

**NANCY FRASER AND THE CAPITALISM THAT DEVOURS THE FUTURE:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION**

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PARA A EDUCAÇÃO***

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IMPLICACIONES PARA LA EDUCACIÓN***



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**ABSTRACT:** Nancy Fraser, in *Cannibal Capitalism* (2024), explores how contemporary capitalism consumes its own foundations, leading to social, political, ecological, and racial-imperial degradation. The work is divided into six chapters, addressing racial exploitation, the crisis of democracy, and social reproduction, with emphasis on the role of women's unpaid work in the capitalist system. Fraser argues that capitalism, by prioritizing infinite accumulation, compromises the sustainability of the planet and social relations. She also discusses how power dynamics and racial exploitation are structural in capitalism. The author suggests the need for resistance through feminist and ecological struggles, defending the creation of new social orders that confront the contradictions of the system. His work is a profound critique of the consequences of neoliberalism for democracy and social policies.

**KEYWORDS:** Cannibal capitalism. Intersectionality. Democratic crisis. Social reproduction.

**RESUMO:** Nancy Fraser, em *Capitalismo Canibal* (2024), explora como o capitalismo contemporâneo consome suas próprias bases, levando à degradação social, política, ecológica e racial-imperial. A obra é dividida em seis capítulos, abordando a exploração racial, a crise da democracia e a reprodução social, com destaque para o papel do trabalho não remunerado das mulheres no sistema capitalista. Fraser argumenta que o capitalismo, ao priorizar a acumulação infinita, compromete a sustentabilidade do planeta e das relações sociais. Ela também discute como as dinâmicas de poder e exploração racial são estruturais no capitalismo. A autora sugere a necessidade de resistência através de lutas feministas e ecológicas, defendendo a criação de novas ordens sociais que confrontem as contradições do sistema. Sua obra é uma crítica profunda às consequências do neoliberalismo para a democracia e as políticas sociais.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Capitalismo canibal. Interseccionalidade. Crise democrática. Reprodução social.

**RESUMEN:** Nancy Fraser, en *Cannibal Capitalism* (2024), explora cómo el capitalismo contemporáneo consume sus propios cimientos, lo que conduce a una degradación social, política, ecológica y racial-imperial. La obra está dividida en seis capítulos, que abordan la explotación racial, la crisis de la democracia y la reproducción social, con énfasis en el papel del trabajo no remunerado de las mujeres en el sistema capitalista. Fraser sostiene que el capitalismo, al priorizar la acumulación infinita, compromete la sostenibilidad del planeta y las relaciones sociales. También analiza cómo la dinámica de poder y la explotación racial son estructurales en el capitalismo. La autora sugiere la necesidad de resistencia a través de luchas feministas y ecológicas, defendiendo la creación de nuevos órdenes sociales que enfrenten las contradicciones del sistema. Su obra es una profunda crítica a las consecuencias del neoliberalismo para la democracia y las políticas sociales.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Capitalismo caníbal. Interseccionalidad. Crisis democrática. Reproducción social.

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## **Cannibal capitalism and the system's contradictions: an analysis of the interrelations between economy, politics, and education**

Nancy Fraser, in her book *Cannibal Capitalism* (2024), spanning 227 pages, offers a profound analysis of the inherent contradictions of capitalism, emphasizing how the system devours its own conditions of possibility, thereby undermining the environment, social relations, and political institutions. Through an interdisciplinary approach, Fraser integrates critical theory, political economy, and social philosophy to present a complex and nuanced understanding of the dynamics of power and exploitation that underpin contemporary capitalism. The book is organized into six chapters, each examining different dimensions of capitalist “cannibalization,” ranging from racial-imperial dynamics to the threats posed to democracy.

Accordingly, the original chapters can be reinterpreted by expanding their titles—without altering their meaning—as follows:

- Chapter 1: The Reorganization of Capitalist Society – Introduces the concept of “cannibal capitalism,” emphasizing how contemporary capitalism consumes its own preconditions of existence, addressing four main contradictions: ecological, social, political, and racial-imperial;
- Chapter 2: Down the Throat: Capitalism Is Structurally Racist – Explores the racial-imperial dynamics of capitalism, revealing how racial exploitation has been deeply rooted in the capitalist logic since the era of slavery and continues to shape the present;
- Chapter 3: Devourer of Care: Social Reproduction as a Central Field of Capitalist Crisis – Discusses the division between production and reproduction, highlighting how capitalism relies on unpaid labor—particularly women’s labor—to sustain its accumulation logic;
- Chapter 4: Nature in the Gut: Ecopolitics Must Be Transenvironmental and Anticapitalist – Addresses the ecological crisis driven by capitalism, arguing that the unrestrained exploitation of natural resources constitutes a form of cannibalization that endangers planetary survival;
- Chapter 5: Swallowing the Public: Capitalism’s Crisis Is a Crisis of Democracy – Examines how financial capitalism has eroded the foundations of democracy by

concentrating power in the hands of a global elite that shapes public policy to serve its own interests;

- Chapter 6: Another Capitalism—or a New Socialist Feminism? – Discusses possible forms of resistance to cannibal capitalism, emphasizing the need for a new social order capable of transcending capitalist contradictions, with a focus on feminist movements and other forms of social emancipation.

Fraser’s work raises numerous questions that invite a profound critical reflection on the trajectory of contemporary consumer society. It confronts readers with the urgent need to reassess the impacts of this model on social relations, demonstrating how it fuels inequality and significantly contributes to environmental degradation. By challenging the values and practices that sustain this consumerist logic, the book compels us to reconsider both our collective and individual responsibility in building a fairer and more sustainable future.

In the opening chapter, Fraser introduces the central concept of “cannibal capitalism,” arguing that the system is not self-sustaining but instead depends on the exploitation of social, ecological, and political processes that it simultaneously destabilizes. She identifies four “contradictions of capitalism”—ecological, social, political, and racial-imperial—each corresponding to a specific form of cannibalization. Fraser (2024, p. 49) suggests that by consuming these conditions, capitalism generates crises that further exacerbate its own instabilities.

The second chapter examines racial-imperial dynamics, revealing how capitalism has always been deeply intertwined with racial oppression. Fraser (2024) contends that racism is not merely a byproduct of capitalism but rather a structural foundation that enables the expropriation and exploitation of populations marginalized by race and social vulnerability. She traces the historical trajectory of these dynamics from the era of slave capitalism to the contemporary period, in which mass incarceration and subprime lending exemplify the ongoing persistence of racial oppression (Fraser, 2024, p. 54).

In the third chapter, Fraser explores gender relations within capitalism, emphasizing the divide between production and reproduction. She argues that the capitalist system feeds on unpaid labor, particularly that performed by women, and that this division reinforces gender inequality, marking capitalism as a devourer of care. This analysis is essential to understanding how educational policies—especially those aimed at integrating women into the labor market—

often perpetuate gender-based exploitation by devaluing reproductive labor (Fraser, 2024, p. 62).

The fourth chapter addresses the ecological crisis, arguing that capitalism, by prioritizing infinite accumulation, undermines the natural processes that sustain life. Fraser underscores that the unrestrained exploitation of natural resources constitutes a form of ecological cannibalization that threatens the survival of the planet and, by extension, that of future generations. This chapter holds particular relevance for scholars of environmental education and curriculum policies aimed at sustainability (Fraser, 2024, p. 65).

In the fifth chapter, Fraser examines the crisis of democracy, asserting that financial capitalism has eroded the foundations of democratic governance. She suggests that economic power has become increasingly concentrated in the hands of a global elite that leverages its influence to shape public policies in its own favor, thereby compromising the legitimacy of democratic institutions. This analysis is essential for those studying inclusion and equality policies, as it reveals how neoliberalism undermines the democratic mechanisms intended to guarantee social justice (Fraser, 2024, p. 75).

Finally, in the sixth chapter and the epilogue, the book concludes with a reflection on the possibilities of resistance to cannibal capitalism. Fraser proposes that, by understanding capitalism as an institutionalized social order, new forms of struggle can emerge—forms that confront not only economic exploitation but also racial, gender-based, and ecological oppressions. She advocates for the development of a multilingual and intersectional critique that addresses the multiple dimensions of capitalist cannibalization (Fraser, 2024, p. 77).

### **Expanding the debate: sensitive issues**

For scholars of equality and inclusion policies, Fraser's work provides a sharp analysis of the ways in which capitalism cannibalizes the very possibility of a democratic and equitable education. Her intersectional approach is crucial to understanding how curriculum policies can both perpetuate and challenge structural inequalities. Ultimately, *Cannibal Capitalism* is an urgent call to action—inviting educators, academics, and activists to reconceptualize education as a field of struggle against the forces of capitalism and to work toward a more just and equitable society.

In expanding Nancy Fraser's analysis of *Cannibal Capitalism*, it becomes essential to delve deeper into the implications of the concept of "cannibalization" within the field of education and curriculum policy. Fraser not only exposes the destructive character of capitalism

but also provides a critical framework for understanding how this system insidiously shapes educational practices and public policies. Her work engages with a broad tradition of critical thought, including authors such as Michel Foucault, Zygmunt Bauman, and Pierre Bourdieu—each contributing concepts that enrich our understanding of the relationship between power, knowledge, and education in the neoliberal context.

Fraser (2024) argues that contemporary capitalism, by devouring its own conditions of possibility, commodifies all aspects of social life, including education. This process of commodification can be understood through Foucault's (1979) concept of *biopower*, in which neoliberal governance seeks to control and regulate life itself—including through educational institutions. Within this framework, education is shaped to produce individuals as “entrepreneurs of themselves,” compliant with the demands of the market, a notion further elaborated in Foucault's (2008) discussions on “neoliberal rationality.”

This perspective is complemented by Bauman's (2001) analysis of *liquid modernity*, which describes a stage of modern life in which institutions, including education, become increasingly flexible and uncertain, reflecting the dynamics of the global market. According to Bauman (2001), in this liquid phase, education begins to serve the logic of consumerism—training individuals not for critical citizenship, but for constant adaptation to a volatile labor market. This “liquidity” manifests in curricula that privilege technical and utilitarian competencies at the expense of critical and emancipatory education.

Fraser's concept of “cannibal capitalism,” in dialogue with these theoretical perspectives, offers an expanded lens through which to analyze contemporary curriculum policies. The curriculum, as a cultural and political artifact, is—according to Bourdieu (1996)—a site of struggle where different forms of capital (economic, social, and cultural) intersect and are unequally distributed. Fraser suggests that under cannibal capitalism, the curriculum becomes instrumentalized to reinforce social and economic inequalities, preparing students to fit market demands rather than fostering a critical education capable of questioning the system's foundations.

Fraser (2024, p. 54) also challenges the traditional view of class struggle, proposing that “boundary struggles”—those related to ecology, gender, race, and democracy—must become central to any project of resistance to cannibal capitalism. This intersectional approach is fundamental for understanding the complex forms of domination and exploitation that operate simultaneously within the educational sphere. Fraser's feminist critique, for example, highlights how curriculum policies often overlook or undervalue the contributions of women and other

marginalized groups, thereby perpetuating an exclusionary logic that mirrors and reinforces the patriarchal structure of society.

Furthermore, Fraser's work resonates with the concerns of scholars such as Judith Butler and Angela Davis, who have examined how contemporary capitalism sustains itself through the systematic exclusion and marginalization of specific social groups (Butler, 1990; Davis, 2016). Butler, in exploring the performativity of gender, exposes how social norms—including those that shape the educational system—function to maintain and reproduce structural inequalities. Davis, in turn, highlights the intersection of race, class, and gender, demonstrating how public policies, including educational ones, often reinforce the oppression of racialized (Black and Brown) and low-income populations.

By integrating these perspectives, Fraser not only critiques the capitalist system but also underscores the necessity of a radical transformation grounded in the re-signification of education and curriculum. She argues that a truly emancipatory education must resist the market logic intrinsic to capitalism and be guided by principles of social justice, inclusion, and sustainability. This vision demands a reevaluation of knowledge and pedagogical practices that promote autonomy, critical thinking, and collective action—standing in stark contrast to the technical and instrumental training that dominates neoliberal curriculum reforms (Pizolati, 2021).

### **Target audience: indications for the work**

Nancy Fraser's *Cannibal Capitalism* is an essential read for students and researchers in the fields of education, public policy, history, and the social and environmental sciences. Students of educational policy will find in this work a critical analysis of the economic and political forces that shape curricula and pedagogical practices. Those interested in equality and inclusion policies will benefit from Fraser's discussion of how capitalism perpetuates racial and gender inequalities. Moreover, the book serves as a valuable resource for historians and political scientists seeking to understand power dynamics in contemporary capitalism.

Fraser offers a dense and rigorous analysis that challenges readers to reconsider the very foundations of the capitalist system and to envision new forms of resistance and social transformation—an effort that necessarily extends into the educational sphere (Silva, 2023). In *Cannibal Capitalism*, Nancy Fraser makes a vital contribution to the field of critical theory by connecting the destructive dynamics of contemporary capitalism to educational practices and public policy. Her analysis is particularly relevant for researchers and students of education,

curriculum policy, social sciences, philosophy, and critical theory. The book constitutes an invaluable resource for those seeking to understand how neoliberalism shapes education and how to resist these trends through an intersectional critique that accounts for the complex interactions among class, race, gender, and ecology.

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