that had - or was said to have had - a racist connotation. There were two or three such incidents which kept getting repeated over and over, usually in the *Wall Street Journal*, with the reporters never even checking what had really happened. And they became legends. Now, I wouldn't deny that there have been excesses, but this has all become so exaggerated that you now have people who believe that American campuses are highly regulated, authoritarian environments. Whereas, in fact, to the degree that there are free, critical environments in American society, they're no where else but in the universities, I can tell you that! That this space should be called «authoritarian» is completely absurd. It's very painful to me when I come to Europe and people on the left repeat these right-wing clichés about political correctness in the United States. It's real disinformation.

**M : Vous associez la redistribution à la gauche sociale. Mais au sein de la gauche sociale, n'y a-t-il pas deux traditions distinctes : l'une qui porte de la redistribution ; l'autre qui porte sur la réorganisation de l'économie et de la production ?**

NF : There are at least those two currents and probably others as well. And I don't want to evacuate those distinctions because my own belief is that some more radical kind of reorganization of the economy is necessary to really redress structural injustices and that a mere redistribution - in terms of income transfers or something - would not be sufficient. Nevertheless, I take them both under the single label redistribution in order to call attention to what I see, in the United States anyway, as the larger division between redistribution and recognition, between the social left and the cultural left. You can say that, at the moment, with the kind of confusion about socialism since the fall of communism and so on, that there's a lot of confusion in the social left about what kind of reorganization one wants: whether it's possible to do more than redistribute; whether there can be market socialism; whether there can be any kind of central planning that is not a command economy.

So, I just wanted to say, «Okay, let's bracket those questions and simply say this is all, broadly speaking, redistribution». And there's this whole other left that has developed entirely separate

from those debates, that has its own debates, including this one between queer politics and traditional identity politics. My idea was that, in a way, the cultural debate between queer politics and identity politics is almost like the cultural analogue of the debates within the social left, between a kind of surface reallocation through income transfers and that kind of restructuring you just spoke about. So, I distinguished between two kinds of politics: *transformative* politics and *affirmative* politics which cut across the whole division between the cultural and the social, between redistribution and recognition. In other words, I distinguish between a transformative redistribution that would reorganize the division of labor and the structure of ownership, and affirmative redistribution which would reallocate, in order to change what might be called the end-state patterns of distribution, without changing the underlying mechanisms that generate those end-state patterns.

Now, I think that there's an analogous distinction on the cultural side. I think that identity politics is an affirmative politics that wants to - in a surface way - reallocate the respect and value that are accorded to existing groups. Blacks need more respect, gays need more affirmation, women need more esteem or value. And that too doesn't in any way transform the underlying structures of the symbolic order. So, in a sense, I think that queer politics is a more radical, more transformative politics that says something like the whole dichotomy Black/White, male/female, homo/hetero are part of the problem, which one actually wants to destabilize in order to allow a much more fluid kind of cultural space, and more plural, fractured identities... So I think this deconstructive cultural politics has more affinity with a kind of radical-socialist social politics... But, this whole question of which redistribution and which recognition is something that I would like to inspire people to be talking about together; the first thing is to put redistribution and recognition together and then we can figure out which version.

**M : Vous soulignez que reconnaissance et redistribution sont irréductibles l'une à l'autre et peuvent en fait se comprendre comme les deux pôles d'un continuum qui embrasse toute forme d'oppression et toute forme de justice. Mais, dans bien des mouvements sociaux, la lutte de reconnaissance n'est-elle pas un moyen pour atteindre l'égalité sociale et la liberté économique que vous assimilez à la redistribution ? Autrement dit, y a-t-il une véritable symétrie entre les deux ?**

NF : Well, I think there's a legitimate question about symmetry: whether they have equal weight and so on. And I would certainly agree it's almost an empirical question, in any given case, whether the real root of the problem is one of economic structure or a problem of symbolic order and culture. I think we could have important arguments about, for example, whether what's really motivating the struggle for Québécois autonomy isn't some economic issues - they're certainly mixed up there. But, I certainly want to insist that there's some real independence and autonomy on the recognition side.

For example, one could take a country like France, at least one segment of which sees itself in this very unitary republican way, with a kind of fixation on Frenchness, French culture, French language and French customs. Now, one could imagine a serious Socialist government doing quite a lot in terms of employment and progressive taxation to create a lot more social equality than now exists. And yet, one could still say there is some serious injustice in this society, insofar as there persists a refusal to recognize that it is a *multicultural* country. That this notion of the single French identity is a *myth* and that all sorts of other people and communities are suffering from being brought under a kind of assimilationist regime. So, like the cultural left, I do insist that even in the absence of economic injustice one can suffer serious injustices: if you're not

allowed to speak your language or practice your religion. Let's put it this way: even if Slobodan Milosovic had not fired all the Albanian workers from the school system and discriminated economically, the relocation of Kosovar cultural autonomy was an injustice.

**M : Nous tournant à présent vers la question de la reconnaissance, vous proposez de réinterpréter les luttes pour la reconnaissance non pas non pas en termes d' *identity politics* mais en termes de statut. C'est sans doute l'une vos intuitions les plus fortes et, en même temps, les plus contestées.**

NF : Basically, I have argued that there has been, over the last ten years, a kind of shift in the relative weight on the left - in the world in general - away from a set of struggles centered around the language and issues of redistribution (which have declined relatively speaking) toward the emergence of discourses and struggles that understand themselves in terms of recognition. On the one hand, it's good that these recognition issues, which were previously submerged in obsessively mono-cultural communist or social democratic contexts, have come out; it's good that the politics of sexuality have come out. Nevertheless, in the current context, it's worrisome, for two different reasons: first of all, this shift toward a new prominence of recognition is happening at exactly the same time as a kind of economic *mondialisation*, which is gravely exacerbating economic inequality in the world. So to the degree that people are forgetting about the redistribution side, this is a huge problem.

The other problem is that these recognition struggles often take a kind of communitarian form which imposes some new authoritarian model of what the group's cultural identity is or ought to be. And that's ironic too because, after all, the context in which recognition struggles are emerging is a context of very strongly increased trans-cultural interaction and communication. I mean, the whole context for the rise of recognition struggles is that of the global media revolution which is bringing images of other cultures right smack into your face on a daily basis, as well as of accelerated migration such that people are actually living together who never before were. The cultural processes are actually very hybridizing and pluralizing but some of the responses are reactive and reactionary, insisting on the purity, the total difference of a particular culture. I have been interested in trying to contest this communitarian turn in recognition politics. If we want a left politics that unites the social left and the cultural left, then we need a different model of recognition than the most prominent, identity-focused model. I've tried to develop an alternative model that would be more useful for a left politics of recognition, that would be more easily linked up with a politics of redistribution, the idea being that what needs to be recognized is not a group-specific identity but rather the equal status or equal standing of group members - as individuals - to have the possibility to participate on a par in social contexts that are mixed, that are multicultural.

**M : Est-ce que cette capacité de participer également ou en «paire» sans subir de discriminations peut inclure des demandes d'identité, ou est-ce que c'est un autre terrain ?**

NF : It could include it but it doesn't have to, and that's why it gives us more space, more opening. It gives us a way of saying that if the goal is equal participation, equal standing, to be accepted as a peer and to have the resources and respect that you need in order to be a full partner in social interaction, there's more than one way to do that. You don't have to focus on the idea of elaborating some wholly distinct, segregated identity that, in the case of Farakhan, for example, is absolutely discriminatory and rejecting of «White devils» and so on. I think there is more than

one way to achieve this kind of parity and there are cases in which identity-related issues are appropriate and important - but not all kinds of identities.

**M : Et quels sont les critères pour définir les justes demandes d'identité ou les justes demandes de statut par rapport à celles qui sont injustes ?**

NF : The over-arching, normative criterion for me is this idea of *parity of participation*. Everyone should have the possibility to participate on a par with others in social life. One could say that identity demands which - if institutionalized - would deny parity of participation to others are *aeo ipso* unjustified. And if that's what the institutionalization of the Farakhan idea would be then it's simply reverse racism. In other words it's sort of easy, at least in the abstract, to say that norms and meanings that institutionalize forms of sexism, racism or homophobia, that prevent women, people of color, gays and lesbians from participating as peers in social life, are unjust. Other examples are a little harder - an interesting example is creationism: the belief of some Christian communities that Darwinian evolution is false and that God created the human species in a completely distinct way that has nothing to do with apes and other primates. There have been, in the United States, demands by such groups that Darwinian evolution should not even be taught in schools, or if it's going to be taught, one has to give equal time to this other theory which they claim is equally valid! Now what do you do about something like that? There is no doubt that these people are scientifically wrong; therefore from the scientific point of view one doesn't want to give them equal time. On the other hand, they do have some sort of claim of being marginalized and disrespected in a non-secular culture. So I think there are issues there about how to deal with that in a way that is genuinely liberal and tolerant without compromising on scientific standards when dealing with education. You want to somehow prevent that legitimate way of determining curriculum on a scientific basis from spilling over into other forms of disrespect.

**M : Comment est-ce que vous reliez cette articulation que vous faites avec, d'un côté, la théorie de Rawls, et de l'autre, celle de Habermas ?**

NF : That's a very hard question. Like everyone in the US, I think, I've been influenced - without even knowing it - by Rawls. On the issue of distributive justice, I have tried to be as agnostic as possible about whether the difference principle or some other theory of distributive justice is best. I want to say, «Let Rawls and Dworkin and Sen argue that out, whoever comes up with the best theory, I'll take it. They're the experts, I'm not.» And the same with the recognition theorists in a way; let the best philosophers argue it out. I think my idea of parity of participation is a radicalization of the idea of equal respect that you find in the second Rawls of *Political Liberalism* - and in most other liberal philosophers. So I am a liberal, in Rawls' sense, insofar as I believe that there has to be some universal notion of the right that can somehow be free-standing in relation to the various comprehensive doctrines of the good; and something like the idea of justice is exactly right. But my interpretation of justice, in terms of this idea of participatory parity, is more radical and more demanding than Rawls' current idea of justice. Rawls makes his job too easy for himself. The interpretation of justice as participatory parity is more demanding. For example, it's not neutral between feminists and fundamentalists on gender issues. It is a standard that entails that men and women ought to have the possibility of participating on a par in social life; well, all sorts of comprehensive doctrines in various religious communities -

Christian, orthodox Judaism, fundamentalist Islam and so on - would reject that. Rawls is trying to give those people more leeway than I would allow.

**M : Votre rapport à Habermas semble avoir évolué...**

NF : Habermas has been one of my most important influences. I didn't like the way Habermas developed his critique of the colonization of the life-world by systems. I think he mistook what I would rather interpret as a perspectival distinction for an institutional distinction. But, on the other hand, I very much appreciated the effort to connect what he called the systems dimension and the life-world dimension. And in my own way, in trying to connect the social dimension and the cultural dimension there's something in common there. I am sorry that Habermas left the domain of social theory for the domain of political theory, that is, for my tastes, too disconnected now from an attempt to analyze the dynamics of society in a social-theoretical way. I'm sorry that his moral theory and legal theory got too disconnected from social theory, and I'm trying to retain the social theory dimension.

**M : Quel est le lien que vous faites entre l'idée de participation en tant que paire à la vie sociale et l'espace public ?**

NF : There are a lot of links at both ends, if you like. First of all, at the end of how one would apply the idea of participatory parity. Like Habermas, I don't believe that the philosopher as expert can give you the perfect decision procedure for saying when we have parity of participation. I believe, like Habermas, that that is a question for the citizens themselves, as he says, to argue out in public space. So, participatory parity is for me a kind of heuristic, abstract idea whose application is completely dependent on public discourse - in the public space. Now, that creates a kind of chicken-and-egg problem because the conditions under which today one could argue those things out in public space, are not conditions in which there is parity of participation in public space. So, this also functions as a critical yardstick for analyzing, in a very Habermasian way, how the existing processes of communication are distorted by the structures of domination or inequality.

**M : Vous avez consacré un de vos livres à une réévaluation du féminisme français. Est-ce que vous pouvez dire quelques mots là-dessus ?**

NF : Well, I have a mixed relation. First of all, I understand that what Americans call French feminism is only a very thin slice of a larger movement. But there's an interesting story to be written about why people translated Irigaray, Kristeva, Cixous, and why they became so influential in the US academy and in the cultural feminist milieu and why others of the more social-feminist left in France were not. So, we had a very distorted reception, first of all. My own feeling is that what was powerful and interesting about this French feminism, as we read it in the 1980s - it was late already, by the time we were reading it - was the attention to the symbolic, to language and psychoanalysis, which at that point was an underdeveloped part of American feminism (where there was an American feminism interested in language and the symbolic, it was much cruder; I mean MacKinnon is in a way a theorist of representation - it's just that she has an unbelievably crude theory that somehow men control representation and that pornographic pictures control everyone). But, in its American reception, it got elaborated into an unbelievably monolithic and totalized view of a phallogentric symbolic order which somehow every child,

virtually from birth, absorbed in a way that took over their entire subjectivity, and thus women couldn't be speaking subjects but only lack. All of this, I think, was just a dead end. As a theory of how ideology works in society, it was very problematic. So, I tried to counter-pose a Gramscian model of hegemony in which the culture was composed of many different strands, some residual, some dominant and some emergent, in which one could tell a story about how certain kinds of phallogentric or sexist models became authoritative in certain institutions at certain times but not in a way that wiped out all the contestation, all the alternatives. I mean, I think the most important thing about our time, with respect to gender, is how *contested* everything is. We're in a moment in which what used to be kind of authoritative models of masculinity and femininity, of what a family should be like, are completely called into question. It's not clear that there even is a hegemonic model at this point. I'm sure there will be again, but at the moment it's all in flux, and to have a theory of the symbolic order that can't theorize this contestation is very disabling politically. And I felt that the way that the French feminist theory of the symbolic order was received in the United States was much too totalizing and monolithic and static and anti-historical - not institutionally grounded.

**M : À chaque fois que vous présentez votre idée de parité vous tenez à préciser, afin d'éviter tout malentendu, que cela n'a rien à voir avec la parité telle qu'elle est débattue en France.**

NF : Well, I think the parity debate here is fascinating but quite curious. Such a thing could never happen in the United States. As I understand it, the proposed French law defines parity in a numerical way in terms of how many representatives are male and female. What I call «parity of participation» has nothing to do with numerical representation. I can imagine an assembly in which fifty percent of the representatives are women where there is not parity of participation, where the women don't speak as much, where they're not listened to when they do. I can also imagine cases where there are a less favorable number but more genuine parity. Also, since I don't think that gender is the only important social fault line, I'm not sure that I would insist that there be fifty percent women if that meant that there might be less immigrants, etc. So, I don't know what I think about this parity stuff, here.

But, what I mean by parity, is the idea that one has the possibility to participate as a full member in social interaction; and I don't want to limit that to the formal political system: to the Assemblée Nationale, to the Sénat, to various municipal councils. I want to see it in those formal institutions - but also in the labor market, in various voluntary institutions of civil society, in the media, in the production of culture, in a whole range of activities. Parity means something different in each of those activities. It's much too mechanical to say that 50 % of the actors, in each sphere, have to be women and 50 % have to be men. I think that people are going to choose what arenas they want to put their time in; not everyone is going to want to do formal electoral politics; not everyone is going to want to do volunteer community activism... I'm more interested in the qualitative character of interaction than in the numbers. I agree that if there are one hundred senators and only three are women, there's a big problem, that's a symptom of something seriously wrong. But, just having the right numbers doesn't ensure the qualitative dimension.

**M : Comment la notion de parité de participation éclaire-t-elle les débats politico-culturels comme celui autour du mariage homosexuel d'un côté, et celui concernant les jeunes filles qui portent le foulard islamique à l'école de l'autre ?**

NF : Well, I am certainly in favor of overturning institutionalized norms that deny homosexuals the rights heterosexuals have - the right to adopt and raise children, the right to have health insurance through their partner, the right to inherit money, the right to have tax exemptions and so on. However, I am opposed to a remedy that would consist in opening the institution of marriage to same-sex couples if that meant not institutionally recognizing other lifestyle choices - the cohabitation of three or, why not, more partners.

With regard to wearing the scarf, I have a principled as well as a strategic answer. Certainly one wants to support sexual equality, and to create conditions for internal change in the Muslim community. However, inasmuch as the scarves don't seem to raise any educational questions, kicking the girls out of school - arguably the only place they might learn to challenge discrimination - is counterproductive. Ultimately the symbolic debate about *pudeur* has to be culturally contested and not state legislated.

**M : Faut-il prendre des mesures ciblées en termes de discrimination positive?**

NF : Targeting is very tricky, because in striving for redistribution one often ends up reinforcing misrecognition. This is the whole irony of the quotas raised by the parity debate in France. In the United States, you have the *right* to vote for whomever you want, and for an American, quotas are the *nightmare* case of affirmative action. In the United States, affirmative action has never been about assuring outcomes, but rather about setting goals. I am a strong supporter of affirmative action, though it should not be portrayed as a panacea for sexism and racism. Affirmative action is always an extra step, an effort of outreach; it has only been portrayed as a *requirement* by conservative disinformation. Another piece of disinformation is that affirmative action only helps middle-class Blacks and women. This is an absolute lie: white monopolies (in police forces, construction workers' unions...) have been broken down thanks to affirmative action. In reality, in the United States, where race almost stands as a proxy for class, actively encouraging more Blacks in the universities, leads to a greater representation of lower-class groups.