Redistribution, Recognition and Participation:  
Incorporating politics of difference to the capability framework

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Abstract:  
Justice today, quoting Nancy Fraser, requires both ‘redistribution’ and ‘recognition’ and as she phrases it, it is a false antithesis to put class and identity politics as two separate things. In this paper, I argue that recognition is already present in the capability framework along with redistribution. Both recognition and redistribution contribute to justice by expanding the real freedom people enjoy which is basically what the capability approach aims at: Expanding the capabilities of each and every individual. One of the main dimensions of the capability approach is its ethical individualism. While some groups may undermine its members to develop other individual capabilities, some capabilities can only be realized within a group. The relationship between groups and individuals is hard to grasp and when we consider the capabilities of individuals, it is even harder. To overcome this difficulty, I suggest incorporating Iris Young’s ‘politics of difference’ to the capability framework. By doing so, I claim that we widen our perspective on the relationship between individuals and groups, and also have better tools to reflect the structural injustices which prevent the capabilities to be developed in the first place.

Introduction:  
‘…the trend toward growing impoverishment of large parts of the population; the emergence of a new ‘underclass’ lacking access to economic as well as sociocultural resources; the steady increase of the wealth of a small minority- all these scandalous manifestations of an almost totally unrestrained capitalism today make it appear self-evident that the normative standpoint of the just distribution of essential goods be given the highest priority. The debate signalled by the juxtaposition of the key terms ‘recognition’ and ‘redistribution’ can therefore not reside at this level of weighing political-moral tasks. Rather, in my view the argument is located on, so to speak, a lower level, where what is at issue is the ‘philosophical’ question: which of the theoretical languages linked to the respective terms is better suited to consistently reconstructing and normatively justifying present-day political demands within the framework of a critical theory of society?’ Axel Honneth (in Fraser and Honneth 2003: 112)

Since Plato, human beings are searching the answer for the question of what just society is:

What is justice? What are the characteristics of a just society? What should be the boundaries of justice? These are the crucial questions which the students of social science, but mainly political scientists and economists, have been working on coming from different philosophical traditions. Thus ‘justice’ challenges the boundaries of ‘economy’ and ‘politics’ more than ever with today’s global, neo-liberal economic conditions and state system.
Justice creates the ground for legitimacy—the reason d’etre for the states and it leads us to the question: How to maintain justice? By redistribution was the dominant answer for a very long period but in the ‘postsocialist’ era and in the context of an ascendant neoliberalism, it is no longer redistribution but recognition. There has been a paradigm shift and recognition is regarded as the main road for justice. Fraser noted the following for the feminist movement but the same argument can be extended to all: ‘Instead of arriving at a broader, richer paradigm that could encompass both redistribution and recognition, feminists appear to have traded one truncated paradigm for another— a truncated economism for a truncated culturalism’ (2001:21). Thus struggle for recognition may be serving less to enrich struggles for redistribution than to displace the latter (Fraser 2001:21). Even the concepts we use have changed putting the issue as more a question of recognition than redistribution, such as the term social exclusion. Redistribution is a necessary condition when we consider the discrepancy between have and have-nots. Nevertheless, both redistribution and recognition are kind of remedies, not actual prevention. And to have just society in the first place requires focusing on the production and structural injustices.

In this paper, using Fraser’s arguments that it is a false antithesis to put class and identity politics as two separate things (2003:9), I argue that recognition or politics of identity is already within the logic of the capability approach—most promising framework for justice. Both recognition and redistribution contribute to justice by expanding the real freedom people enjoy which is basically what the capability approach aims at. The capability approach, has been classified within the distributive paradigm and has been criticised for being ‘too individualistic’, is not a full theory of justice and it does not tell us the fairness and equity of the processes involved. Thus still with the capability approach, we gain an important framework for justice in which differences are taken into consideration for developing capabilities. I therefore suggest incorporating Iris Young’s ‘politics of difference’ to the
capability framework in order to bring in the group perspective. By doing so, I claim that we widen our perspective on the relationship between individuals and groups, and also have better tools to reflect the structural injustices which prevent the capabilities to be developed in the first place.

**Justice: Redistribution, Recognition and What else?**

In *Redistribution or Recognition?*, Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth debate about the fundamental framework for justice in order to reconstruct the conceptual underpinnings of Critical Theory. Honneth argues for a theory of recognition whereas Fraser states that ‘dual perspective theory’ is needed in which recognition and distribution both are included (2003:19). Justice today, quoting Nancy Fraser, requires both ‘redistribution’ and ‘recognition’: Cultural and economic forms of injustice reinforce each other and ‘economic disadvantage impedes equal participation in the making of culture, in public spheres, and in everyday life (Fraser 1997:15). However, this ‘false’ antithesis is what we have been observing through different channels: academia, social movements, government policies and also international organizations noting that of course there are always exceptions. Even our terminology has been affected by this and there is the term social exclusion which is also used as one of the key concepts in European social policy.

Rather than the concepts of poverty, low income or vulnerable groups, needy, subaltern, underclass, marginalized, socially disadvantaged, or homelessness, ‘social exclusion’ has been used as an umbrella term. It is a vague term and a catchword. But clearly social exclusion is not a well-defined and located concept. Definition of poverty is difficult but social exclusion is harder. This may be seen as positive as social exclusion has the potential of the complexities of the experience of socially disadvantage. It was argued that social exclusion is beyond the limited understanding of poverty where the focus is mainly on low income. Thus one has to note that social exclusion allows the problem to be understood more
of a recognition problem than a redistribution one. To be socially excluded is to be deprived from social recognition. In the sphere of politics social recognition is obtained by full citizenship, in the economic sphere it means being paid enough to be able to participate fully in the life of the community. The problems of redistribution, and of course related production, are not in the focus. Although social exclusion has been argued that as a term tried to politicize poverty and draw the society’s attention to the fact that poverty affects the whole society, it also distances the problem from economy, does not deal with the distributional problem. Levitas (1998) argues that the term divides the society into two groups: the excluded and the included and framing the issues of inequality as less important.

When we look at the theories of distributive justice, they have been criticized for ignoring the issues of recognition of difference. Nevertheless, many students of distributive justice are aware of the issues of ethnicity, culture and gender differentiation. Particularly the works of feminists have already tried to integrate the stated points. As Robeyns (2003b) states not all theories of distributive justice ignore the issue of recognition of difference. Particularly Sen’s capability approach integrates both the distribution of resources and how these resources can turn into capabilities by different individuals. Robeyns also demonstrates how Sen emphasises the cultural and social constraints on the choices that can people make ‘authentic and free’ well-informed choices (2003b:547):

‘… additional aspects of identity, diversity, and (mis-)recognition are taken into account, as unjust identity formation and social norms can lead to choices from one’s capability set that result in unjust inequalities. Similarly, choices are often not simply individual but collective

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1Robeyns criticises Fraser for her oversimplification of the theories of distributive justice and for putting all the theories of justice into the same basket, particularly for Sen’s capability approach. See Robeyns’ article where she compares Sen’s capability approach and Fraser’ participatory parity and argues that capability approach has a wider scope and pays more attention to human diversity than parity participation (2003b:548). Fraser uses the term ‘participatory parity’ for the goal of social justice, social arrangements should be arranged accordingly which ‘permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers’, ‘institutionalized patterns of cultural value express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem’ (Fraser 2003:36). Participatory parity calls for the necessary conditions to ensure that all individuals can develop and flourish as citizens.
(for example within a household), and this has an impact on people’s well-being. Thus, power relations within collectivities such as the household need to be taken into account in a capability analyses (Robeyns 2003b: 547).

In this paper I will argue that both recognition and redistribution contribute to justice by expanding the real freedom people enjoy. Thus the relationship between groups and individuals is hard to grasp and when we consider the capabilities of individuals, it is even harder. By incorporating Iris Young’s ‘politics of difference’ to the capability framework, I suggest incorporating Iris Young’s ‘politics of difference’ to the capability framework. By doing so, I claim that we widen our perspective on the relationship between individuals and groups, and also have better tools to reflect the structural injustices which prevent the capabilities to be developed in the first place. The goal is to incorporate groups to the capability framework, but at the same time to keep the ‘ethical individualism’.

As noted by Stewart, the quality of groups with which individuals identify forms an important direct contribution to their well-being by being instrumental to other capabilities and by influencing people’s choices and values (2005:185). So I argue for a two level analysis both individual and group level in order to overcome the problems that may emerge out of thinking justice only through recognition of collectivities-group identities.

**How do we conceptualize ‘recognition’? Politics of identity or politic of difference**

> “Five core elements of global ethics: equity (recognizing the equality of all individuals regardless of class, race, gender…) human rights and responsibilities; democracy; protection of minorities and peaceful conflict resolution and fair negotiation” (UNDP 2004:90).

In Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the term recognition is originally used and since then there are different interpretations. Within the limits of this paper I will not focus on these various interpretations and the theories of recognition, but focus on Iris Young’s call for ‘politics of difference’. As the above quote states for equality of all individuals, the claim is to disregard class, race and gender differences; however the politics of difference argues that we
need to recognize these differences for the same aim. The politics of recognition demand for recognition “on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has been denied: it is *qua* women, *qua* blacks, *qua* lesbians that groups demand recognition.” (Kruks 2001: 85)

Young (1990), in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, illuminates a theory of justice which includes redistribution and recognition, equality and difference though with some difficulties (Fraser 1997: 190). Young prefers to call the ‘post-socialist’ condition of the recent decades of distinctive politics not as politics of identity but politics of difference (1999: 416). Recognition claims by and-or on behalf of minority groups criticise the traditional equal citizenship rights by stating that those universal rights are in favour of the majority group that it is a false universality. The claim of ‘identity politics’ is to be recognized with respect to differences but most of the time ethnic and cultural differences. Young (1990) sees culture as one axis of politically relevant social difference; others include division of labour, sexuality, age, ability and racialised social structures. Young argues that ‘in a politics of difference the main issue is privilege more than recognition’ as the aim is to expand our understanding of the different bases of privilege beyond the ownership of property (1999:416). Particularly the point Young raises in terms of how oppression and privilege play role in one’s decision and preferences is crucial for the difficulties one face in terms of subjective well-being which is very important for the capability framework.

Young states that ‘oppression consists in systematic institutional processes which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings, or institutional processes which inhibit people’s ability to play and communicate with others or to express their feelings and perspectives on social life in contexts where others can listen’ (1990:38). This point provides important insight but also raises many questions with respect to the definition of social groups.

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2 According to Young, oppression, with its five faces—exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence—is structural.
According to Young, ‘a social group is a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life. Members of a group have a specific affinity with one another because of their similar experience or way of life, which prompts them to associate with one another more than those not identified with the group, or in a different way’ (1990:43). Young’s conception of social group covers both cultural and political-economic phenomena; different modes of collectivity such as ethnic, class, gender are all included\(^1\). Within the framework of justice, this way of looking at social groups is very illuminating.

Young argues for a more generic interpretation of a politics of difference in which culturally based claims are only one species: “In this more generic understanding, the problems that motivate social movements around group difference have to do with dominant norms and expectations in the society. Dominant institutions support norms and expectations that privilege some groups and render other deviant. Some of these are cultural norms, but others are norms of capability, social role, sexual desire, or location in the division of labour. Most group-based political claims of justice are responses to these structures of privilege and disadvantage” (Young 1999:415). For Young, providing mechanisms for the effective recognition and representation of the distinct voices and perspectives of those of its constituent groups that are oppressed or disadvantaged is a necessity for a democratic public (1990: 185).

\(^3\) Thus Fraser criticizes Young by stating that she seeks to defend a wholesale, undifferentiated and uncritical version of the politics of difference and Fraser points that ‘the cultural dimension of the definition which suggest that the capacities and abilities of oppressed people are essentially undamaged and intact; they suffer chiefly from misrecognition and undervaluation of their group-specific modes of cultural expression’(1997:193).

\(^4\) Fraser thinks it is better to distinguish these different groups at least in terms of ‘a culture-based group’ and ‘a political-economy based’ group (1997:195). Fraser suggests distinguishing the two types of oppressions: ‘economically rooted oppressions’ and ‘culturally rooted oppressions’ (1997:199) by stating that politics of difference can work against redistribution that ‘a more differentiated politics of difference’ is needed (Fraser 1997:200). Nancy Fraser argues that ‘gender’ and ‘race’ are typical examples of bivalent collectivities which refer to group of people that ‘encompasses both distribution and recognition without reducing either of them to the other’ (1997:30).
The struggle for equal political and civil rights did not bring actual freedom for some group and “social movements of oppressed and excluded groups have recently asked why extension of equal citizenship rights has not led to social justice and equality” (Young 1989: 250).

Universal citizenship is a relationship between individuals and states which is defined by rights and obligations. Universal citizenship means that being a citizen of a country transcends differences of the individuals. Thus according to Marshall (1950), citizenship is a full membership of a community which is constituted by three elements: ‘civil; political and social rights’. Civil rights are individual freedom such as freedom of speech, the right to own property, equality before the law. Political rights consist of rights to participate in the exercise of political power. Social rights are more known as socio-economic rights, basically the right to have economic welfare and security. Today still Marshall’s argument—the original claim for citizenship in the 18th century provoked demands for a more comprehensive understanding of what it means to be a full member of a political community (Linklater 1998: 187). However the demands of politics of identity are framed more as civil and political, whereas I would suggest demands of politics of difference call for the three dimensions: civil, political and socio-economic rights. With Young’s politics of difference, depending on the type of oppression, the claim for ‘the right to have rights’ can be raised.

Anderson calls for ‘democratic equality’ in which she seeks the construction of a community of equals, integrates principles of distribution with the expressive demands of equal respect (1999:289): ‘In such a state, citizens make claims on one another in virtue of their equality,

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5 Young suggests ‘group-differentiated’ citizenship which would lead to public recognition upon the interests and needs of different subaltern groups in order to maintain equality among the citizens, moving beyond the Marshall’s framework. Thus this suggestion has been criticised with the claim that the recognition of group-specific rights will strengthen essentialist account of these groups. According to Benhabib, “The human infant becomes a person through contingent processes of socialization, acquires language and reason, develops a sense of justice and autonomy, and becomes capable of projecting a narrative of which she is not only the author but the actor as well” (1994:174) Young criticizes both Habermas and Benhabib for sharing the illusions of Enlightenment in still defending a transparency of consciousness (1994:165-173) and Benhabib replies back with a critique of Young’s thought that it is ontologically and fundamentally impossible for social groups to think, to see, to understand the standpoint of other social groups by pointing out that Young again essentialises group identities and not taking into account the contested and fragile construction of ‘group standpoints’ (1994:185).
not their inferiority, to others. Because the fundamental aim of citizens in constructing a state is to secure everyone’s freedom…” (1999:289). Anderson frames it as each member of the community to be ‘entitled to the capabilities necessary for functioning as an equal citizen in a democratic state…”(1999:316). Thus citizenship needs to involve providing necessary capabilities: ‘To be capable of functioning as an equal citizen involves not just the ability to effectively exercise specifically political rights, but also to participate in the various activities of civil society more broadly, including participation in the economy. ..’ (Anderson 1999:317). Then the expected question is: Why the capabilities?

**Combining universal with that of particular: The Capability Approach**

How does the capability approach offer a solution to the above stated problems? Why to look at these questions through the capability perspective? The first point, as above stated by Robeyns and Anderson, I argue that the capability approach manage to combine the two dimensions, namely redistribution and recognition, (and even the third: participation). In fact what has been discussed above in terms of politics of difference is what is already integrated within the basic principles of the capability approach. When we consider universal values such as human rights, we do not have to identify universalism with the enforced uniformity. O’Neill offers strong reasons for rejecting the presumption that universal form and cosmopolitan scope must lead to uniform prescription: “uniformity is a matter of content of a principle and not of its form or scope. Some principles of universal form, whatever their scope, prescribe or recommend differentiated, i.e. non-uniform treatment. For example, principles such as ‘Each should be taxed in proportion to ability to pay’…..respectively prescribe and recommend universally, but both will require varied rather than uniform. Universality evidently does not entail uniformity” (O’Neill 1996:75). In fact, the universal principles should be applied differently in different cases. The capability approach, as a universal human development framework, has the potential of including these particularities.
Amartya Sen has introduced us the concept of ‘capability’ within the specific context of evaluating inequality\(^6\). He suggests that in order to provide well-being, the focus should be on making people capable of achieving well-being on their own terms. People differ in what well-being means to them, and capabilities are what they need in order to achieve what they define as well-being. Unlike the previous approaches for the measurement of development, the capability approach focuses on what people are actually able to do or to be. The capability to function is the thing that comes closest to the notion of positive freedom, and if freedom is valued then capability itself can serve as an object of value and moral importance” (Sen 1998:316). For Sen, development must be seen as enhancing the capabilities of people, and should not be seen as merely expanding the supplies of commodities.

A pregnant woman needs more nutrition than a non-pregnant one and disabled bodied person may need a wheelchair. This starting point of capability approach is also its strength as it tries to develop an understanding of diversity in human lives whether man and woman; handicapped or able-bodied; pregnant or not; young or elder. The goal is to provide the necessary conditions for capabilities to develop but how it would be satisfied and functioned depends on each person. Given the diversity of both social and political conditions, people live in their own personal characteristics, priorities and skills. The capability approach inherits this diversity and comes up with a development framework which incorporates these diversities. The basic idea is simple but also powerful. Since the fact of pluralism of human values and diverse life styles are taken into consideration for a universality claim, the capability approach is able to combine universalism and pluralism (Sen 1990).

Sen lists the diversities and heterogeneities that determine well-being which shows his concern for including particularisms in his framework:

\(^6\) The capability approach is founded by Amartya Sen and a very close version of the approach is developed by Martha Nussbaum. Within the limits of this article I am not going to elaborate on the differences of Amartya Sen’s capability approach and Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach.
“1-Personal heterogeneities: People have disparate physical characteristics connected with
disability, illness, age or gender, and these make their needs diverse.

2-Environmental diversities: Variations in environmental conditions, such as climatic
circumstances (temperature ranges, rainfall, flooding and so on), can influence what a person
gets out of a given level of income. (AIDS, pollution….)

3-Variations in social climate: The conversion of personal incomes and resources into the
quality of life is influenced also by social conditions, including public educational
arrangements, and the prevalence or absence of crime and violence in the particular location.

4- Differences in relational perspectives: The commodity requirements of established patterns
of behaviour may vary between communities, depending on conventions and customs. (‘To
appear in public without shame” Adam Smith noted two centuries ago…)

5-Distribution within the family: Incomes earned by one or more members of a family are
shared by all- non-earners as well as earners. (…) Thus, intrafamily distribution of incomes is
quite a crucial parametric variable in linking individual achievements and opportunities with
the overall level of family income.” (Sen 1999:70-1)

The capability approach tries to combine sensitivity to these diversities and heterogeneities
with a moral conception of universal human need and human flourishing. Nussbaum argues
that “legitimate concerns for diversity, pluralism, and personal freedom are not incompatible
with the recognition of universal norms; indeed, universal norms are required if we are to
protect diversity, pluralism and freedom, treating each human being as an agent and an end”
(2001:6). The capability approach therefore develops a form of universalism that is sensitive
to pluralism and cultural difference. Nussbaum claims that by arguing for developing
capabilities space, the aim is to have “universals that are facilitative rather than tyrannical,
that create spaces for choice rather than dragooning people into a desired total mode of
functioning” (2001:59). The common human capabilities do not need to be realized in the
same identical way. There are different kinds of differences. Some may be eliminated and
some should be enjoyed. The capability approach seems to be compatible with cultural

7 Nussbaum also defends universal values by stating that “to say that we need local knowledge to understand the
problems women face, or to direct our attention” does not exclude “to claim that certain very general values,
such as the dignity of the person, the integrity of the body, basic political rights and liberties”. See Nussbaum
(2001: 41—51) where she lists her reasons for her defense of universalism by replying the criticisms of the
particularistic position. She notes that when universalism is criticized for being paternalist, it endorses one
universal value: “the value of having the opportunity to think and choose for oneself”.

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relativism. The capability approach, therefore, is a promising alternative for combining redistribution and recognition.

**Respecting the agency:**

The respect for reasoning and choice is crucial for the capability approach. Thus the respect for agency is essential for developing policies that would create tools and practices, which would be remedy to the real problems in the area. Sen’s distinction between “agency” and “well-being freedom” is important particularly in evaluating well-being in both objective and subjective forms. There are often discrepancies between subjective perceptions of well-being and well-being measured by ‘objective’ indicators, and Sen tries to develop objective measures of poverty to overcome these biases and prejudices which are inherent in all societies. According to Sen, freedom is concerned “with the real opportunity that we have to accomplish what we value” (1992: 31). However he distinguishes freedom in terms of well-being and agency. Agency freedom is “one’s freedom to bring about achievements one values and which one attempts to produce”; well-being freedom, on the other hand, is “one’s freedom to achieve those things that are constitutive of one’s well-being” (Sen 1992:57; Sen 1985a; 203-4). Sen argues that “understanding the agency role is thus central to recognizing people as responsible persons: not only are we well or ill, but also we act or refuse to act, and can choose to act one way rather than another” (Sen 1999:190). Sen is against the view of seeing people as ‘passive recipients’ (1999:11) of public programs but rather he views them as agents, thus individuals can ‘with adequate social opportunities … effectively shape their own destiny and help each other’ (1999:11). And he sees that removing the iniquities that depress the *well-being* of women can be overcome by focusing on women’s *agency* (1999:191). “Well-being of a person can be seen as an evaluation of the ‘wellness’ of a

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8 Nussbaum does not have this distinction. She agrees with Sen that they are important distinctions but she claims that all the important distinctions can be captured as aspects of the capability/functioning distinction (2001:14). Nevertheless Nussbaum devotes a whole chapter in her book to ‘adapted preferences’, see Nussbaum (2001:119-166) for her in-depth analysis of the concept.
person’s state of being (rather than, say, the goodness of her contribution to the country, or her success in achieving her overall goals” (Sen in Nussbaum & Sen 1993:36).

Thus there can be contradiction between well-being and agency freedom. One may choose to endanger well-being achievements and freedom by exercising agency achievement. This tension is the recognition of false or socially conditioned consciousness, particularly with the concept of *adapted preferences*: For Sen, the personal mental state—happiness or satisfaction is crucial for determining the well-being but he criticizes the utilitarian approach for its exclusive dependence on personal satisfaction as information base and its exclusion of other sources such as physical and social conditions in evaluating well-being. He argues that mentally a person can adapt herself to her situation and would be content with what she is living. “A person who is ill-fed, undernourished, unsheltered, and ill can still be high up in the scale of happiness or desire-fulfilment if he or she has learned to have ‘realistic’ desires and to take pleasure in small mercies.’ (Sen 1985b:21) It is argued that people adapt their happiness or desires to the prevailing situation in which they live, even though they suffer from certain deficiencies: “The battered slave, the broken unemployed, the hopeless destitute, the tamed housewife, may have the courage to desire little, but the fulfilment of those disciplined desires is not a sign of a great success and cannot be treated in the same way as the fulfilment of the confident and demanding desires of the better placed” (Sen 1987: 11).

Both Sen and Nussbaum argue for freedom of choice for everybody, thus they both argue that preferences can be distorted, which means that a person would prefer different if she is well-informed and able to think other possibilities.

Sen tries to find a middle way. He does not focus exclusively on well-being⁹ but he also takes into account that people are agents, having the ability to set and pursue one’s own goals and interests (1985a). Nevertheless, the reservation on preference is a challenge to the agency

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⁹ Well-being can be evaluated in the space of functionings so structuring a “space” in which human flourish rather than identifying the “best” form within it (Alkire 2002:51).
perspective of the capability approach. The critics against preference-based utilitarian approach also works at the expense of declared commitment to take seriously what individuals say they desire and choose (Phillips 2002:401).

Human choice is never formed in total spontaneity. Apart from the financial constraints, the socialization plays important role in all our preferences. All choices are constrained and socially constructed. Preferences, choices and values are shaped by the economic and social conditions of the society and the groups we live in. What a self desires can only be understood by the social context of internal and external factors. Preference deformation or adaptation can be observed anywhere and any time. The effects of the socialization processes are not limited to the subaltern groups. However, being the *agency of her own subordination* is used mostly and exclusively for the subaltern groups and the reservation on preference is a challenge to the agency perspective of the capability approach. One is autonomous if one has “the personal capacities, opportunities to choose from and access to those opportunities, so as to frame, revise, and pursue a conception of the good life, and to see that conception of the good life as something which contributes to forming one’s identity over some period of time” (Fabre 2000:12). In a way all of our preferences are adapted but the general problem to what extent we see the other options, different ways of living and believing; whether the person really has the option to choose otherwise.

The concept of ‘freedom’ has always played an important role in Sen’s thought (Sen 1992:69). His version of the capability approach therefore involved towards *Development as Freedom* (1999) stressing the primary importance to freedom- the freedom to be able to lead the life one wants, and to pursue the goals that one sees as valuable. Particularly in terms of group belongings and what individuals prioritize, what they choose to recognize. Thus the status of individuals within the minority groups is usually neglected, since even for the individual, the focus is on being member of that group. Groups play important role in
preference formation. Young’s suggestion of ‘politics of difference’ therefore may provide a fruitful perspective for defining the structural injustices that has been effective for a particular group. To scrutinize subjective well-being through the lenses of group differences may bring new perspective.

ETHICAL INDIVIDUALISM AND POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE:

Another crucial dimension of the capability approach is its ethical or normative individualism. The communitarians criticize the capability approach for taking the individual capabilities as its basis. They argue that the capability approach is too individualistic since some capabilities can only be “functioned” within a group. The communitarians note that to co-operate “collective capabilities” is necessary to the framework of the capability. Sen (1999) and Nussbaum think that the self is at once a socially constituted and self-constituting agent and that promoting individual capabilities goes hand in hand with the institutional support received from non-individualized social goods (Alexander 2003:16). People choose and become part of it. Thus some groups may undermine its members or a group of its members to develop other individual capabilities. Capabilities realized within a group (associational capabilities) therefore may challenge individual capabilities, religion being the most well-known example.

The capability approach is an ethically individualistic theory (Robeyns 2003a). Robeyns states that the units of normative judgment are individuals, not households or communities. Robeyns’ example that many theories of justice simply assume that families are just social institutions, where principles of love and solidarity rule, however this makes these theories, by design, unable to understand inequalities within the household-what Okin calls as ‘false gender neutrality’(1989: 10-13). The capability approach is not ‘ontologically’ but ethically or normatively individualistic theory which has the aim of making the individual the basic unit of political thought.
Sen (1993) has shown that within the same family, men and women do not have the same access to health care and nutritious food. Families constantly face the problem of how to allocate the scarce resources among the family members. And Sen has pointed out that the hunger and malnutrition are not only entitlement failure. They also emerge as a consequence of unfair distribution of entitlements within the family (1985b:81-104). This leads the conclusion that only individuals should be the units of moral concern, which Nussbaum also shares by emphasizing the ‘separateness of each person’:

“…the basic fact that each person has a course from birth to death that is not precisely the same as that of any other person; that each person is one and not more than one, that each feels pain in his or her own body, that the food given to A does not arrive in the stomach of B. The separateness of persons is a basic fact of human life.

...collectivities, such as the state and even the family, are composed of individuals, who never do fuse, who always continue to have their separate brains and voices and stomachs, however much they love one another.... because such unities do not really efface the separate reality of individual lives; normatively because the recognition of that separateness is held to be fundamental fact for ethics, which should recognize each separate entity as an end not as a means to the ends of others. ” (Nussbaum 2000:62)

According to Young ‘the assessment of inequality solely by comparing the individuals does not provide sufficient basis for making claims about social justice’ (Young 2001:2) and ‘group based comparison helps to reveal important aspects of institutional relations and processes, specifically structural inequalities’ (2001:2). Thus Young also notes this does not necessarily mean rejecting the ethical individualism. Young explicitly states that ‘the ultimate purpose for making assessments of inequality is to promote the well-being of individuals considered as irreducible moral equals’ (2001:6) and she notes that ‘nothing in the argument about assessing inequality in terms of structures contradicts the claim that individual persons are and ought to be final targets of judgments and policies aimed at producing or improving well-being’ (2001:17). What I suggest is therefore already in Young’s statements. We can and should keep the ethical individualism of the capability framework but add the dimension of politics of difference which would demonstrate structural injustices for particular cultural,
social and economic groups\textsuperscript{10}. As individuals may also be oppressed by virtue of their membership in a particular group and as there is no guarantee of democracy within each social group.

Today we have multiple identities—what Sen calls as ‘the pluralities of human identity’ (2006). We are members of variety of groups—citizenship, residence, geographic origin, gender, class, politics, profession, employment, food habits, sports interests, taste in music, social commitments, etc. Each gives us our particular identity (Sen 2006:4-5). As Sen also notes, the main issue is our choice: which identities we prefer and have reason to recognize, value and defend (2006:6). Nevertheless, some people stand on the intersection point of these identities. Let’s say a person X is a woman. She has a family background of Roma, recently unemployed, and disabled. X stands on the intersection point of different group identities and faces many structural injustices.

Young argues that ‘politics of inclusion’ requires participatory democrats who would ‘promote the ideal of a heterogeneous public, in which persons stand forth with their differences acknowledged and respected’ (1990: 119). In order to expand the capability set of person X, one has to acknowledge her different group belongings and how structural injustices work. X’s subjective well-being and preferences may not provide us the ways to capture the limitations on her capabilities and functionings, but the way we analyse the position of different oppressed groups may give us the detailed picture of why and how X’s agency and well-being freedom are under threat.

\textbf{As a conclusion:}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{10} For a challenge, see Tebble (2002) where he argues that ‘if the politics of difference is to take seriously the anti-essentialist nature of groups and admit the political significance of subgroups or individuals, then the rationale for prioritizing the political subjectivity of social groups disappears’ (2002: 276).}
Part of the question which I start to work on in this paper is tried to be answered by James Bohman’s recent article ‘Beyond Distributive Justice and Struggles for Recognition: Freedom, Democracy, and Critical Theory’ (2007). Bohman argues that ‘both Honneth’s and Fraser’s comprehensive theories cannot account for a central phenomenon of contemporary societies: domination as structural exclusion rather than tyranny or lack of parity’ (2007:268).

The form of domination Bohman states is the ‘social exclusion of large numbers of people that is structural feature of many modern globalizing forms of political economy’ (2007:269) which in fact takes us the epigraph-Honneth’s quote on the first page. The subaltern classes suffer from capability failure as a result of extreme destitution (Bohman 2007:270). Bohman argues that ‘rather than being misrecognized, they are invisible as a consequence of the structural features of markets, particularly their constant innovation and their creation of impersonal forms of dependency… and this sort of domination is structural rather than distributive’ (Bohman 2007:270).

Freedom rather than justice or recognition should play a central role. Bohman argues that in order to overcome what he calls as ‘the democratic circle’ problem; one has to think about democratic justice in terms of basic freedoms that underwrite a democratic minimum or threshold (2007:268). What is stated by Bohman and what I find very important in terms of justice and theories of justice that ‘ redescribing these phenomena in terms of recognition or distributive justice is always theoretically possible, but it is not fully adequate to the distinctive features of structural domination’:

‘It could be said that the goal of freedom from domination is to overcome social invisibility, but this is due neither to cultural standards of value that produce misrecognition nor to a standard struggle for the recognition of a particular identity. Instead of integrity, respect, or esteem, structural exclusion requires capabilities-based approach to freedom in order to provide its diagnosis and remedy.’ (Bohman 2007:271).
Bohman argues that there is a vicious ‘democratic circle’. We need democracy to promote the justice for the subaltern groups, but in order to do that democracy must already be just. Bohman’s argument is crucial and we should all be aware of the limits of the existing democracies. Thus the way for citizens ‘to exercise their normative and creative powers to reshape democracy to the demands of justice’ can only be maintained by expanding capability sets of particularly those oppressed people.

The capability approach is founded on the idea of equalizing capabilities by capturing the different needs and abilities which means that both recognition and redistribution are already within the framework of the capability, and with respect to their agency and well-being freedom even the participation. Thus the unit of analysis for the capability approach is individual which in a way lower the importance of the role groups play in the formation of preferences, capability sets and subjective well-being.

Young suggests the politics of difference rather than politics of identity and I find Young’s claim to be compatible with the capability framework. What I argue, in this paper, is to keep the ethical individualism as the final moral goal but also to have second level of analysis for the structural injustices through particular group differences. The two level analysis one collective and one individual level can show us the dynamics of how injustices are produced.

This is particularly important for advocacy. When a particular group faces structural injustice, to take collective action is vital. To understand and to interpret that injustice as a structural and systemic failure and not an individual one is very crucial. Rediscovery of political action and the demands of citizenship may emerge out of seeing how individual is shaped and changed by the society and by the groups in that society; and how the groups are changed by the individuals.

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11 As Bohman states: ‘The achievement of a normative status sufficient for citizens to exercise their normative and creative powers to reshape democracy according to the demands of justice’ (Bohman 2007:271-2) See Bohman & Regh (eds.) (1997); Elster (ed.) (1998) for the detailed discussion on deliberative democracy. See also Keleher’s article (2004) where she links capability approach with deliberative democracy. She suggests Iris Young’s principle of democratic participation for empowerment (2004: 11-12).


