

## Political Representation without Identity: a feminist dilemma

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**ABSTRACT:** *In Gender Trouble, Judith Butler criticizes the way in which feminism traditionally maintained an unjustified binarism between female and male based on the well-known dichotomy gender and sex. By deconstructing these categories showing how the content of gender and sex are constructed and contingent, Butler also empties the feminist political subject known as "woman". Given the heterogeneity of the content that constitutes this "woman" category, Butler denies the possibility of an effective political representation through the use of a shared identity, because she denies the existence of characteristics shared among women. Some authors, like Iris Young, considered this denial of the political subject of feminism as a political risk that could undermine the emancipatory potential of the feminist movement. In this article, I show how Young seeks to reconceptualize the gender category as disconnected from identity based on the criticisms made by Butler. As a result, Young allows the construction of a gender theory that is committed to the political representation of women in a non-essentialist and democratic form.*

**KEYWORDS** – *Inclusion. Democracy. Feminist Theory. Judith Butler. Iris Young.*

### I. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SEX AND GENDER

The first feminist discussions about sex and gender arise from the analysis proposed by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. In this work, Beauvoir starts from the "woman" category to show how it was built and defined by men. His initial purpose is to understand the meaning of this category, because a lot has been said about women but there is not a clear consensus about what exactly it means. Apparently, to be a woman it is not enough to be a female of human species. For this purpose, it is necessary to participate in a "mysterious and endangered reality" which is called femininity.

According to Beauvoir, the subordination of woman to man - as Other<sup>1</sup> - does not have a biological explanation. She analyzes several theories that have emerged since antiquity that seek to naturalize the differences between man and woman. She argues, from the point of view of the species, males and females differ in terms of reproduction, although this separation, as shown by several examples, does not depend on any sexual differentiation, that is, it has a contingent character.

In some theories, this sexual difference was added by a distinction of the social role that each sex (female or male) must fulfill. According to Aristotle, for example, the fetus is produced by the meeting of the sperm and the menses, and it is up to woman supply the passive matter, while the man gives strength, activity

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<sup>1</sup>For Beauvoir, man is the Subject, the Absolute and woman is the Other (BEAUVOIR, 2016, p. 11). The category of the Other is very old, present in the most ancient mythologies and is part of the way human beings organize their thinking. For the inhabitants of any village, a foreigner is the Other. In the same way, the Jews are the others for the anti-Semite, the blacks for the racists, the indigenous for the colonists, the women for the men. However, according to Beauvoir, there is nothing in nature that justifies this duality of the Other and the One in terms of the female or male sex. There is no female element involved in this division. We must understand, however, how this notion was formed and how we can escape it.

and, finally, life<sup>2</sup>. Beauvoir says that even after the discovery of the mammal's egg by the German naturalist Ernest Baer in 1827, this theory remained influential, which is why Beauvoir turns to biology to show that the theses have already been refuted. Although there are differences between the sperm and the egg, for Beauvoir it is impossible to point out any relationship of superiority between them.

Beauvoir presents physiological characteristics of women, showing that female body has a lower muscular strength with a lower respiratory capacity and other characteristics that are comparatively inferior to the male body. Such facts, in his view, cannot be denied, however, these facts are meaningless in themselves, they cannot explain or justify the subordination of women to men. After all, a woman's physical weakness is only revealed as bad feature in a certain particular view. Where muscle strength not bring advantage, the discussion loses its meaning.

In a similar argument, Beauvoir discuss the negative influential that the reproductive role exerts on women. The negative aspects of the reproductive role could be reduced if society requires a greater or lesser number of births or if it guarantees hygienic conditions for the development of pregnancy or childbirth, for example. In this sense, these aspects depend on how free reproduction is and the role it plays in a given society. Therefore, biology is part of the woman's situation, but it does not determine an immutable destiny for her. In other words, it is not enough to define a hierarchy of the sexes or to explain the subordinate and Other condition of women. It is a situation, not a destination.

For these reasons, although the biological dimension of the distinction between men and women is not neglected, Beauvoir rejects that it is capable of determining the fate of both. The woman's body is one of the components of the situation she occupies in society, but that is not enough to define what she is<sup>3</sup>. For Beauvoir, the most important thing is the meaning that these facts acquire, because social and economic notions are necessary to attribute to women ideas of weakness and inferiority. The conclusion is that woman's condition is socially constructed and has no biological basis. In her words,

No one is born a woman but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, economic destiny defines the path that the human female takes in society. It is the social group that elaborates this intermediate product between male and the castrated beings who qualify as female (BEAUVOIR, 2016, p. 9)

This statement means that a category of women does not have exactly defined content, because the content depends on the way society defines it. In this sense, since the category of women was built by men like the Other, it is up to women to reconstruct that category in another way. For these reasons, at the end of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir invites women to collective action in a struggle that could emancipate not only women, but also men.

For this work, Beauvoir was considered the "mother" of the second feminist wave for her pioneering spirit in analyzing the situation of women subordination. His work brought an interpretative model that allowed the emergence of the distinction of sex and gender, created by Gayle Rubin in "Trafficking in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex. In this work, Rubin takes a similar idea as a starting point. The question that guides Rubin's essay is: what makes a female of the human species turn into an oppressed woman? This issue is important because it is precisely in your answer that we found the elements that could be modified to achieve an egalitarian society.

Rubin's idea is to elaborate an alternative explanation for the origin of female subordination, which she calls "sex/gender system", based on Freud and Lévi Strauss. Rubin seeks to show that the gender distinction corresponds to a cultural construction carried out on a biological distinction that, in itself, has no definite meaning. According to Rubin, every society has a sex/gender system: "a set of arrangements by which the

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<sup>2</sup>ARISTOTLE *apud* BEAUVOIR, 2016, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup>Ingrid Cyfer (2015, p. 68) says that, "in Beauvoir, the biological materiality of the body is important for the subjectivity of woman, but it does not precede or define a destination. The body is like a situation, a form to taking possession of the world and an outline of your projects".

biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner, no matter how bizarre some of the conventions may be” (RUBIN, 1975, p. 3).

The important thing for Rubin here is to explain, from anthropological studies on primitive societies, that the tasks and functions attributed to different sexes (female/male) are defined by a sexual difference, even in different traditional communities. The reason is that through the distinction of tasks by sex the mutual dependence between men and women is generated, which guarantees the necessary union for the reproduction of the species and the bond between the different groups.

If the bond between men and women were natural, it would not be necessary to create a set of rules and social functions that bind them as a couple. Based on this, Rubin criticizes the naturalization of the masculinity/femininity. These characteristics are not linked to sex, as some thought, but to gender and reflect historically contingent social roles, which it would be vary from society to society. The fundamental principle of this system consists in the exchange of women between groups, where such women are seen as properties, having no right to choose, constituting the way in which such groups gain sexual access, genealogical, ancestral and ancestry names, in short, concrete systems of social relations.

If the exchange of gifts allows the establishment of bonds between groups, the exchange of women, as Levi-Strauss shows, corresponds to the most important act because allows, through heterosexual and monogamous marriage, the most lasting link between groups. In Rubin's words,

The result of a gift of women is more profound than the result of other gift transactions, because the relationship thus established is not just one of reciprocity, but one of kinship. The exchange partners have become affined, and their descendants will be related by blood: “Two people may meet in friendship and exchange gifts and yet quarrel and fight in later times, but intermarriage connects them in a permanent manner (Lévi Strauss)” (RUBIN, 1975, p. 22).

Thus, Rubin affirms that the creation of genders, that is, masculinity/femininity, is in fact a product of the way kinship systems is imposed on individuals, having gender as the basis for social organization. The exchange of women, one of the basic principles of Strauss's kinship theory, is taken by her as a concept that situates and “explains” the oppression of women within social systems<sup>4</sup>. In her words:

Men and women are, of course, different. But they are no different than day and night, earth and sky, yin and yang, life and death. In fact, from the perspective of nature, men and women are closer to each other than they are to anything else - for example, mountains, kangaroos or coconut trees. The idea that men and women are more different from each other than they are from anything else must come from some sphere other than nature.... Far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities (RUBIN, 1975, p. 69).

As a result, for Rubin, kinship systems would involve the social creation of two binary genders, from biological sex and through a sexual division of labor. Such a configuration would provoke an interdependence between men and women that is not natural, as well as the social regulation of female sexuality aiming at reproduction, imposing heterosexuality on women. In other words, kinship systems, from a sexual division of labor, create men and women both heterosexual. Thus, Rubin's conclusion is that the suppression of the

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<sup>4</sup> According to Rubin, the exchange of women was a first step towards the construction of concepts through which it is possible to think about the subordination of women. For Rubin, these more primitive social practices would be at the base of the construction of genres that we know. Therefore, kinship creates the gender, it establishes the difference, the opposition of the sexes, exacerbating the biological differences between them. With regard to sexual difference, culture overrides nature (RUBIN, 1975, p. 28).

homosexual component of human sexuality and the oppression of homosexuals are products of the same system whose rules oppress women.

Rubin's work meant an advance for feminist theoretical analysis, because, while much of the theories treated it as something natural, Rubin denaturalized heterosexuality. Rubin opened doors for other forms of interpretation of gender and sex. Furthermore, like Beauvoir, Rubin seems to question the biological basis of the distinction between genders or, if we want to use Beauvoir's vocabulary, the distinction between male and female. Rubin notes that the content given to the genre varies historically and is culturally constructed. Biology not only cannot explain this difference, but it does not provide any good argument to justify it.

## II. BUTLER'S DECONSTRUCTION OF SEX, GENDER AND IDENTITY

Rubin and Beauvoir influenced later feminist analysis. From their work, new critical analyzes could be constructed and the concept of "gender" was established as an indispensable category in feminist analysis. However, numerous controversies have arisen as to what exactly it should mean. The continuity and rupture - in some aspects - with these works became more evident, starting in the 1990s, with the publication of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* by Judith Butler.

In this work, Butler recognizes the merit of Beauvoir and Rubin, but points to some limitations in their interpretations. Butler says that both, Beauvoir and Rubin, maintained an unjustified binarism about genres. For Butler, even though the concept of gender and its differentiation from that of sex had the objective of questioning the view that biology serves as a destination for women, both maintain the idea that sex is biological and naturally given. Both understand sex as the biological basis on which gender is built. But, for Butler, if it is true that "genders are the cultural meanings assumed by the sexed body"<sup>5</sup>, then the consequence is that the unity of the subject "women" is already contested here, because this distinction allows gender as an interpretation of sex. After all, it cannot be said that gender stems from sex in a specific way, because if a female is not necessarily a woman and, if the content of the gender is culturally constructed, nothing requires that a female (sex) be a woman (with feminine gender).

According to Butler, our binary gender system (feminine/masculine) presupposes an implicit mimetic relationship between gender and sex, in which gender reflects what sex is. However, the sex/gender distinction shows us a radical discontinuity between sexualized bodies and culturally constructed genders. This means that, even in the hypothesis of binary sex (male/female) as something fixed and immutable, it does not follow the construction of men as male bodies and women as female bodies. Therefore, there is no reason to suppose that the genders remain in only two options (feminine/masculine). Thus, the constructed gender become a "floating artifice"<sup>6</sup>, with the consequence that man can mean both a female and a male body and, in a similar way, a woman can mean both a female and a male body.

For Butler, gender is an apparatus of production by which the sexes are constructed. It follows that gender is not for culture like sex for nature as Rubin had thought. The sex/gender dichotomy makes gender produce the appearance of a "natural sex", a pre-discursive body, prior to culture, since gender is culture. Sex is then produced as something politically neutral on which culture is built<sup>7</sup>. According to Butler, it is exactly this duality that guarantees the internal stability and the binary structure of sex and satisfies the objective of maintaining power and control over bodies. In short, Butler calls into question the sex/gender distinction in order to show

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<sup>5</sup>BUTLER, 2014, p. 24.

<sup>6</sup>BUTLER, 2014, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup>Butler follows Foucault's claim that body does not correspond to a politically neutral place, but is a product of certain scientific discourses that express certain social and political interests. In this sense, Butler suggests that conception of sex as something biologically given is "an effect of a discursive construction of behaviors expected from the subjects. That is, certain social rules constrain women to adhere to "femininity", just as they constrain men to adhere to "masculinity". She says that: "Strictly speaking, perhaps sex has always been gender, in such a way that the sex/gender distinction turns out to be absolutely none" (BUTLER, 2014, p. 25).

that there is no sex that is no longer gender. Bodies have been “gendered” since the beginning of their existence in society, which also means that there is no “natural body”, a body that preexists cultural inscription.

Butler also criticizes an attempt by many feminists to seek a source of women's oppression, or even the “intimate truth of women,” which defines who the woman is. The problem is that this type of presupposes a universal subject for feminism. According to Butler, the idea of the existence of “a subject who stands before the law while waiting for representation” is a fiction. For Butler, the idea that women share common features and, therefore, can be represented in a universal subject called “woman” is the result of a normative language that says what a woman is and what is not. In this sense, this category does not seem to be ideal for feminist goals, as it ends up excluding women, instead of emancipate them. According to Butler, this decontextualized subject of class, race, ethnicity is incompatible with identity as a singular notion<sup>8</sup>.

With his genealogical investigation, Butler shows that the Subject is not prior to the inscription of gender and sex, but is constructed in specific contexts (birth itself constitutes a scene of subjectivity). For Butler, being a woman is something more that we “do” and not that “we are.” In this respect, Butler expands on Beauvoir’s idea of becoming a woman,

If there is something right in Beauvoir’s claim that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman, it follows that woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification. Even when gender seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the “congealing” is itself an insistent and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means. It is, for Beauvoir, never possible finally to become a woman, as if there were a telos that governs the process of acculturation and construction (BUTLER, 2014, p. 58).

In effect, according to Butler, the feminist subject is revealed to be discursively constituted and this raises the possibility of not having a subject that is prior to the law, “waiting for representation in the law”. For Butler, the legal subjects in the representational systems of Western culture when they are produced are linked to certain exclusion objectives. The domains of linguistic and political representation establish a priori the criteria according to which subjects are trained. It follows that representation can only extend to what is recognized as a subject. In this sense, for someone to be included as a “subject”, the qualifications for that need to be met. It is for this reason that Butler says that the subject “women” would not exist effectively and any attempt to create it leads to the exclusion of part of the voices that feminism wants to represent<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, Butler argues that the category of women should be open to constant reformulation and challenges. Contrary to what some feminists thought, the cause of the movement's fragmentation is precisely the insistence on this category as a representational subject of feminism. Butler argues that there is no need for a subject behind political action, thus, identity is not necessary to guarantee the political objects of emancipation. It is, in fact, the opposite that occurs. In his words,

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<sup>8</sup>For Butler, there is a significant literature that questions the viability of the "subject" as the ultimate candidate for representation or even liberation, as they demonstrate - among other things - how little agreement there is as to what constitutes the category "women". Instead of generating the immediate consent of those who feel represented, the category of "women" has become a cause of anxiety. As Butler remembers, *Am I That Name? [Am I this name?]* Denise Risely's title deals with a question that is generated by the possibilities of the multiple meanings of the category. For Butler, “if someone” is “a woman, that is certainly not all that someone is”, the term cannot be exhaustive because it has not always been constituted in a univocal and coherent way in the different historical contexts where there are "women". In addition, gender establishes “intersections with racial, classist, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities”. In this sense, it is impossible to separate the content of the category from the context in which it was established (BUTLER, 2014, p. 20-21).

<sup>9</sup>BUTLER, 2014, p. 205.

Without the compulsory expectation that feminist actions must be instituted from some stable, unified, and agreed-upon identity, those actions might well get a quicker start and seem more congenial to a number of “women” for whom the meaning of the category is permanently moot. (BUTLER, 2014, p. 36)

After exposing his criticisms, Butler claims that it is possible to undo these commonly accepted bases of gender, based on the notion of gender performativity. For Butler, gender is performative, it is a repetition of bodily acts that aims at cultural survival, since those who do not “do” their gender correctly are punished by society. The gender gains the appearance of natural because it is stiffened by the process of regulated repetition that occurs in language<sup>10</sup>.

To challenge the gender norms, it would be necessary to perform gender in a way that reveals your fictional characteristic. A subversive “performance” of the gender could confuse the relationship between gender and sex, as in the case of *Drags*, who combine a stereotyped representation of the female with a male body, showing the possibility of dissonance between sex, sexuality and gender.

In the conclusion of his book, Butler says “the task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself” (2014, p. 148). What Butler seems to show at this point, is that although gender identity is an effect, it is not fatally determined. There is the possibility of denaturalizing, proliferating and displacing identities.

### III. "CRITICAL COMMENTS": IRIS YOUNG READS JUDITH BUTLER

In the article “Lived body and Gender: Reflections on Social Structure and Subjectivity” (2002), Iris Young seems to agree with the criticism that Butler leads to the categories of gender and sex, but says that discarding the category of gender and women can imply a high political risk for the feminist movement. In this article, Young analyzes the essay by Toril Moi entitled “What is a woman?”.

According to Young, Moi perceives the most recent feminist theorization as the end of the constructivist gender current. Although the feminist theory of the 1970s found a distinction between sex and gender that was liberating for both theory and practice, the criticisms that followed, such as Butler's, were successful in showing how problematic that distinction was. Not only did they destabilize the categories of biological sex and gender identity, but they also made it possible to expand the possibilities of thinking about identities and their relations with practical life.

Moi, then, proposes to abandon the gender category, due to its excessively generalizing and excluding character (as demonstrated by Butler). Instead, Moi bets on the renewal of the concept of “lived body” derived from existential phenomenology, as a more suitable candidate to theorize the subjectivity of the body without falling into the traps of biological reductionism and gender essentialism.

Young, for his part, agrees that gender is a problematic concept for theorizing subjectivity, but says that there are other aspects of feminist theorization that cannot do without a concept of gender. For Young, these aspects are more about social structure than subjectivity and identity and have been relatively neglected by more recent feminist theories. The notion of lived body helps for the second (subjectivity and identity) but is not

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<sup>10</sup>For Butler, gender performativity is an effect of forced norm recitation. We recognize certain behavior as feminine because he recites certain practices that, over time, acquire legitimacy. The female subject is only a female subject because of this repetition. Far from being chosen, therefore, femininity is an effect of the forced citation of a norm. These are norms that are recited by force, because they are deeply interwoven in relationships of domination, rebuke and control (think of the associated risks when sex is practiced in the wrong way). These are independent of the subject, operating from the moment one is born until death. The recitation of gender norms is necessary to enable someone as an intelligible subject throughout their life (Butler, 2000, 232).

completely satisfactory for the first (systemic and structural processes). In Young's view, the latter to be well described lack a reformulated concept of gender<sup>11</sup>.

Young believes that Moi's proposal to return to the concept of the lived body is commendable, since this concept works better fulfills than the theoretical function of gender category. This concept allows the description of habits and interactions of men with women, women with women and men with men, ways that serve as possibilities of behavior, without the need to reduce the heterosexual binarism "female" and "male". Furthermore, it works best because it helps to avoid the problem used by the use of general descriptive categories such as "gender", "race", "nationality", "sexual orientation" that helps to describe as constituted identities of individuals, that is, "namely the additive character that identities appear to have under this description." (YOUNG, 2002, p. 417)

Nevertheless, Young notes that feminist and queer theories, like Butler's view, are projects of critical social theory. These projects strive to identify certain damages or injustices, locate and explain their bases in the institutions, in the relationships and finally propose (sometimes) guidelines for changing them. However, this last set of tasks requires the theorist to have a description not only of individual experience and subjectivity, but also of social structures. Instead of the idea of individuals sharing group identities, Young articulates the concept of social structure that seeks to provide an institutional explanation for the sources of injustice.

These structures denote the confluence of institutional rules, interactive rules, resources and material structures, which constitute the historical data on which individuals act and which are relatively stable over time. Such structures also shows the broader social results that result from the confluence of individual actions within certain institutional relationships whose collective consequences generally do not bear the mark of the intention of any person or group.

These social structures position individuals in the relations of work and production, power, subordination, desire, sexuality, prestige and status. The way a person is positioned in structures is a function of how people are treated in various institutional contexts. Social groups defined by class, race, age, ethnicity and gender denominate structural positions whose occupants are privileged or disadvantaged in relation to each other due to the agents' adherence to institutional rules and norms and the search for their interests and objectives in the institutions. Thus, for Young, these structures offer a way of understanding inequality of opportunity, oppression and domination, which does not seek individual perpetrators, but considers most agents complicit in its production.

According to Young, to describe and explain some of the structures and processes that affect differential opportunities and privileges in contemporary society, we cannot do without a category of gender. Feminist theories need conceptual tools to describe the rules and practices of institutions that take on different roles for men and women and/or assume that men and women are linked together in intimate relationships. Therefore, we need tools to understand how and why certain tasks or status remain persistent in a way that limits the options of many women and most people whose sexual and intimate choices deviate from heterosexual norms. According to Young, we must understand the concept of gender as a concept for theorizing structures rather than subjects. We do not need to assign a single or shared gender identity to men and women.

Additionally, in the essay "*Gender as Seriality: thinking women as a social collective*" (1994), Young agrees with the criticisms that show how the search for common characteristics of women, or their oppression, leads to normalizations and exclusions. But he also agrees with those who say there are pragmatic reasons for insisting on the possibility of understanding women as a group. Young sees that these two positions pose a dilemma for feminist theory: if, on the one hand, women are not in any sense a social collective, there would be nothing specific for feminist politics; on the other hand, the effort to identify the attributes of this collective

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<sup>11</sup>For Young, Butler successfully questions the logic of the distinction between sex and gender, but his theorizing never goes beyond these terms and remains linked to them. Young recalls Moi's criticism, which further says that this gender perspective makes the category of gender useless to understand subjectivity and identity. Butler's theory seeks to free gender content from the normative polarities of hegemonic masculinity and femininity. According to Young, the consequence is that queer feminist theorists completely break with the gender category.

seems to undermine feminist politics can leave out who should be included. Young proposes as a solution the reconceptualization of social collectivity or the meaning of social groups such as what Sartre writes, in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, being a phenomenon of serial collectivity. This approach allows women to be understood as a social collective without identifying attributes common to all of them that may imply that they share a common identity.

In *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre says that a group is a collection of people who recognize themselves and others as they establish a unified relationship between them. The group members recognize each other and together endorse a common project, so they are united by the action they print together<sup>12</sup>. Thus, a group refers to a collective aware of its mutual recognition and purpose. Such groups emerge and can go back to a collective unit that is not conscious and less organized, called series.

According to Young, in the series the members are passively united by the objects towards which their actions are oriented or by the objective results of the material effects of the actions of others. The unity of the series is given by the way individuals pursue their own personal ends with regard to objects conditioned by a continuous material environment and in response to structures that were created by the collective and unintended result of past actions Sartre uses the example radio to illustrate some features of the series. The collective of radio listeners are isolated, but not alone. They are aware that they are part of a series of radio listeners, other simultaneous listeners and that they are indirectly connected to them through radio transmission. The experience of listening to the radio is partially conditioned by the awareness of being connected to others.

For Sartre, the purpose of seriality was to describe the meaning of a social class. To be a member of a working or capitalist class would mean to live in series with others in that class, through a complex and linked set of objects, structures, practices related to work, interaction and consumption. The existence of the class does not define the person's identity, it only designates a social facticity given the material conditions of his life that the person is subject to. When you proudly say you belong to a class, existence is no longer experienced at the level of the series, but at the level of the group. Young briefly defines series as:

A series is a collective whose members are passively unified by the relationship that their actions have with material objects and their practical-inert stories. The practical-inert environment, in whose structures, and through which individuals achieve their goals, is felt as a constraint in relation to the modes and limits of action. To say that you are part of the same series does not necessarily mean that you identify yourself as a set of common taxes that all members have, because your membership status is defined not by something that people are, but rather by the fact that their existences and diverse actions, be ordered around the same objects or practical-inert structures. Being a member of a series does not define the person's identity. Each member of the series is isolated, He is Other to the others and, as a member of the series, He is Other besides himself. Finally, there is no concept of series to attributes that clearly and mark what in individuals makes them belong to a certain series. The series is a unit and beat and variable an amorphous collective (YOUNG, 1994, p. 727).

For Young, "I am a woman" as a series means a background for the personal identity of the woman or a group and not something that constitutes the woman. According to Young, like the structures of gender, class and race, neither do they name attributes or aspects of their identity but rather practical-inert needs that condition their lives and which they have to deal with. Individuals can adopt various attitudes towards these structures. Their position in each series means that they differ in experiences and perceptions from others that are situated differently, but the same person can relate to these series in different social contexts and at different times in life. In Young's words:

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<sup>12</sup>The group project is a collective project in that members share with each other the idea that the project can only be carried out, or at least in the best way, if taken together.



A person can choose to make none of her serial memberships important for her sense of identity. Or she can find that her family, neighborhood, and church network makes the serial facts of race, for example, important for her identity and development of a group solidarity. Or she can develop a sense of herself and membership in group affiliations that makes different serial structures important to her in different respects or salient in different kinds of circumstances (YOUNG, 1994, p. 733).

For Young, thinking of gender as seriality eliminates the problem of essentialism and of defining identity from what it means to be a woman, in feminist theory. This is because the series does not conceptualize a group and its unity is indistinct, volatile. This unity does not emerge from people considered women, but positions them through the material organization of social relations. They are not attributes applied to all women, but a structure of actions and expectations in relation to others<sup>13</sup>. According to Young, it also eliminates the problem of identity, since it disconnects gender from its relationship with identity. Each person's identity is unique, no individual identity of a woman escapes the gender mark, but the way gender marks her life is unique. When gender is serial, women do not need to have anything in common in their individual lives to be serialized as women. According to Young, this is the most thoughtless and universal level of being a woman.

On the other hand, women also form groups based on their serial existence, that is, self-conscious collectives that mutually recognize each other as having common purposes or shared experiences. In this sense, the series are always partial to groups. Groups are more than just women, they are usually specified socially, historically and culturally. That is, there may be groups of women who are feminists, who claim other things or even are anti-feminist.

Feminist politics and theory refer to or point to the serial reality of women, this serial reality embraces all women who exist and have ever existed. For Young, feminism cannot be a group of women, there are many feminisms, many groups of women whose purpose is to politicize gender and change power relations between men and women<sup>14</sup>. But, when they are grouped, the condition of women is not the only thing that brings them together, other concrete details such as class, race, nationality are at the base of these affinities. In this way, Young sees that feminist policies must be alliance policies, since a series as a process, a volatile unit, is not a totality. So that feminism will always tend to be multiple.

To make it clearer how identities may not name subjectivities, Young constructs an idea of political representation as a relationship. In "Political Representation, Identity and Minorities" chapter of *Inclusion and Democracy* (2000), Iris Young analyzes the inclusion dilemmas faced in a democracy, especially those involved in the representation of political minorities. One of them is that the idea of representation assumes that a group has a set of common attributes and interests that can be represented, which in most cases would be false. The unifying process required by group representation would freeze fluid relationships into a unified identity, recreating political exclusions. However, in the context of practical disputes, many people believe that representation is still the best way to give voice to the excluded.

For Young, these representative practices are an important instrument for political inclusion and the questions stem from misunderstandings about the nature of representation. Representation discourses often assume that the person they represent places themselves in a position of substitution or identity with those represented. Against to this image, Young conceptualizes representation as "a differentiated relationship between political actors engaged in a process that spans space and time" (YOUNG, 2000, 125). Temporality and spatiality decentralize the concept of representation, opening up both potential and political risks.

For Young, the view that authentic democracy is not compatible with representation is implicitly supported by an identity logic. It is often said that representation is necessary but, at the same time, democratic

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<sup>13</sup>The content of these structures may vary according to the social context. Saying that a person is a woman can predict some constraints and expectations that she will have to deal with, but it does not predict anything in particular about what she is, what she does and how she adopts her social position.

<sup>14</sup>For Young, "feminism is a particular reflexive impulse of women who form a group - women who group together as women to change or eliminate the structures that serialize them as women" (YOUNG, 1994, 418).

deliberation requires citizen co-presence and representation is only legitimate if the representative is in some way identical to the voters. For the author, this opens a paradox: representation is necessary, but it is impossible, as it is impossible to capture the essential attributes of voters, the diversity of their interests, experiences and opinions. In this sense, to get out of this paradox it is necessary to conceptualize representation without being guided by an identity logic. Political representation should not be thought of as a relationship of identity and substitution, but as a process that involves a mediated relationship between voters and each other and with a representative.

Young relies on Derrida's concept of *différance* to formulate a new notion of representation. While the logic of identity generates polarities, thinking of identities in terms of *différance* maintains them in their plurality, without requiring a unification of identities in a common identity. In his words, "things are similar without being identical and are different without being opposed to each other, depending on the reference point and the moment in a process" (YOUNG, 2000, p. 127). By emphasizing the process and the relationship and not the substance as in the logic of identity, *différance* highlights intervals of space and time. To conceptualize representation as *différance* means to recognize and affirm that there is a difference, a separation (and not unity) between the representative and the represented. It also means describing a relationship between voters and the representative in which the representative's role is to speak for and not to speak as voters would speak.

This notion of representation dissolves the paradox posed by the situation in which one person represents the experiences and opinions of many others. In this case, there is no specific will shared by all that can be represented, since the electorate is internally differentiated. For Young, thinking of representation in terms of *différance* instead of identity means taking into account its temporality, so that we must evaluate the representation process according to the relationship between the voters and the representative, even if a departure is inevitable, this the latter must be connected to voters in some way, just as they must be connected to each other.

The relationship between voters and representatives must vary between the moment of authorization and the rendering of accounts in order to guarantee the continuous connection between them. The representative is authorized to act by a group of official institutions that also circumscribe the represented group, as well as to be accountable to those he represents, otherwise he would be acting only for himself. For Young, his notion of representation is primarily normative, reflecting the ideas of a representation that is effective and that promotes democratic legitimacy and political inclusion. In this sense, for the author, the main normative problem of representation is the threatened disconnection between the representative and his voters.

In short, in whatever form it assumes, political representation cannot refer to the sharing of attributes between people as well as a set of opinions, interests or experiences. This interpretation follows the identity logic, rather than conceptualizing representation as a differentiated process of relations between the representative and the representatives. In this sense, the representative is not a mirror of his constituency. On the other hand, representation cannot be done individually (as some might suggest), whatever the principle that shapes representation, members of an electorate are best represented when they organize to discuss their disagreements and differences with one another others and with representatives.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The differences between the approaches of Iris Young and Judith Butler are quite clear. On the one hand, Butler moves away from reformist approaches to politics by proposing a cultural transformation that destabilizes norms and is regardless of the state's protective laws. On the other hand, Young believes in institutions as indispensable tools for collective political struggle, Young is concerned with reforming such institutions in order to make them more inclusive and democratic. Butler does not believe that this is possible, because the nature of the regulatory legal devices are in themselves exclusive.

Despite these clear differences in both approaches, in this essay I proposed a reconciliation between the authors in what they have in common: a concern for people who are excluded from hegemonic groups and

whose voices are silenced in “democratic” deliberations. I tried to show that Young starts from the criticism made by Butler to reconceptualize the concept of gender and later unties the political representation of identity. As a result, Young shows us at least two aspects: 1) Women can form groups and affirm identities, but this process never refers to the totality of women that exist. Even so, it is possible and desirable to know the structures of oppression that women share as a social position and this is a function of the gender category. 2) Political representation dispenses identity if we think of it not as the replacement or mirror of the person represented, but as a form of relationship between the representative and the person represented.

These two Young's theses that I tried to develop solve the paradox of the feminist identity, because it is possible to talk about all women in a series, structural and non-essentialist perspective, in which feminism does not lose its political specificity. In addition, it is possible to speak about political representation because it is possible speaking *for* women and not speaking *like* women, since identity is displaced from representation and it functions as a relational process between the representative and the represented. If the objective of the identity "women" as a feminist political subject is to enable claims of shared interest among women, then it seems that this objective is preserved in its most important sense: in a way that does not exclude other women in this process.

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