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Between Structure and Agency

Structural Injustice in the Capability Approach, its Applications, and in Genetically-modified Corn Farming in Bukidnon, Philippines

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Université de Namur

Between Structure and Agency:
Structural Injustice in the Capability Approach, its Applications, and in Genetically-modified Corn Farming in Bukidnon, Philippines

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

At the heart of this thesis is the concern for justice amid, and in resistance to, social structures that are unjust. More specifically, I investigate whether the capability approach can be used to understand and analyze the background conditions of injustice in concrete applications, without losing a sense of individual agency, especially the agency of those who are most disadvantaged.

To do this, I survey both the capability approach literature on justice—particularly those of Amartya Sen, Sabina Alkire, and Jay Drydyk—examining its existing conception of structural injustice, and whether it can be used in such types of analyses. I also draw from the work of feminist critical social theorists Iris Marion Young and Sally Haslanger to further develop and specify a concept of structural injustice and its mechanisms for sustaining and perpetuating injustices. This theorical discussion is also informed by my field research with the LUCID Project, which studied the social and economic impact of nearly 20 years of genetically-modified, high-yield variety corn on the small farmers of the Upper Pulangi watershed in the province of Bukidnon, southern Philippines, in which I sketch the social structure that enables small farmers to participate in these farming practices, but also illustrating how they are disadvantaged and how their agency is constrained in this context.

I propose and sketch a capabilitarian critical analysis of structural injustice, a mode of social analysis that allows a researcher to articulate and analyze a concrete situation of injustice in terms of the social structural processes that produce and reproduce injustice, while also accounting for the positions occupied by the various agents who participate in the social structural processes. The degrees of agency of these various participants—that is, whether they experience the social structure as enabling or disabling of their agency—gives us not only points of evaluation and assessment of who is the most disadvantaged in an unjust social structure, but also (and equally importantly) gives us a direction for further investigating the mechanisms that allow these structures to perpetuate as well as possible levers of change. Expanding on Haslanger's social ontology, in my sketch I focus on reasons to value as the drivers of the social structural processes that underpin the social structure. Unjust social structures are unjust because they misrecognize or exclude a plurality of possible reasons to value the resources around which the social structural processes are organized. This limits and impedes the capabilities and possibilities for action of some agents while enabling possibilities for other agents better positioned and whose reasons to value are aligned with that of the social structure. We can thus find the limitations of the existing social structure, how it is perpetuated, and identify the agents that occupy the most disadvantaged positions within that structure.

This sketch of a capabilitarian critique, finally, addresses what other capability scholars have identified as a gap in the literature, particularly on operationalizing the approach to make analyses that focus on the background conditions of injustice—that is, the broader social factors and processes that contribute to and perpetuate the concrete situations of injustice.

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First, thanks must go to my colleagues at Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC), without whom the LUCID Project would not have been possible. Ms. Sylvia, Andres, Pedro, Kelvin, Amor, Ms. Cherie—staff of ESSC past and present—your work was and continues to be an inspiration.

I am also grateful for the support I received from the Académie de Recherche et d'Enseignement Supérieur–Commission de la Coopération au Développement (ARES-CCD), which funded the bulk of my thesis, as well as the funding support from Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU) and the Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED). Their support allowed for the material conditions that made my research possible, and what are we if not material and embodied beings.

I am also grateful to the people of the Upper Pulangi, the farmers and traders who welcomed me into their homes and allowed me to accompany (or intrude on) them through their day. Looking forward to the day that they achieve the agency freedom that they so desire.

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To my daughter, Likha Maria: I hope you listen to your spirit always and learn that you can make of yourself into whatever is the best version of you. This thesis is a testament to your nanay continuing, striving to make herself into the best version of herself: you can do it, whatever form it takes, too.

Contents

Introduction

The philosopher is always socially situated, and if the society is divided by oppressions, she either reinforces or struggles against them.
—Iris Marion Young

The Philippine national highway in the municipality of Cabanglasan, in the province of Bukidnon, can often feel like the middle of nowhere despite being just about an hour away by car from the center of Malaybalay City (the provincial capital). Vehicles pass by the highway sporadically. The hills undulate on both sides of the highway, and if you visit at the right time of the year, these hills are planted in innumerable rows of corn plants. The road rises and falls and wends its way through the hills. On a ridge, from the midst of the corn plants appears a concrete monument—a giant corn cob stands tall over the fields.

While writing this thesis, I often returned to this image in my mind: the monument to corn becoming the focal point of that stretch of highway in Cabanglasan. It felt like an apt metaphor for some of the questions that motivated this work: questions of how the practice of farming genetically-modified, high-yield variety (GM HYV) corn has come to dominate this region, and what the impact of this domination has been on the actual human lives of the inhabitants of this region, most especially the lives of the small farmers who till the corn fields that surround the monument; questions of who has agency and who benefits the most (and conversely, who are disadvantaged and limited) from corn farming; and questions of if and how these social structures could be changed for the benefit of those most disadvantaged.

1. The LUCID Project and its relation to the questions of this thesis

Cabanglasan is one of the municipalities within the greater geographic area of the Upper Pulangi watershed, the area covered by the project Social Justice Implications of Land Use Change in the Philippine Uplands: Analysis of the Socio-Economic Drivers and Impacts on the Land and its People (LUCID Project), to which the funding support for my PhD has been tied. Funded by the Académie de Recherche et d'Enseignement Supérieur – Commission de la Coopération au Développement (ARES-CCD) and headed by an interdisciplinary team of researchers from Université de Namur and the Institute of Environmental Science for Social Change, the project intended to examine the social and economic impacts of over 20 years of the adoption and farming of GM HYV corn in the Upper Pulangi watershed. The approval of GM HYV corn cultivation in the Philippines was originally justified by the Philippine government by citing the economic benefits increased yields and reduced labor costs would have on small farmers, and the LUCID Project sought to examine if these policy assumptions translated into a real positive impact on the small farmers in the Upper Pulangi.

The LUCID Project was not the first time I had been to Cabanglasan nor the Upper Pulangi, however—I have visited (and lived briefly in) the area sporadically over nearly the last twenty years, first as a volunteer with the Jesuit Volunteers Philippines, and later during my stint as a development worker in the non-government organization (NGO) sector. Even in those days, the corn fields already dominated the area's landscape, though the monument did not yet exist. My experiences as a volunteer and as a development worker were influential in shaping my broader philosophical interests in development, political and social philosophy, and particularly in questions of structural justice and the possibility of cultural and social pluralism. This thesis project brought together two important strands of my adult life, in a location that itself was formative; my professional life and pressing questions as a philosopher, and my previous professional life as a development worker, came together in this mountain range and river valley in the northeastern corner of Bukidnon.

All these different strands—the dominance of corn farming in the Upper Pulangi and whether its claimed benefits had been realized, my experiences of working in development, and philosophical questions of injustice, what 'human development' consists of, and of the possibility of social change—are threads which are interwoven through the entirety of this thesis. At its heart are questions of injustice, particularly injustice that results from social structural processes, how this form of injustice differs from other forms, why it is necessary to address structural injustice, and what we can do to reduce structural injustice in today's world. These questions, I maintain, are nonetheless philosophical; though not questions of high theory, these are nonetheless questions of real human urgency. Moreover, these are questions that are at the heart of development work and the capability approach.

Stated more directly, the concern of this thesis is the capability approach's ability to deal with structural injustice, a concern that is informed by both the field research of the LUCID Project and broader questions on the nature of development projects. Can the capability approach be used to understand and analyze the background conditions of injustice, that is, the social structures that situate, contextualize, and continue the perpetuation of injustice? And can the capability approach do this without losing the sense of individual agency, especially the agency of those who occupy the most disadvantaged positions within these social structures?

These questions can be further unpacked into the following sub-questions: First, what is the capability approach's relationship to issues of injustice? Second, what is the status or role of agency in the capability approach, and what is its relationship to social structures? Third, I ask what is structural injustice, and how does it differ from other forms of injustice? Finally, is there room within the capability approach for issues of structural injustice and social structural change, and if there is, how can this be applied within the approach?

2. Methods, approaches, and ways of exploring the questions

In order to do justice to these intertwined strands of questions, the philosophical approach I have taken in this thesis is one informed by pragmatism and critical social theory: 1) it is pragmatist in so far as it is focused on ways of understanding and improving our understanding of real injustices, instead of being focused on defining justice, and also in so far as it takes as a given the lived realities of people, and tries to articulate the usually unvoiced conventions and assumptions that underly these lived realities; and 2) it is critical in so far as it is committed to the struggle against the real injustices that are experienced by people, especially those worst-off, wielding theoretical tools to better understand what is unjust in society in view of dismantling these injustices.[1]

I also argue in this thesis that the capability approach shares in these philosophical approaches; in my view, the capability approach, particularly Amartya Sen's account of the approach—is itself pragmatist and critical. I argue this because of a dissatisfaction I have with variations and applications of the capability approach which are more politically liberal in orientation, emphasizing individuals and capabilities to a degree that makes capabilities and functionings seem merely analogous to rights and entitlements. In both critical social theory and the capability approach, the process of reflection and inquiry into people's lived experiences of social reality is crucial—these are not just examples to illustrate theories, but more crucially, it is the reality to which theory must ultimately be relevant and responsive. I assert that this resonates with Sen's articulation of a "realization-focused, comparative approach to justice," which he proposes as an alternative to the dominant transcendental approach to justice or ideal theory. Sen criticizes transcendental theories of justice for prioritizing the formulation of a complete set of standards and criteria for justice, instead of addressing the immediate needs and realities of injustice that people experience.[2]

Deepening and developing what Sen means by a realization-focused, comparative approach to justice is not just a theme that I return to throughout the thesis. This work is also an effort to put this mode of theorizing into practice. By beginning my thesis with field data from the LUCID Project, and continually returning to the insights gained from that research, I intend to not only use the field data merely as examples to illustrate concepts, but rather for my theoretical work to be engaged with the field work as dialogical partners—one informs the other, and vice versa.

Because of my intention to develop an idea of structural injustice for the capability approach, in the vein of Sen's comparative approach to justice, I have chosen to focus my

[1] For these descriptions of pragmatism and critical theory, I am most indebted to the work of Elizabeth Anderson and Sally Haslanger. See Elizabeth Anderson, "How to be a Pragmatist," *The Routledge Handbook of Practical Reason*, eds. Ruth Chang and Kurt Sylvan (London: Routledge, 2020), 83-86; Sally Haslanger, *Critical Theory and Practice*, Spinoza Lectures (Amsterdam: Department of Philosophy, University of Amsterdam, 2015) 7-8, 33-44.

[2] Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (London: Penguin, 2010), 5-10.

philosophical discussion on two bodies of work: the capability approach literature on the one hand, and on the other hand the conception of structural injustice in the work of feminist critical social theorists Iris Marion Young and Sally Haslanger. The capability approach alone already accounts for a voluminous literature, and I have had to narrow it down further to the subset that focuses on theorizing justice, inequality, and oppression. While there is also a significant amount of work on social justice and social analysis in Philippine scholarship, this is also an area that I have decided to omit from this project for now. Aside from the sheer breadth of the literature,[3] it is also due to this project's focus specifically on *structural* injustice as a concept, which is not as explicitly conceptualized in the existing social justice literature in the Philippines. I do, however, return to this body of work at the end of this project as a possible future area of exploration.

3. An overview

The spirit of a realization-focused, comparative approach to justice is implicit throughout this thesis, but it is most explicit in Chapter 1. In Chapter 1, I not only examine the data obtained by the LUCID Project and discuss its implications, but I also try to explore and articulate the social and cultural background of this data. By exploring the cultural and social phenomena of the different relations that underlie the practices of GM corn farming in the Upper Pulangi watershed, and the broader social forces and social changes that have come about with the spread and adoption of GM corn, I wanted to paint a fuller picture of the social landscape of corn farming, the relationship dynamics between the different agents, and the unarticulated assumptions underlying these relationships—especially among the small farmers and local traders/financiers—for whom these practices are taken for granted as part of daily life. Chapter 1 reveals GM corn farming as a social structure that significantly disadvantages small farmers more than any other agents within the structure, instantiated in the prevailing system and social practices in the Upper Pulangi. The disadvantages that small farmers experience in this system are not only economic in character—these are also disadvantages manifested in relation to social and cultural capital.

To respond to situations like that of the Upper Pulangi, alternatives to exclusively economic development paradigms have emerged, including the capability approach, which has at its core a concern with people's real *beings* and *doings*, and their capabilities to function and achieve whatever they have reasons to value. In Chapters 2 and 3, I focus on the capability approach and emphasize its concern for *human* development, its responsiveness to concrete

[3] It is contested how far back one can trace the literature on social analysis and social justice in the Philippine context: some, like Julian Go (2023) and Agustin Martin Rodriguez (2019, 2021) contend that it can extend back to the anti-colonial literature during the end of the Spanish colonization of the Philippines, while others contend that social analysis in the Philippines more explicitly begins with the 1960s Marxist-Leninist *Philippine Society and Revolution* by Amado Guerrero (Jose Ma. Sison). Regardless of where social justice literature begins in the Philippines, it speaks nonetheless to the breadth of the literature, a breadth that seems impossible to capture within the limits of this project.

contexts and experiences, and its explicit de-emphasis on ideal theory. Chapter 2 is focused on understanding the philosophical foundations of the capability approach, providing an overview of its present use and practice, and its main concerns of *capabilities* and *functionings*. Chapter 3 builds on the discussion of the previous chapter by focusing more specifically on the capability approach's concern with agency and justice, particularly structural injustice.

The exploration and articulation of the capability approach literature demonstrates that the approach is indeed concerned with structural injustice, but it does not have a well-articulated conception or account of structural injustice. Thus, in Chapter 4, I explore beyond the capability approach. I go into the existing literature in political philosophy on structural injustice, particularly how it has been developed in feminist critical social theory by Iris Marion Young and Sally Haslanger.

In Chapter 5, I bring this conception of structural injustice together with the capability approach, establishing the compatibility between Sen's approach and the approach of the feminist critical social theory from which the concept of structural injustice emerged. In this chapter, I also apply the concept of structural injustice, and the possibility of social structural change, together with the capability approach, to the experiences of injustice through the practices of GM corn farming in the Upper Pulangi watershed. This is an initial attempt to articulate and put to use a capabilitarian critique of structural injustice, which allows the capability approach to provide insights into the background conditions of injustice and the possible levers for structural change. I also make the link between this process and the broader processes of ideology critique and consciousness raising that are articulated in feminist critical theory.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I explore two possibilities for further research that this thesis has opened up, first concerning the possibility of changing corporate values in view of social structural change, and second examining whether participatory development projects are venues for ideology critique or participate in perpetuating unjust social structures.

Chapter 1
An Exploration of Structural Injustice through the System of Smallholder Corn Farming in the Upper Pulangi

In this chapter, I will discuss the field element of my project. I will begin with describing the concrete circumstances of high-yield variety (HYV) corn farming in the Upper Pulangi watershed (which cuts through several municipalities) in the province of Bukidnon in the Philippines, through the results of a quantitative survey, and qualitatively from the perspectives of both the farmers and of the financiers who do business with them.

Through this description, I intend to demonstrate how this situation is a concrete structure of injustice, not only reinforcing existing economic inequalities in the area, but also participating in an extractive transnational structure which exacerbates inequality by consolidating capital—not just economic capital, but cultural and social capital as well—in the hands of a few elites. These elites are both local (i.e. local political-economic elites) as well as global (i.e. transnational corporations).

I will also show how these experiences of the farmers and financiers of HYV corn farming in the Upper Pulangi relate to the prior literature on biotech corn farming in the Philippines and current analyses in the sociology of agriculture, and how these experiences align with the trends and socio-economic implications of biotech farming in other Global South countries. The most interesting of these trends is the phenomenon that Gabriela Pechlaner calls "expropriationism," which she describes as restricting the power (i.e. the ability of choice) of farmers, shifting capital accumulation to the technology producers (i.e. seed companies), but while also diffusing any legal liabilities away from the technology producers across different mechanisms.[4] Taken together, these experiences and trends in farming HYV corn comprise a system that, as we shall see, disadvantage small farmers the most.

1. Corn Farming in Bukidnon and the LUCID Project

The Social Justice Implications of Land Use Change in the Philippine Uplands (LUCID) Project is a multi-disciplinary research project implemented by the Université de Namur (UNamur) and Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC), a Philippine non-government research organization affiliated with the Society of Jesus. It specifically seeks to document and analyze the land use change and socio-economic impact on small-holder farmers caused by the shift to high yield variety (HYV) corn farming, in the uplands of the Upper Pulangi watershed, in the province of Bukidnon—in turn located in Mindanao, the Philippines' second largest and southernmost island.

[4] Gabriela Pechlaner, "The Sociology of Agriculture in Transition," *Canadian Journal of Sociology/Cahiers Canadiens de Sociologie* 35 no.2 (2010): 254-55, https://doi.org/10.29173/cjs5114.

The shift to HYV corn farming is heralded by the Philippine authorities and policymakers as a financial boon for small-holder farmers because of increased yields and higher market demand and prices.[5] Since various varieties of genetically-modified (GM) HYV corn were approved for commercialization by the Philippine government in the early to mid-2000s, farmers have embraced the crop. Aside from the increased yields and increased income, farmers note the greater ease of farming GM corn as a reason for their embrace of the crop—GM corn engineered to be herbicide-resistant enabled farmers to use glyphosate,[6] which dramatically reduced the amount of labour required to cultivate corn (particularly in comparison to traditional varieties which required intensive manual weeding).

The Upper Pulangi, which consists of *barangays*[7] covered by the local governments of the two municipalities of Malaybalay City and Cabanglasan, is no exception to this widespread embrace of HYV corn cultivation. Has corn production there lived up to the promise of financial gain for small-holder farmers?

1.1 Corn farming in the Upper Pulangi, by the numbers

This is one of the questions that the LUCID Project seeks to examine, primarily through a comprehensive socio-economic household survey and value-chain analysis, conducted by a team of economists associated with the project, from April to August 2017. The survey covered 454 households from Malaybalay and Cabanglasan, of whom 415 planted corn in the most recent planting season.[8] I will not get into the details of their survey methodology here, but I will instead summarize some of the key results from the survey as well as discussing additional information that came up after these survey results were presented to representatives of government, farmers' organizations, the private sector, and agricultural researchers from other areas of the Philippines.[9]

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[5] Cleofe S. Torres, et al., *Adoption and Uptake Pathways of GM/Biotech Crops by Small-Scale, Resource-Poor Filipino Farmers* (Los Baños, Laguna: College of Development Communication-UPLB, International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAA), and SEAMEO Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture, 2013).

[6] The best-known brand of glyphosate is Monsanto's Roundup Ready, but others are available as well.

[7] In the Philippines, the *barangay* is considered the smallest unit of local government by the 1987 Constitution. Administratively, local government in the Philippines consists of three levels, in decreasing size: 1) provinces and independent cities, 2) component cities and municipalities, and 3) barangays that are components of cities and municipalities.

[8] Clarice Manuel, "LUCID Socioeconomic Survey," unpublished internal report, 23 May 2019. Cf. Clarice Manuel, "GM Corn Production in the Philippines: A Tale of Two Varieties" (online, Ateneo de Manila University Lecture Series on the LUCID Project, Quezon City, 14 October 2022, https://www.youtube.com/live/uwc2tJYA27A?si=BV6aI3JePuz8SW2U.

[9] Environmental Science for Social Change, "Living on the Edge: Challenges in Smallholder Corn Farming in the Philippines," report on the proceedings of the Philippine Working Group Social Justice Forum Series October 2018, last updated 16 September 2020.

Among the 415 corn farming households surveyed, 107 farmers planted GM corn, while 308 planted a variety of corn colloquially referred to as "sige-sige" (which we shall refer to hereafter as SG). This variety is unfamiliar to corn farmers outside of Mindanao,[10] and is of uncertain provenance; the best conjecture of researchers is that it is a variety that emerged from unsupervised cross-pollination between GM corn and traditional corn varieties, whose offspring retained the GM corn parent's resistance to herbicides like glyphosate, but are able to reproduce (unlike the GM corn parent plant).

The survey also showed that GM farmers in the area tend to have larger plots of land (1.73 ha) than SG farmers (1.13 ha), and that GM yields almost double (2.23 tons/ha) than SG (1.12 tons/ha) at harvest.[11] However, these yields are, on average, much lower than in other parts of Bukidnon (4.2 tons/ha), and is lower than both the regional average (3.48 tons/ha) and national average (3.09 tons/ha).[12]

Despite the large difference in yield, however, the survey shows that the quasi-profits[13] from the GM and SG corn are not significantly different. SG farmers had an average quasi-profit of ₱9,200 (around €157 or $190), against ₱11,700PHP (around €199 or $245) for GM farmers. GM farmers' gross revenues are undercut by the pre-harvest costs of farm input (fertilizers, herbicides) and seeds.

These pre-harvest expenses consist of the cost of seeds, farming input, and labour. Since GM corn seeds are patented by seed companies, farmers pay a premium for them, and need to be repurchased every planting season; in contrast, though SG corn seeds can be bought informally (for about ₱82 a bag), three-fourths of the SG farmers surveyed simply saved seeds from their previous harvest for use in the next. GM farmers also use more fertilizers and herbicides than SG corn farmers, thus incurring more costs. SG corn farmers have greater freedom to apply less or more herbicides and fertilizers, depending on the environmental conditions and soil quality. GM corn also requires more hired labour compared to SG corn. GM corn farmers hire an average of seven workers, in contrast to the three workers on average for SG farmers.

Finally, another significant chunk of GM farmers' gross revenue goes into loan repayments. Since GM corn farming is more cost-intensive, farmers take out loans to access seeds and input. The majority access financing informally through local trader-financiers, who offer the seeds and input on credit, at interest rates of 8-10% per month (the equivalent of 40% per annum).

[10] Environmental Science for Social Change, "Living on the Edge."

[11] The difference in harvested corn is not driven by the variation in the harvest month of individual farmers. Manuel, "LUCID Socioeconomic Survey."

[12] Environmental Science for Social Change, "Living on the Edge."

[13] Strictly speaking, profits consist of gross revenues minus all costs incurred in their analysis. The study explains they did not monetize the value of family labour and did not include these in the computation, thus the use of the term "quasi-profits" (Manuel 2019).

The survey also showed that HYV corn farming is risky for farmers, with SG being less risky. Both varieties had 39-40% rate of failure of harvest, without yet taking into consideration extreme weather phenomena or extreme market price fluctuations. Since GM farmers are more likely to have taken financing than SG farmers, they are at a high risk of defaulting on loans if their harvest fails.

The report notes that if corn were their only income source, a family—whether they farmed GM or SG corn—would have to live on around P2,300–P2,925 per month until the next harvest. With an average of five members in a family, per capita income would be ₱15/day (€0.26), far below international poverty thresholds (for instance, the World Bank's International Extreme Poverty Threshold is €1.50/day).

The survey also examined factors that influence the adoption or non-adoption of GM variety corn, and found a statistically significant correlation between households with access to electricity, livestock, and land inheritance (which can all be considered proxies for wealth), and GM corn adoption. Households with higher educational attainments were also more likely to adopt GM corn.

Finally, the value chain analysis shows that only 5% of gross revenue goes to the farmers. In contrast, the traders' profit margin on inputs, after interest rates, can range between 38% and 64%.

1.2 The People of the Upper Pulangi: Relationships and Power

Despite the high financial costs and economic risks to the small farmers in the Upper Pulangi, 91% of the farmers surveyed still farmed high-yield variety corn, whether of the GM or SG variety. There must be other reasons or factors that make farmers continue to farm this type of corn. One of the questions that I wanted to examine further on a more qualitative level as a researcher with the LUCID Project are the human factors—specifically relationships and structures—that support high-yield variety corn farming in the locality.

Aside from the ease of farming high-yield variety corn—enabled by the use of glyphosate spray—another possible factor that promotes the continuing cultivation of corn are the relationships that tie together small farmers with local financiers, and the broader social structures that tie local financiers with seed companies and local government patrons. To what extent do relationships of affiliation and relationships of social, economic, and political power constrain or enable corn farmers in the Upper Pulangi? To explore these questions further, I set out to interview not just local farmers, but the financiers who conduct their business in the area, and gain a better sense of their day-to-day lives.

1.2.1 Taking different approaches and methods for engaging farmers, traders, and business perspectives in conversation

Initially, I had planned to take an ethnographic approach to understanding the experiences of farmers, to live with and shadow in turn two to three small-holder farming

households. While I was able to spend a week in 2017 with a farming household (in Barangay Upper Mapulo), it was not easy to really shadow the family in their daily activities, as they considered me a guest. Despite my insistence that I be treated the same as them, and capable of speaking the *lingua franca*, it was also clear that I was an outsider—particularly one from the "big city," from an "elite" university.[14]

To overcome these limitations, I joined other ESSC-organized activities and programs, in an effort to become a relatively less strange, more familiar face. I tagged along with ESSC community liaison officers in community visits and discussions in different barangays in Upper Pulangi in 2018 and 2019.

Together with other UNamur and ESSC colleagues, in 2018 I also visited and conducted group interviews with HYV corn farmers in the northern province of Isabela, the largest corn producing province in the Philippines; this helped me gain a broader view of the experiences of corn farming in the Philippines, and have a point of comparison with the experiences of farmers in Bukidnon, the second largest corn producing province in the country.

In 2019, I also assisted ESSC colleagues in facilitating *Seeking a New Business Paradigm*, a field course for Masters in Business Administration (MBA) students from Ateneo de Manila University[15], part of a broader program organized for Jesuit business schools by Ecojesuit.[16] In the program, the MBA students visited two barangays in the Upper Pulangi, met and discussed with HYV corn farmers, and reflected on why the margins persist in a growing economy. Facilitating these visits and discussions helped me gain insight into the perceptions of Filipino middle managers in multinational corporations and how their experiences of the market economy contrast with the experiences of the farmers in the Upper Pulangi.[17] These conversations and interviews with farmers and business students solidified my interest in moving beyond solely interviewing farmers, to including financiers among the respondents.

I went through two different processes of recruitment for farmer-respondents and for financier-respondents. Farmer-respondent recruitment was fairly straightforward: together with Kelvin Wu, the ESSC community liaison officer, I visited communities that were previously

[14] The rhetoric of Manila being an "imperial" capital that looks down on all other parts of the Philippines as "provincial" and "backward" is a common truism in the Philippines. National television broadcasts of large university sports leagues have made participating universities' names familiar "brands" in the past two decades. Because university athletics of such a scale requires significant financial resources—akin to university athletics programmes in the United States, the template of Philippine universities since the American colonial era—these universities have become markers for economic and cultural status.

[15] This particular MBA program is designed as a professional program; its students are already working in middle management positions.

[16] Ecojesuit, also known as Ecology and Jesuits in Communication, is a web-based newsletter of the Roman Catholic order of Society of Jesus, which features and reflections on the ecological work being done by the Society of Jesus and their collaborators globally. https://www.ecojesuit.com.

[17] By chance, one of the MBA students in that course had recently resigned from a job in middle management at a major multinational seed company, while another was an engineer who had studied sustainable technologies as an undergraduate before professional practice. The rest of the participants in the course were working in finance, banking, and business solutions consulting.

surveyed by the economics team of the LUCID Project, particularly the barangays of Poblacion (in Cabanglasan municipality), and of St. Peter, Upper Mapulo, and Lower Mapulo (in Malaybalay). Local community leaders identified other members of the community that we could interview. I interviewed seven farming households—in some circumstances, with both husband and wife together, while in others only one farmer representing the household—and interviews on average took an hour.[18]

In contrast, recruiting financiers to be respondents was far more difficult. In conversations with Kelvin Wu, we surmised some possible reasons for the reluctance: first, that the association with a non-government organization (NGO) made the households wary; second, that we required a more personal approach and connection to these households that we did not have; and third, I was a relative outsider. This was reflected in how our first respondent in this category—a former financier—was the sister-in-law of an ESSC colleague. We also lost our chance to interview a large financier from Cabanglasan (who had been recruited through a more tenuous personal connection) when we were late to our appointed time because of a traffic jam on the highway due to a military checkpoint.[19]

I tried instead to use my position as a relative outsider from "the big city" to my advantage: one of the local Catholic parishes was being run by priests from the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), who coincidentally had been my classmates as an undergraduate philosophy student in a Jesuit university in Manila. Knowing that the work of parish priests requires them to know various members of their church community, we paid a visit to one priest. He immediately connected us to two financiers, one of whom we had unsuccessfully been trying to find a contact to for a few months prior. The final financier whom I interviewed was, in turn, a contact of another ESSC colleague (their children attended the same school). These personal connections tie in directly with an observation I make later on in my analysis regarding the advantages of social capital.

Interviews with the financiers were mostly about 30 minutes to an hour long, save for one financier, whom I unexpectedly (but fortuitously) ended up shadowing for nearly six hours as he went about his workday. I also originally intended to have follow up interviews with these financiers, but I had to scrap this plan due to COVID-19 pandemic-related travel restrictions in the Philippines. Despite this, I nonetheless have gained insights into the dynamics of the relationships between various agents within the social structure of HYV corn farming in the Upper Pulangi area.

In the succeeding sections, I will be first presenting a description and summary of the interviews I conducted.[20] From there I will move to a discussion of my observations accompanied by an analysis of these observations. Finally, I wish to describe the social

[18] Full questionnaires are in the annexes to this work.

[19] At the time, the whole island of Mindanao was still under martial law, ostensibly because of the threat of communist insurgency and radical "Islamic" terrorists in separate parts of the island.

[20] Interview transcripts are included as annexes to this work.

structures and relations of HYV corn farming in the Upper Pulangi, based on piecing together the information gained from the economic survey, my interviews with farmers and financiers, and broader sociological studies of the dynamics of HYV corn production in the Philippines.

1.2.2 Promise and peril: Farmers and financiers discuss their experiences

For this section, in which I provide summaries and descriptions of the interviews I conducted in the first quarter of 2020, I wish to describe my interviews under the two broad categories of my respondents, *farmer-respondents* and *financier-respondents*. This categorization, however, is not a clear-cut one—as we shall see, the financiers (and former financier, who I have classed into this group) are themselves also farmers. They differ significantly, however, from the farmer-respondents in terms of the scale of their farming—while most of the farmer-respondents would be classed as small farmers, cultivating land of five hectares or less, the financiers farmed on a much larger scale, as much as 100 hectares in the case of one financier. The separation, I hope, also illustrates the difference in their accounts of their experiences with HYV corn farming, experiences which could be broadly described as peril and opportunity, but on very different scales.

1.2.2.1 Farmer-respondents and the struggle for capital

I interviewed nine farmers from seven farming households over the span of a week. These households were diverse in ages, concerns, and cultural backgrounds, and on the surface, I assumed that there would be no similarity in their responses. However, despite these differences, there was considerable overlap in what they observed to be the promise and peril of farming HYV corn.

Demographic breakdown of farmer-respondents	
Total number of farmer-respondents	9
Number of households	7
Sex	
Male	5
Female	4
Age	
Younger than 40 years old	3
40 years old and above	6
Municipalities of residence	
Malaybalay City	6
Cabanglasan	3
Currently farming HYV corn	8
Varieties	
GM corn	4
SG corn	4
Modes of financing HYV corn production	
Trader-financier	5

Bank loan	2
Self-financed	1
Private, informal loan	1
Ethnic background	
Lumad (indigenous people)	6
Migrant (from other parts of the Philippines)	3

The most common observation, shared by all the farmers I interviewed, was that capital and cash were absolutely necessary to make a profit from farming GM corn. They all share that if one has no capital, one has no choice but to rely on financing—whether from banks or from financiers—to keep farming GM corn. Farming SG corn is less capital-intensive, because the seeds are cheap (if not free) and requires less input, but is still inevitably tied to capital and the cash economy. They also point out that cash is now necessary for paying for labor costs, which is a marked change from traditional communal or shared farming practices. This loss of communal practices of sharing labor, according to some of the farmers, was one reason why it was hard for them to shift to another crop from HYV corn—most other crops are a lot more labor-intensive than HVY corn, since spraying glyphosate eliminates the need to regularly weed the farm plots.

Interestingly, the older respondents (those older than age 40), also saw that profits from GM corn are tied to how much existing capital one has. As one respondent from Cabanglasan put it: "If you're poor when you start farming, you stay poor; but if you are rich, you grow richer." Another respondent from Malaybalay phrases it differently, but the sentiment is similar: "Opportunities today depend on how much money you have; what moves the world is money. If you have no money, you have no opportunity."

This observation is also related to why most of them continue to farm high-yield variety corn, whether these GM or SG varieties, despite the difficulties that they identified and have experienced: the need for cash. It is a reliable source of income in many different ways, but not the least because there will always be a ready market for it. While five of the respondents have tried alternative crops to grow aside from HYV corn, only one consistently farmed another crop (specifically, sweet bell peppers) while also farming HYV corn, particularly SG corn, at the same time. This ability seems to be attributable to how bell peppers also have a ready market (bought and picked up directly by traders that the farmer is in contact with), in contrast with alternatives other respondents tried, such as *adlai* (*Coix lachrymal-jobi L.*, an indigenous grain gaining popularity in big city health-food stores[21]), for which it was more difficult to find buyers and entailed larger transport costs.

The four farmers who were farming GM corn at the time of the interview also expressed their satisfaction with the benefits they gained from farming GM corn. Despite their expressed

[21] Steph Arnaldo, "Adlai: What it is, where to get it, how to enjoy it," *Rappler*, 18 March 2021, https://www.rappler.com/life-and-style/food-drinks/things-to-know-adlai-low-carbohydrate-rice.

difficulties with GM corn—particularly with the continually rising costs of seeds and input—they also conceded that they were nonetheless better off than in the past. One young farmer, who had previously been cultivating rice for three years before shifting to corn, says that it was easier for him to turn a profit from corn. One farming couple attest to how farming GM corn has enabled them to provide stable lives for their 10 children, most of whom have already finished high school or college, and who are working as professionals and farmers themselves. They contrast their children's lives to their own, recounting how as children, they would often go hungry, eating only one meal a day—hardships that none of their children have had to experience. They also point out that having a steady source of cash is important with school-age children, for allowance, school supplies, and other such needs

This same couple expressed what seemed to me very pragmatic attitudes towards GM corn farming. The husband noted that, while he has observed the detrimental effects of using glyphosate on the soil quality (hardened and dried soil), he also continues to use it as it reduces the amount of manual labor he has to do, an important consideration as he is growing older.

Another interesting commonality across the four farmers who were farming GM corn at the time were how they were, in one way or another, involved or formerly involved in local government. One was a current *kagawad* (an elected official, sitting in their barangay council), one was a Barangay Health Worker (BHW),[22] another was a retired Barangay Health Worker, and another was a former *kagawad* recently appointed to be Indigenous People's Mandatory Representative (MR) to their barangay council.

Additionally, none of them financed their farming through the trader/financier system—the married couple regularly got loans from a rural bank, one was self-financing, while the last one got regular, informal loans from a personal contact who is not in the corn trading/financing business. This last farmer's situation is particularly interesting: they would be lent money by someone best described as a patron—a former local government official with whom she worked before retiring from being a BHW, and as she describes it, whose family members she has helped campaign for during elections. She is charged nominal interest (just a few hundred pesos on top of the actual cost of the seeds and inputs) and is the only farmer to whom this patron gives loans.

1.2.2.2 Financier-respondents and access to capital

I interviewed four financier-respondents over the span of a week. Of these four, three currently finance GM corn farming; while one used to finance HYV corn and stopped because it was unprofitable for them, and is currently financing sweet bell pepper and tomato farming. This smaller number of respondents, compared to the number of farmers interviewed, was because of the difficulty of recruitment that I recounted above. Moreover, until the moments immediately prior to the interviews, I encountered reticence from two out of the four

[22] Barangay Health Workers are volunteer community healthcare workers who live in and originate from the communities that they serve. They are given basic training by the government and NGOs.

respondents. It is still not clear to me what the cause for reticence and suspicion was, but the personal introductions through colleagues and the parish priest seemed to be enough to mitigate these feelings.

I also speculated that a cultural norm in many parts of the Philippines of not bragging about or of downplaying one's wealth when in conversation with others could also be a factor causing this reticence. I thus tried to formulate questions that would allow financiers to describe their business interests qualitatively and narratively, in the hopes of having a quantitative discussion come up organically in the conversation.

Despite these limitations of recruitment and a small number of respondents, I still found the responses illuminating, adding significant details to the relationships and dispositions within the social structure of HYV corn farming. These relationships and dispositions, in turn, will help us better understand the need for a better conception of responsibility for structural injustice in capability and development applications.

The most noticeable similarity across the financiers is their diversified income sources. Financing was not their sole income stream or business venture, and were engaged in no less than two other types of business—all related, directly or indirectly, to farming. All were, at the time of the interview, also farming GM corn. Three out of four also farmed other crops (cassava, sugarcane, and rubber). Three out of four also engaged in corn buying; two out of four offered mechanized corn drying and shelling services; one had a trucking service; one had a dry goods store; while another had a general agricultural supplies store (for a large variety of crops). Two out of four also had spouses who had their own sources of income (whether a day job or a separate business venture). Their level of educational attainment is high in comparison to the farmer-respondents (of the four, three have college degrees, while one finished high school). Three currently host GM corn demonstration farms on their land. Moreover, all four had already established at least one of these income streams prior to financing—they had all run profitable businesses before going into providing loans to other farmers.

How they got started was the same as well: they all attested that it was the farmers who approached them to ask for loans. This could be an indicator that other people recognized their relative economic and social privilege, as it is usual within the culture to approach those in a "better off" position for loans. This, I speculate, will also have something to do with patterns of patronage in Philippine society that I will discuss further in the succeeding section—a pattern that also seems related how two out of four of the respondents currently or have previously held public office as local government officials at the barangay level. Notably, one of the respondents was a barangay captain for 10 years (having reached her maximum number of terms) and prior to that, was a barangay *kagawad* (council member)—both of which are elected positions.

Of the four respondents, three seem to come from families who were relatively better off economically in comparison to the farmer-respondents: One financier-respondent recounted how the business began with seed money an aunt had informally lent them with no

interest, as a wedding gift; another described their mother as having run an agricultural supply store, and described 'taking over' her business when she retired; while another recounts meeting their spouse as a university student studying agricultural engineering in a prestigious state university far from their hometown (a situation requiring a steady income for families who have to fund a dormitory room and provide an allowance for living expenses).

Where the respondents differed more was, intriguingly, in how they answered the question of motivation, of what keeps them in the business of financing. These differences, which I will discuss in more depth the succeeding section, demonstrate how in this structure, financiers are, in many ways, the gatekeepers to capital.

1.2.3 Forms of capital and its gatekeepers

HYV corn farming in the Upper Pulangi is capital intensive, not only in the sense of economic capital. Aside from the economic resources required to buy seeds, labor, and other agricultural input, financial success at HYV corn farming appears to require, among others, a certain amount of education that enables farmers to do research into the particular seeds and their suitability for their type of land, a certain ability to navigate the social norms of financial processes (whether to obtain a loan from a bank or to finagle a lower interest rate from private financing), a familiarity with the workings of the broader commodities market and its implications on corn pricing, and sometimes is just a matter of knowing the right people. In short, it requires considerable resources of what Pierre Bourdieu has called *economic*, *cultural* and *social capital*—and those in short supply of any (and all) of these forms of capital have no other option available but to go through the local financiers, who act as gatekeepers of these forms of capital, brokering and providing access to capital for small farmers. This section will thus focus on discussing economic, cultural, and social capital in the context of the Upper Pulangi, and how the current large corn traders and financiers hold the capital—and therefore, the power—in the area.

Bourdieu asserts that capital takes three forms: 1) *economic capital*, "which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights," how we commonly use capital in our everyday language;[23] 2) *cultural capital*, which broadly corresponds to an individual's knowledge, understanding of concepts and applications of intellectual fields, education, how these are objectified in cultural goods and technologies, and can be institutionalized in the form of academic credentials;[24] and finally 3) *social capital*, which Bourdieu defines as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a

[23] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* ed., J.G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 243.

[24] Bourdieu, 243-46.

group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, *a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.*"[25]

We have already established in previous sections how the small farmers in the Upper Pulangi do not have much economic capital, given both their limited land ownership and net income from farming, but how are they disadvantaged in terms of cultural and social capital? Why does it seem as if their only recourse is to access economic, cultural and social capital through financiers? The preliminary answers to these questions came during my final interview with a financier, who during our meeting was unexpectedly called to a "Farmers' Meeting" by a seed company sales agent.

1.2.3.1 The cultural capital of GM corn farming

What I had planned to be a brief interview of no more than hour long ended up with me tagging along for a few hours, observing a day in the life of a big farmer/trader/financier. Most of my interview was conducted in snatches—while in a pickup truck on the way to the farm, while having a snack after the farmers' meeting we attended. At some points of the interview, we were also joined by their business partner, who happened a retired agronomist who had worked for 30 years in agricultural input companies, and briefly by the sales agent of a seed company.

"Farmers' Meetings" are really marketing events, organized by seed brands at demonstration farms after harvest, gathering all the farmers from the barangay to show off the yield of their seed brand and variety. When one farmer asked about the schedule of applying herbicide and fertilizers, the sales agent answered, "farmer's practice." Later on, I learned that the sales agent had called in a panic because his invited resource speaker did not arrive, and he was running out of things to say to the farmers. In his account, he was a long-time sales agent for the seed company's parent conglomerate, and was just given the corn seeds account to sell after the parent conglomerate had acquired the seed company. He knew nothing about farming, he says. What he was knowledgeable about was how to make a sale and hitting sales targets.

The retired agronomist had things to say about this after the sales agent left, bemoaning the dearth of information that farmers receive about the seeds they purchase. The advice to follow "farmer's practice" is only one symptom of what he thinks is a bigger problem. As an agronomist, he knows that when the fertilizer is applied, what the ratio of micro- and macro-nutrients are, and where it is applied, makes a dramatic difference on the yield of GM corn. Having worked in agro-chemical companies for his whole career, he also knows that different GM corn seed varieties have different nutritional requirements. None of these are information made accessible to the farmers in Upper Pulangi—neither by the seed companies, nor by the Philippine government's agricultural technicians. This information, necessary for improving crop yields, can only be found in scientific literature that the small farmers of the Upper Pulangi

[25] Bourdieu, 248. *Emphasis mine.*

have no access to. In his view, what GM crops require farmers to do is to adopt new technologies and techniques, not just adopting new seeds; but he observes that this is not the way it has been approached. GM corn, as far as he can tell, was introduced to farmers by the seed companies' sales agents, not by agriculturists or agricultural technicians, and thus farmers have gaps in their knowledge. He thinks of his work with the financier, working with farmers to improve their techniques and their yields, and providing farming input tailored to particular GM corn varieties' requirements, as a way of responding to this gap.

These two brief conversations revealed additional resources that the small farmers of the Upper Pulangi lacked: the access to the scientific and technological information about GM seeds.[26] In theory, this is information provided to farmers by the agricultural technicians employed by the Philippine government's Department of Agriculture (and is actually the case in some other provinces and regions of the Philippines), but is not provided in practice. Instead, these are resources that, at best, they can access only though financiers. These resources fall within the ambit of *cultural capital*, in the form of knowledge and technologies.

Hosting demonstration farms is also a manifestation of cultural capital. Another financier described the dynamic of hosting a demonstration farm with the seed companies in a bit more detail. The seed companies monitor demonstration farms closely, sending both scientific research teams to take laboratory samples of the soil, and agricultural-technical teams to advise them regarding the proper planting techniques for the seeds and application of chemical inputs (herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers) for optimal crop growth. This financier, in turn, is able to use the optimal application of chemicals developed with the help of the company on their other, non-demonstration, corn farms, and harvests more than the neighboring local farmers who don't have the benefit of this information.

The more I reflected on the interviews, the more it seemed that the technical knowledge of GM seeds was only one instance of cultural capital. In many ways, the current large corn traders and financiers have their status because of their cultural capital, as seen in their familiarity and comfort in navigating through and negotiating with economic, political, and social institutions, and secondarily through their educational attainment. Two of the financiers I interviewed seem to have some awareness of this—both the financier who is a trained agriculturist, and the financier I had shadowed, made it a condition of their loans that the borrowers must follow their technical advice regarding crop spacing, fertilizer mixing and application, and the like. These same financiers also refer farmers whom they cannot finance to rural banks, facilitating their loan applications and introducing them to the bank processes, making the loan application process less intimidating for the farmers.

[26] This reminded me as well of a statement from an elderly farmer-respondent I interviewed, who explained that part of his reluctance to farm GM corn was that he had no opportunity to learn about the different varieties and techniques and their suitability for the type of land he had, for him to make a better-informed choice. He would rather not make the choice at all, instead of making an uninformed choice.

1.2.3.2 The social capital of GM corn farming

These social connections to agriculturists, agronomists, and banks are some examples of what Bourdieu would call *social capital*, which refers to how an agent is born into a network of social relationships that they use. At the heart of social capital are the influential people one knows, and how one is able to parlay those social relationships into economic and social advantages.

In the case of the four financiers I interviewed, established relationships of patronage and clientelism, and other economic, social, and institutional relations allowed them to navigate their context with greater ease. Having a pre-existing successful business to one's name—which was the case for all financier-respondents—opens the doors of banks and other financial institutions, making the bureaucracy easier to navigate. Being a local government official builds up a person's network of relationships not only within their own communities, but with the local centers of power. Barangay officials, especially barangay captains, cultivate relationships with the municipal mayor, with the local congressional representative, with the provincial governor, and their staff and other local officials, in a bid to ensure funding for local projects, and mutual support during electoral campaigns. In a country like the Philippines where patronage and clientelistic politics, also called the "*padrino* system" prevails, having an "in" with a local politician is a key to advancing one's social status and to accessing resources.[27]

Having demonstration farms expands financier-farmers' social network by putting them in contact with sales representatives from chemical companies, who actively court farmers with demonstration farms and/or farms along the side of the highway. One financier-

[27] Let me briefly discuss here what it means to describe Philippine politics as based on patronage and clientelism. There is a copious amount of literature on this in political science and Southeast Asian studies, but one of its earliest uses in the Southeast Asian political science literature is from James C. Scott, "Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia," *American Political Science Review* 66 (March 1972): 91-113.
In this work, I follow the definitions outlined by Paul Hutchcroft in his comparative work "Linking Capital and Countryside: Patronage and Clientelism in Japan, Thailand, and the Philippines," from *Clientelism, Social Policy, and the Quality of Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014). In this article, patronage is defined as "a *material resource*, disbursed for particularistic benefit for political purposes, and commonly (but not always) derived from public sources," while on the other hand, clientelism is "a *personalistic relationship of power.* Persons of higher social status (patrons) are linked to those of lower social status (clients) in face-to-face ties of reciprocity that can vary in content and purpose across time" (54).
From the US colonial era to the post-colonial period, a large degree of authority in the Philippines was given to local economic and social elites, the *cacique* class, as both the colonial and post-colonial governments were more concerned with establishing electoral institutions than bureaucratic processes. In exchange for patronage, local politicians deliver votes during national and local elections. In turn, local politicians exercise patronage and clientelism with their lower-status constituents, distributing not only financial resources to those in their favor, but also enhancing their social status though their personalistic connections, most commonly through "*KBL*" (*kasal, binyag, libing*), literally weddings, baptisms, and funerals (70).
This system has also been described in the literature as the "*padrino* system," described as "an exchange relationship between a more powerful and resourceful patron and a recipient-client of the patron's favours…social transactions are both constrained and enabled by such Filipino-cultural codes as the ethics of 'debt of gratitude' (Filipino: *utang na loob*) and the psycho-social notion of 'shame' (Filipino: *hiya*)," from Pak Nung Wong and Kristine Joyce Lara de Leon, "Padrino System (Philippines)," *Global Informality Project*, 11 May 2020, https://www.in-formality.com/wiki/index.php?title=Padrino_System_(Philippines).

respondent shared that having a demonstration farm is something that many farmers strive for—since aside from the free seeds and technical support they receive from the seed companies, they also receive free inputs from chemical companies who want their products advertised along the highway. Since chemical inputs comprise a large amount of the costs of farming, these free inputs have a significant effect on their profit margin at harvest—yet another advantage for financier-farmers that they can leverage.[28]

1.2.4 Gatekeepers to capital in action: Two examples

The following accounts of two respondent-financiers provide excellent examples of cultural and social capital in action. The first account, illustrating social capital, is of someone we shall call Financier X. They described their financing activities as a business concerned with "providing jobs for the community" as part of "public service."

This is a deceptively simple statement that bears unpacking. Financier X sees financing as part of their own family business, which includes their own farm, their corn trading, trucking, milling, and drying (they own a large solar drying facility) businesses. Their concern is the bottom line, so even though they have an avowed sense of "public service" in the form of creating (low wage) jobs, it is still within the context of running a profitable business. Keeping the business profitable is what guarantees that jobs continue to exist and continue to be created.

While job creation itself may not a bad thing, Financier X's business orientation is overlaid on relationships of dependency and patronage. As a former barangay official who had served for ten years, Financier X's relationships with the other residents of the barangay are influenced by the patronage politics and *quid pro quo* that is typical to the Philippines, characterized by patron-client relationships between the *politico* and their constituents, usually called the *padrino system*.

While Financier X is adamant that they did not engage in the financing apect of their business during their time in public office, it is also worth noting that holding such public office helped create connections and relationships with people of higher economic and political status beyond their barangay. This increased social capital that Finacier X obtained through their political office is something that is implicitly understood within the local culture as beneficial to the constituents, following the *padrino* system (i.e. the system of patronage and clientelism, which I discussed a bit in footnote 13 of this chapter).

For instance, by accessing financing (i.e. economic capital) through Financier X, a farmer is also accessing Financier X's relationship network (i.e. social capital), by gaining indirect

[28] During my visits to the Upper Pulangi, I heard accounts of other forms of incentives as well, such as all-expenses-paid trips abroad (ostensibly to tour the company facilities, but in practice touristic in nature, thus promoting one's social status) and cash bonuses from companies. I heard these accounts, however, not from financiers themselves but from people proximate to them (family members) and from an MBA student formerly employed by a seed company who participated in the field course I mentioned earlier.

access to the corn buyers that Financier X works with and indirect access to seed and chemical companies. A farmer is usually given a choice of pre-set "packages," that is, a set of branded seeds and other farming input, from a menu that the financier gives to them. These packages usually feature seeds and inputs from the different seed and chemical brands and companies that the financier has already cultivated prior working relationships with, and from whom they usually obtain these inputs at a discounted price. Being employed by Financier X is another mode of becoming an 'insider', of having access to the relationship network that Financier X has, through meeting and dealing with the people with whom Financier X has relationships with—bigger traders and buyers, *politcos* higher in the political pecking order, and so on.

These circumstances suggest that Financier X's business benefits from their being in a social position of patron, distributing largesse (whether in the form of jobs or loans or other status symbols) to those of lower socio-economic status. This also seems to be supported by the way the farmers we interviewed, who would all refer to Financier X using their political position or title, not just by name. A couple of the farmers also recounted how it is important to stay in Financier X's "good graces," such as by making payments on time, or not talking badly of Financier X in the community, or continuing to vote for Financier X and/or their family members in the next elections. If one is perceived as being out of Financier X's favor, a farmer can be levied higher interest rates, be denied a loan on account of failing to uphold the other end of the *padrino* relationship, or start to have a negative reputation as untrustworthy in business, which in turn will have a negative impact on their ability to access economic and social capital. Other social-economic resources, such as scholarships for one's children, are usually coursed through the local government, and cultivating a relationship with a local government official may also be seen as giving one an edge.

Upon further reflection, the means by which I was able to interview Financier X and all the other financiers was also through social capital. I was only able to be granted meetings and interviews when my requests were coursed through personal relationships that the financiers had with people they considered their peers in social esteem/prestige, such as their family members or the parish priest. Requests coursed through their staff or through client farmers—those on the lower levels of social power—were not granted.

Financier Y's account is, in turn, an instance of the access and use of cultural capital. They recognize that their family is in a more advantageous position compared to extended family and neighbors, due to a variety of factors that they identified: their degree in agriculture, their family's other sources of income (a salary from regular employment, their family's other businesses), and having more access to cash (a smaller family means less day-to-day expenses; regular employment makes it easy for them to access formal financing and other financial services). Thus, they facilitate access to economic *and* cultural capital by providing not only financial credit to farmers, but also the technical agricultural support that enable farmers to increase their harvest yields.

Financier Y describes it as the condition of granting loans to others—if they grant a loan to farmers, the farmers understand that the farms will be regularly inspected by Financier Y and that the farmers must follow the schedule of applying fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides that Financier Y recommends. The financier recounts how, based on their own experience and knowledge as a university-educated agriculturist and as a farmer themselves, the slightest deviation from this schedule can have a large negative impact on the yields of HYV corn.

Financier Y says their position of privilege is what makes them feel a sense of obligation to other families who are part of their community, and who have been a source of non-financial (emotional, social) support for them in the past. They say it is now their turn to provide support to the community, until the community is able to support themselves. If they cannot support them through financing, they say, they find ways to direct them to more sustainable financing sources, such as referring them to rural banks for loans.

While they acknowledge their difference in socio-economic status, Financier Y's financing activities do not seem to be premised on a relationship of patronage and clientelism. They were consistent in describing their financing activities as a kind of resource-sharing with extended family and neighbors, and even more notably, they recognized their technical knowledge and college degree as resources—Bourdieu's cultural capital—that could be shared alongside economic capital.

1.3 An overview of the economic and social structures of HYV corn farming in the Upper Pulangi

The preceding discussions of both the results of the LUCID economic survey and of my own qualitative interviews have helped us better understand and describe the different agents, processes, and forms of capital that continue to enable HYV corn farming in the Upper Pulangi, and have also helped us begin to sketch their effects on the different agents involved in these processes.[29] Notably, we can glean from both the quantitative and qualitative accounts that 1) HVY corn farming is capital intensive (requiring considerable economic, cultural, and social capital in order to turn a profit); 2) farmers and financiers all recognize this capital requirement (though with differing responses to this recognition); and that 3) both groups recognize how smaller farmers are the most disadvantaged. As a way of summarizing the previous discussion, this section will describe the economic and social structures of HYV corn farming in the Upper Pulangi from the position of a farmer, in order to show that the notable social effect on small farmers has been the loss of choice and power.

Despite the clear disadvantage of their position in comparison to financiers, small farmers in the Upper Pulangi continue to take loans to farm HYV corn. Even though the farmer

[29] I note here however the limitations as well of this sketch of the social structure of HYV corn farming in the Upper Pulangi—due to the geographic focus of the research, as well as the unexpected lockdowns because of the pandemic, I did not get to tackle the 'consumer' side of this structure, i.e. the buyers of the HYV corn, who are animal feed manufacturers located in other parts of the country.

recognizes their own disadvantage, they attribute their reluctance to leave HYV corn farming altogether to what seems like convenience: HYV corn, because it was engineered to be resistant to glyphosate, is far less labor intensive than traditional corn varieties that required intensive weeding. However, it also shows how the socio-cultural practices that enabled the farming of traditional corn varieties—such as communal labor practices—have completely eroded, supplanted by the work-for-cash system.

And, while the farmer may be interested in shifting to other crops or even to organic farming (about a third of the farmers I interviewed expressed this desire), making this shift is difficult because there are no broader systems supporting them: shifting to a different crop still requires capital and technologies which they do not have (and which, unlike corn, are more difficult to access financing for), and organically-farmed produce is bought at the same price by traders in Bukidnon.[30] There are also no policy directives from their local governments to support this shift, despite farmers' desires. In fact, the opposite is the case; one of the municipalities in the Upper Pulangi district, shortly after my interviews in the first two months of 2020, began calling itself the "corn capital of Bukidnon," actively promoting the expansion of high-yield variety corn farming in the municipality.[31] It remains to be seen, however, how much of this is a PR campaign for the local government, and how much of this is actually supported by technical support for farmers on the ground.

Contextualizing this even further, it can seem that such social and economic changes make it difficult for small farmers to cease farming high-yield variety corn, despite the risks and costs that they themselves acknowledge. Working for cash is taken for granted, financing through the local financiers seems easily accessible because of relationships of patronage and affiliation, and there's no need to find buyers for one's crop because corn buyers come to you—either through one's fellow farmer or through one's financier. Shifting to another crop is harder: one has to find their own capital, find their own labor, find their own buyers, find their own transportation to take their harvest to the buyer; they basically have to go at it alone. Relationships of patronage and affiliation may also add motivation to continue farming high-yield variety corn—becoming a client of a financier's business may also be a means of cultivating a patron who gives one access to better opportunities.

The net effect of all these considerations is a real loss of choice and sense of agency for small farmers. The most noteworthy detail is how, as a farmer's land size increases, the more relationships they have, and therefore, *the more choice and agency they have*. The increase of relationships is a good proxy for choice and agency, as the farmers with the fewer relationships are comparatively more constrained in their access to economic, cultural, and social capital.

For instance, having a larger land size usually means access to multiple sources of financing, as one is no longer constrained to borrow money from the financiers and can instead

[30] Unlike in other neighboring provinces where organic produce is priced at a premium.

[31] They celebrated this by erecting a massive statue of a corn cob in the middle of a large corn field, visible from multiple points on the Bukidnon national highway.

use the land as capital for borrowing from a rural bank or credit cooperative which offer much lower interest rates on their loans (the minimum land size that rural banks and credit cooperatives accept is three hectares). Borowing from a rural bank or credit cooperative also means that the farmer receives cash, and thus has more liberty to choose the type or brand of seed they want to buy, and can choose the most cost-effective fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides on the market. This is very different from a loan from a financier, who supplies particular packages to choose from. That is, these farmers can only choose from predetermined sets of seeds and input, a more limited set of choices. There is also evidence that suggests a statistically-significant correlation between plot size and educational attainment at the household level, which in turn suggests that these farmers have more cultural capital as well.[32]

Though the farmers themselves recognize that they indeed work less, harvest more, and earn more gross income from HYV corn production, they claim that they are not in the ones benefiting the most from this shift. This intuition seems to be affirmed by both the qualitative and quantitative data that we have discussed, which shows that those with more economic, cultural, and social capital—such as financiers and farmers with larger tracts of land—are in a better position to benefit from HYV corn production. This raises questions, therefore, about the just-ness and fairness of such institutional arrangements, raising important philosophical questions that I shall be returning to in the succeeding chapters of this work, particularly questions of whether access to material resources is an adequate measure of justice. I shall return to this point in the succeeding chapter on justice and how the capability approach is meant as a critique and an alternative to approaches to justice that use material resources as the gauge of justice.

However, the questions do not end with understanding and describing better the justice or lack thereof in the system of HYV corn production in the Upper Pulangi. These examinations also raise the questions of how this situation can be remedied, and, more importantly, *who ought to be responsible for remedying this situation*. Agents who participate in HYV corn production in the Upper Pulangi, as we have discussed, do not only comprise farmers and financiers—financial institutions, the local and national government, and corporations (both national and multi-/trans-national corporations) are agents in this system as well. Among all these agents, who are to be held responsible—none? All? To address these questions, we take a turn into the literature in the sociology of agriculture.

2. Agriculture, biotechnology, and structures of diffused responsibility

The preceding discussions of the field data gleaned from the LUCID Project, and my initial analysis of this data, can also be understood as one instance of a greater phenomenon that is changing the social structure of agriculture—changes which, according to sociologist Gabriela

[32] Clarice Manuel, email correspondence, 11 September 2020.

Pechlaner, have been brought about by the introduction and dominance of biotech crops. She calls this phenomenon *expropriationism*, emphasizing three effects: how it not only leads to capital accumulation for biotech companies, but also to impairing farmers' power and capability to choose, and diffuses the liability for the use of biotech crops and any consequences that arise from their cultivation.

These effects of expropriationism are of particular relevance to the questions of this thesis: that is, questions of agency, capability, and how to conceptualize responsibility for injustices of social structures. This is why this section will discuss Pechlaner's concept of expropriationism in more detail, connecting it to the data gathered from the Upper Pulangi, and how these demonstrate the need for formulating a concept of responsibility for structural injustice in the capability approach. To do this, however, we must first delve into the broader context of the sociology of agriculture that Pechlaner is responding to, and the social structures it attempts to describe and capture.

2.1 Capital accumulation, choice, and power in agricultural production

Classically, the sociology of agriculture was focused on how industrialization changed the mode of capital accumulation in agricultural societies. Agriculture was a kind of limit case, though, since unlike the typical industrial modes of capital accumulation deeply tied to mechanization and automation, agriculture was—and still is—tied to farmers' lives and natural processes largely out of industrial control.[33]

It is only in the last two decades of the 20th century that an alternative sociological approach emerges, which views agriculture from the lens of how it is organized, how it uses physical space, and who accumulates capital and power as a result of the process. She cites Goodman and Watts as the pioneers of this approach, describing their work as "[putting] agriculture firmly under the umbrella of its broader political economic context, but without creating a forced marriage of industrialization concepts and empirical evidence."[34]

Using this framework, sociologists have described how industrialization has coped with the inability to control the natural process of agriculture: that is, through gradually gaining control of the input end and the output end of the process. As Lewontin describes it, industrial capital has

> [wrested] control of the choices from the farmers, forcing them into a farming process that uses a package of inputs of maximum value to the producers of those inputs, and tailoring the nature of farm products to match the demands of a few major purchasers of

[33] Pechlaner, "Sociology of Agriculture," 246. Cf. Richard C. Lewontin, "The Maturing of Capitalist Agriculture: The Farmer as Proletarian," in *The Monthly Review* 50 no.3 (July/August 1998): 93-106.

[34] David Goodman and Micheal Watts, "Reconfiguring the Rural or Fording the Divide? Capitalist Restructuring and the Global Agro-food System," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 22 no.1 (1994): 1-49. Cited in Pechlaner, 247.

farm outputs who have the power to determine the price paid. Whatever production risks remain are, of course, retained by the farmer.[35]

Goodman, Sorj, and Wilkinson developed two concepts to describe this transformation: *appropriationism*, the "discontinuous but persistent undermining of discrete elements of the agricultural production process, their transformation into industrial activities, and their re-incorporation into agriculture as inputs"[36] and *substitutionism*, which "replace[s] the agricultural end products, reducing them to industrial inputs for manufactured products."[37] Appropriationism and substitutionism also have a mutually beneficial relationship with technological development and state policy promoting industrialization—appropriationism and substitutionism occur faster along with the support for developing industrial technology on a large scale.[38]

As farmers become more and more dependent on industrial inputs such as machinery and chemical fertilizers (appropratationism), and increasingly produce inputs on the demand of other industrial processes such as raw material for manufacturing processed food or animal feeds (susbtitutionism), their economic and social power within the system of agriculture is diminished. The market power instead lies in the hands of the producers of these inputs, and the producers of the consumer goods who have the power to dictate agricultural production, such as in the case of contract farming. As Pechlaner puts it, "these accumulation strategies have functioned to minimize the economic significance of agricultural production and reduce the power of farmers."[39]

2.2 Biotech crops: from appropriationism and subsitutionism to expropriationism

Though the emergence of biotech crops—specifically, what we commonly call genetically-modified (GM) organisms—can be seen as heightened appropriationism (as the seeds and the biotechnology that produces them are, after all, products of industrial capital) and heightened substitutionism (as the seeds are engineered to produce crops most suitable to the demands of buyers and end users),[40] she asserts that there is a more significant change occurring.

Following Kloppenburg's analysis in the book *First the Seed*, biotechnology is the means that industry has used to transform seeds, formerly a natural part of the agricultural cycle, into

[35] Lewontin, 96. Quoted in Pechlaner, 247.

[36] David Goodman, Bernardo Sorj, and John Wilkinson, *From Farming to Biotechnology: A Theory of Agro-Industrial Development* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 2. Quoted in Pechlaner, 248.

[37] Pechlaner, 248.

[38] Pechlaner, 249.

[39] Pechlaner, 249.

[40] Pechlaner, 252.

capital that it can control and profit from.[41] This control is effected in two ways: the technological (particularly the use of the "terminator gene") and the social (the use of patent law). This has the effect of rendering farmers completely beholden to the biotech companies, with their power and choices severely curtailed, through perfectly legal mechanisms. Pechlaner asserts that "[t]his impact is sufficiently distinct in character from appropriationism and substitutionism—although there is significant overlap—that requires a new concept—'expropriationism'."[42]

Expropriationism, in her usage, refers to how private property has been seized for corporate benefit, aided by public policy or public institutions. The seed, which traditionally has been kept by farmers at the end of every harvest to use in the next planting season, has instead become a patented product belonging to a biotechnology company, to be sold for profit. But it does not simply end there. Pechlaner writes:

> What is new…is the widespread introduction of an assortment of legal mechanisms associated with a specific technology that is itself becoming widespread, at least in the commercial production of some key crops. In expropriationism, capital is extracted through legal mechanisms, used in novel ways, to facilitate capital accumulation through changes in the systems of power and control. Evidence of these changes can be seen in law, as the technologies' proprietary framework evolves through litigation, and in practice, through the changing relationship of farmers to their production system.[43]

In her article, Pechlaner discusses several examples of these changes in law and in practice, using data gathered from farmers who were early adopters of GM canola in the US and Canada (specifically in Mississippi and Saskatchewan, respectively). She highlights how several cases of litigation in these two places have used the legal system to, on the one hand, uphold the seed companies' ownership of the seeds as a product, while on the other hand allow them to avoid liability for the consequences that occur from growing these seeds. Though she cites several legal cases in her analysis, I shall focus only on two here, as they best highlight two important consequences of expropriationism.

The first case was filed against Monsanto in Canada, where GM canola had cross-pollinated with organic canola. These organic farmers wanted Monstanto to be liable for the loss of organic certification because of this cross-polination.[44] However, the judge ruled that Monsanto was not liable, that "the sale of an item…could not be blamed for the actions of that item…and that [legal] action would be more suitably directed at the user of the item—the GM farmer,"[45] effectively upholding Monsanto's *ownership* of the seeds (and thus the profit gained

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[41] Jack Kloppenburg, *First the Seed: Political Economy of Plant Biotech-nology, 1492-2000,* 2d ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

[42] Pechlaner, 254.

[43] Pechlaner, 254.

[44] In Canada, as in many other countries, organic certification stipulates the use of non-GM seeds, among other requirements.

[45] Pechlaner, 260.

from selling these), while absolving them of responsibility over any effects of these seeds once planted.

The second case leads us straight into the other major effect of expropriationism: the complete market capture by biotech companies and the gradual but inevitable loss of choice and power of farmers. This lawsuit was filed against Monsanto, this time by farmers in the US, concerning what they saw as coercive "technology agreements" that farmers were required to sign if they purchased Monsanto seed for their use. These technology agreements required farmers to purchase only specific (usually Monsanto-brand) inputs, only from Monstanto-approved sellers, and sometimes stipulating that farmers sells harvests only to Monsanto-approved buyers. This practice, Pechlaner says, is geared towards limiting farmers' choices and capturing the market, citing how in interviews in 2005 (just seven years after GM canola was approved for cultivation in the US), "many farmers were close to technological dependence on GM technology, and felt they could no longer farm competitively without it."[46] Regardless of how high seed and input costs became, farmers were left with no choice but to purchase them. Nonetheless, the judge ruled in Monstanto's favour, arguing that "farmers were under no obligation to use Roundup, as they could choose to use no herbicide at all."[47]

These two cases are but two examples of expropriationism: that is, the use of legal means to deprive farmers of choice and market power, for the sake of biotech companies' profits, while allowing responsibility for any negative consequences to be diffused through the system. She writes, "the pricing, replant policies, and rewards and incentive programs all create a legal web balanced against farmers. To the extent that biotechnologies become necessary to remain competitive, producers are locked into paying what suppliers demand and accepting any associated conditions."[48] Expropriation thus becomes the social structure that subsumes GM farmers, all through perfectly legal means. As Pechlaner writes:

> While these issues can face future challenges, the effect of the web of legal mechanisms ushered in with agricultural biotechnologies appears unambiguous. Farmers adopt GM crops on the basis of an individual cost-benefit assessment, but the associated trade-offs increasingly dictate many aspects of their production process. The road would indeed seem to lead towards Lewontin's "farmer as mere operative" (2000:97). As GM technology is introduced into more and more key crops…the narrowing of choices and economic strategies will have an increasingly significant impact on farmers.[49]

[46] Pechlaner, 263.

[47] Pechlaner, 264. An absurd option that, as Pechlaner points out shortly thereafter, "makes no economic sense." I would add that it makes neither scientific nor agricultural sense either, as the seeds are engineered precisely for use with herbicides.

[48] Pechlaner, 265.

[49] Pechlaner, 266.

2.3 Expropriationism in the Upper Pulangi

As the farmers Pechlaner worked with are North American, she worries about the expansion of expropriation as biotech crops become more widespread, and how they can affect more economically vulnerable farmers in other parts of the world. As she concludes in her article:

> In the current context of deepening agricultural internationalization, concerns about shifting control over agriculture by legal fiat become extremely urgent, particularly when reproduced on a scale that reaches the world's poorest farmers…. There are powerful political and economic forces driving their development, but there are also forces of resistance, both within and outside the legal forum.[50]

Following Pechlaner's discussion, what we have seen in the LUCID field study can be interpreted as a specific and different manifestation of expropriationism in the Philippine context. How so? As we have seen in our previous discussion in the previous section, in the context of the Upper Pulangi, the financier/trader is the gatekeeper for very small GM corn farmers—controlling access to capital, inputs, and buyers, and acting as an agent for the interests of industry, receiving direct and indirect incentives from these companies. In some cases, even further information about better farming practices can only be accessed through the gatekeeper in the form of the financier. The simple result of this is the loss of factors within the control of small farmers; the control within this relationship lies instead in the hands of traders/financiers and of corporations and their agents.

Though this is all perfectly legal business practice, it has resulted in the progressive loss of power among small farmers, for whom the financier/trader becomes a patron, from whose largesse they benefit. It is the financier who has the power to permit or prohibit a farmer from accessing resources—not only economic capital, but social capital as well. Expropriation is further evidenced by the conclusion of the value-chain analysis discussed above, which shows that ultimately only 5% of gross revenues end up in the hands of farmers.

Smaller farmers' use of sige-sige (SG corn), though controversial from a proprietary standpoint (some other researchers call SG corn "pirated" seeds, using terminology of intellectual property law), can be seen in this light as a mode of resistance to expropriation, as it allows them to avoid part of the structure and a modicum of choice, as they can produce corn for their own consumption, or to sell it, as corn buyers in the area do not make a distinction between GM and SG corn come harvest season.

Though there are studies prior to LUCID from other parts of the Philippines, that predict the negative impact of GM crops in the Philippines,[51] and even if the use of GM corn seems to have a statistically-relevant correlation to the increased incidence of landslides in Upper

[50] Pechlaner, 267.

[51] Torres et al., *Adoption and Uptake Pathways.*

Pulangi,[52] no laws have been violated by biotech seed companies, nor can they be held legally liable for these negative impacts. Nonetheless, the injustice of the structure of expropriation is not alleviated by the presence of individual choice, nor by the knowledge that financiers are actively working with farmers to improve the interest and loan payback rates, nor by the assurance that biotech companies have complied with Philippine and international law. In these circumstances, an NGO worker, government worker, or policy researcher can easily be left wondering: How can this structure be changed? By whom?

3. Approaches to development and justice beyond the economic

These questions are, precisely, the questions that bring us to the heart of the philosophical questions of my project. If my commitment is as a capabilitarian thinker and practitioner of the approach is development, understood as the flourishing of human capabilities within the world that she inhabits, shouldn't these structures of injustice, which inhibit or constrain her capabilities, be of concern? In what way can I conceptualize structures of injustice in the capability approach?

These questions about the possibility of changing a structure that unfairly disadvantages small farmers, and advantages local and multinational elites, are questions that we will return to in chapters 3-5 of this work, in which I will explore the concepts of agency, injustice, social structures, and social-structural change. Before I do this, however, it is necessary to explain what I mean when I claim to be a "capabilitarian thinker" or a practitioner of the capability approach. The capability approach has emerged in the last 30 years as an alternative to more economistic approaches to development, and in the next chapter, we examine the capability approach, what it consists of, how it has been applied in development contexts, and its relationship to inequality and injustice.

[52] Ludovic Bequet, "Biotech Crops, Input Use and Landslides Case Study of Herbicide Tolerant Corn in the Philippine Highlands," *Ecological Economics* 177 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2020.106773.

Chapter 2
The Capability Approach, Inequality, and Injustice

In the previous chapter, I sketched out a particular system of high-yield variety (HYV) corn farming prevalent in the Upper Pulangi watershed in the province of Bukidnon in the Philippines. In this system, small-scale farmers are at a disadvantage, not only because they do not have the existing economic resources to enable them to profitably farm a capital-intensive crop, but also because there are larger social systems and relationships they have to navigate from a position of disadvantage. This disadvantage can be further described as having to depend on a trader-financier to access economic, social, and cultural capital, instead of having a plurality of means of accessing these forms of capital. The injustices experienced by these farmers cannot be attributed to any single person or group; they describe their experience as having the whole system stacked against them, and this appears to be affirmed by the economic study conducted in the area.

While some of the disadvantage can be attributed to an inequitable distribution of economic resources in this situation, it cannot completely account for the injustice. Social status and social capital—"who you know"—also play a crucial role in the relative disadvantage/advantage of farmers, as well as being used to their advantage by global biotech corporations. I doubt that the policy makers who first promoted the adoption of HYV corn among smallholder farmers, with the aim of increasing their income, anticipated these effects. Are there any approaches to justice—whether on the theoretical level or the policy level—that take into consideration these factors beyond economic capital?

The capability approach (hereafter referred to as CA) is one such approach that claims to move beyond resource-based conceptions of justice. Formulated over 30 years ago by the economist Amartya Sen and the philosopher Martha Nussbaum, it began as an alternative to prevailing development paradigms that were focused either on economistic measures of development (for instance, the growth of a country's economy, measured through its Gross Domestic and Gross National Products) or versions of the utilitarian calculus that called for maximization of happiness. The CA claims that these paradigms fail to consider the non-calculable elements that allow for human life to flourish. Instead of focusing on incomes or utilitarian "happiness" as measures of a flourishing human life, the CA proposes that we consider development in terms of people's capabilities: that is, how much real opportunities for action and function people have, such that they live their lives according to whatever they have reason to value.[53] Aside from offering a critique of these paradigms of development,

[53] For a straightforward discussion of the capability approach in relation to theories of distributive justice, see Ingrid Robeyns, "The Capability Approach," in *The Oxford Handbook of Distributive Justice*, ed. Serena Olsaretti (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 109-128, http://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199645121.013.5.

however, the CA is more broadly an approach to normative reasoning and assessment—it proposes an alternative approach to normative questions of equality and injustice.[54]

Would the CA then be an approach that can be used in situations of injustice such as those experienced by the small farmers of the Upper Pulangi? Are there areas of the approach that need further development to allow its use/application for such situations?

In this chapter, I will take the first steps to answering this question. In the first section, I will provide an overview of the CA and its most accepted norms. Next, I will discuss its relationship to justice, particularly Sen's version of this relationship, and compare it with the other theories of justice it responds to in the context of development—theories that broadly fall under the umbrella of distributive theories of justice.

I will also discuss why, from within the CA, I have chosen to draw the most from the work of Sen, particularly on his writings on agency and justice. At the heart of this choice to focus on Sen is his emphasis on the CA as a "realization focused comparative approach," that is, viewing the CA as focused on understanding particular social contexts of injustice, uncovering the different factors that have an impact on agents in these contexts, ultimately in view of working to reduce or eliminate the injustice.

Finally, I conclude this chapter by identifying one particular area of Sen's work that is most relevant to the question of the disadvantages faced by the small farmers of the Upper Pulangi, namely the relationship Sen identifies between *agency* and what he calls *conversion factors*, which he uses to designate the factors that impair, impede, or otherwise affect an agent's actual ability to achieve the functionings that they have reason to value, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

1. The Capability Approach

Though it is still contested even among capabilitarians whether the approach can be considered an actual theory of justice,[55] the capability approach has become an influential approach to thinking about questions of human welfare, economic development, and inequality in the past thirty years, especially with the creation of global indices such as the Human Development Index and global goals such as the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals.[56]

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[54] Ingrid Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice: The Capability Approach Reexamined* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2017) Kindle edition, http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0130, Chapter 1.

[55] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2. See also: Ingrid Robeyns and Morten Fibieger Byskov, "The Capability Approach," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/capability-approach/. Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (London: Penguin, 2010), 8-10, 15-18. Martha C. Nussbaum, preface to *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 2011), xi-xii.

[56] As of 20 June 2019, there was a précis of the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Reports and its debt to Amartya Sen and the capability approach, under the subheading "Intellectual and Historical Underpinnings," https://hdr.undp.org/about/human-development, accessed 7 November 2023. See also Martha C. Nussbaum, preface to *Creating Capabilities,* ix-xi.

Broadly speaking, the CA emerged as a counterpoint and alternative to dominant utilitarian, welfarist, and income-based approaches to human development in economics, as well as an alternative to a Rawlsian approach to justice in political theory. In these aforementioned approaches, the concern often lies in either in maximization of utility (as in the case of utilitarian and welfarist approaches) or in the fair distribution of resources (as in the case of Rawls). In contrast, the capability approach maintains that maximal utility or resource distribution are merely means to an end, and the theoretical and policy focus placed on these means have obscured that end. What is that end? Sen and Nussbaum assert that the end is human development, human wellbeing, thriving, or "human flourishing" (in the more Aristotelian formulation that Nussbaum sometimes uses).[57] The evaluative/normative concerns, therefore, ought not to be maximal utility or distribution of resources, but rather the lives that people lead—their beings and doings *and* their capabilities that enable them to be and do (as they are referred to in much of the capability literature).

This assertion seems to have resonated across different fields, extending from development economics and development projects into a broad range of the social sciences and their applications. As Solava Ibrahim observes, the CA gained much attention because of "[its] freedom-centred view of development, its accounting for interpersonal and intercultural variations, its emphasis on social justice and its stress on public discussion and deliberative democracy have rendered the capability approach (CA) a wider and more comprehensive framework for designing and assessing development policies."[58]

Today, the CA literature includes work in healthcare accessibility, children's rights and welfare, education, jurisprudence, and ethical theory. A visit to the Human Development and Capability Association's website—the organisation focused on the development and use of the capability approach—lists thirteen thematic groups that its members' research fall under.[59] I think the capability approach has been attractive across a wide variety of applications because of its grounded, practical character. Sen describes it as a "realization focused comparison,"[60] and that seems to have sparked the interest not just of scholars, but also of practitioners.

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[57] Various ways of phrasing were used in the early days of the approach. See Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, eds. *The Quality of Life*, WIDER Studies in Development Economics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[58] Solava Ibrahim, "The Capability Approach: From Theory to Practice – Rationale, Review and Reflections," introduction to *The Capability Approach: From Theory to Practice*, Solava Ibrahim and Meera Tiwari, eds. (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), Kindle Edition.

[59] Here is a copy of the full list, which can also be found at https://hd-ca.org/thematic-groups (last accessed 30 June 2022): Children and Youth; Education; Empowerment and Collective Capabilities; Ethics and Development; Foundational Issues in the Capability Approach; Gender and Sexuality; Health and Disability; Horizontal Inequality; Human Rights; Human Security; Indigenous People; Participatory Methods; Quantitative Research Methods; Sustainable Human Development; Technology, Innovation and Design; Work and Employment.

[60] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 7.

Given this rather broad characterization and use, how ought we to conceptualize the capability approach? Is it a theoretical-ethical framework for the human and social sciences, a school of thought, or a theory of justice?

1.1 Defining the capability approach?

Sen's description of the approach is perhaps the most cited one, and it is instructive to begin here. He describes the CA as "an intellectual discipline that gives a central role to the evaluation of a person's achievements and freedoms in terms of his or her actual ability to do the different things a person has reason to value doing or being."[61] Thus, if we follow Sen, the CA is intended as way of proceeding or of approaching questions of normative evaluation in the human/social sciences, but he stops short of claiming it to be a fully-formed theory of justice. One could even say that he distances the CA specifically from ideal theories of justice,[62] preferring to describe his work as a comparative approach to realizing justice, in the vein of social critics like Mary Wollstonecraft.[63] In contrast, Nussbaum is less reticent, proffering the CA as a more specified theory of justice, "the counter-theory we need in an era of urgent human problems and unjustifiable human inequalities,"[64] and thus a theory that a practitioner can readily apply to cases they encounter. The contrast between Nussbaum and Sen will be discussed in a bit more depth in the succeeding section; but for our current purposes, taking notice of this difference is enough—it is illustrative of not only the diversity of opinions within the CA, but also of the broadness of its frontiers.

This breadth and diversity are precisely what Ingrid Robeyns grapples with in her 2017 book, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice: The Capability Approach Re-examined*. There, she offers a characterisation of the CA, through surveying the CA literature as it stands in the present and to distill what all these have in common, in an accessible form. The CA, she points out, has added value across different cases, fields, and disciplines. Nonetheless, its added value has not been the same across all these fields, having had the most impact in development economics, the philosophical examination and critique of the concept of development, and in political-philosophical debates on the nature of justice.[65] This varied breadth and depth of the CA literature, she asserts, necessitates a re-examination and re-articulation of the approach, in a form that makes sense for these different applications and for practitioners of these different fields, particularly those new to the approach.[66] Robeyns first begins with a general

[61] Amartya Sen, "Capability: Reach and Limit," in *Debating Global Society: Reach and Limits of the Capability Approach*, Enrica Chiappero-Martinetti and José Manuel Roche, eds. (Milan: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, 2009), 16. Quoted in Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 1.1.

[62] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 5-7 and 15-18.

[63] Sen, *Idea of Justice,* 8-9.

[64] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, xii.

[65] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 1, Section 1.2.

[66] Robeyns, Chapter 1, Sections 1.1 and 1.3.

characterization of the approach as a framework for approaching normative questions. As she writes:

> [The capability approach] is generally understood as a conceptual framework for a range of evaluative exercises, including most prominently the following: (1) the assessment of individual levels of achieved wellbeing and wellbeing freedom; (2) the evaluation and assessment of social arrangements or institutions, and (3) the design of policies and other forms of social change in society.[67]

The breadth of capability scholarship can be attributed, Robeyns explains, to the CA's flexibility. As an approach, the CA is best described as *open-ended* and *underspecified*, and how and why the approach is used in a particular context is closely linked to how it will be specified in a given application. She elaborates, "What is needed for this specifying or closing of the capability approach will depend on the aim of using the approach, e.g. whether we want to develop it into a (partial) theory of justice, or to use it to assess inequality, or to conceptualise development, or use it for some other purpose."[68] Thus, it is necessary to distinguish between the *capability approach* (the broad framework) and *capability theories and applications* (the particular uses and adaptations of this framework)[69] In her book, she uses the shorthand of *capability theories* to refer to this second category, but it is important to note that this covers a broad variety of writings.[70]

Providing a more nuanced typology in her book is necessary, she explains, to appreciate the nuances of the CA, yet a typology also remains a work in progress, as the CA has found use in a diversity of disciplines, has been used in a variety of ways, and for different goals of knowledge creation.[71] As she asserts, "The capability approach is an open approach, and depending on its purpose can be developed into a range of capability theories or capabilitarian applications…However, this still does not answer the question of what kind of framework the capability approach is."[72]

Robeyns is thus faced with the challenge of finding the commonalities across this breadth, which she presents through a modular account of the capability approach. A modular account not only makes it easy to introduce the CA to those new to it, but also

> makes clear what all [capability] theories share, yet on the other hand allows us to better understand the many forms that a capability theory or capability account can take—hence

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[67] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice,* Chapter 2, Section 2.2.

[68] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.3.

[69] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.3.

[70] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.3. In this work, I will use *capability theories* to refer to the philosophical development and use of the capability approach, and *capability applications* to refer specifically to the application of the capability approach in development issues, development projects, policy assessments, and the like, following Robeyns' own suggestion: "not all of the [specific analyses] are capability *theories*, some are capability *applications*, both empirical as well as theoretical" (Chapter 2, Section 2.4).

[71] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.4.

[72] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.5.

> to appreciate the diversity within the capability approach more fully… The modular view shifts the focus a little bit from the question of how to understand the capability approach in general, to the question of how the various capability accounts, applications and theories should be understood and how they should be constructed.[73]

1.1.1 Robeyns' modular account of the CA

For my purposes here, Robeyns' modular account is helpful because it is able to present the "non-optional core" of the approach through the A-module, while also demonstrating how and why the approach is easily applicable to such a breadth of research questions, particularised through the B- and C-modules. As Robeyns herself explains, "The modular view is an attempt at understanding the plurality of capability theories on offer in the literature, doing justice to this plurality, yet at the same time avoiding the idea that 'anything goes'."[74] In this subsection, I will summarize some of the key insights from this modular account of the CA and highlight areas of interest and contention most relevant to my thesis.

The most important of Robeyns' modules to understand, especially for those new to the capability approach, are the non-optional A- and B-modules. Both are non-optional, but unlike the A-module, which Robeyns describes as "compulsory for all capability theories" and as "the core of the capability approach," [75] the B-module are "non-optional modules *with optional content.*"[76] The content of the B-modules are determined by the objective/s, use case, and context for the particular capability theory or application. Robeyns asserts that "one *has* to be clear about one's purpose, but there are many different purposes possible."[77] I shall expound on this later; for now, I shall first pay attention to the A-modules.

1.1.2 The Non-optional A-modules

Robeyns identifies eight modules as the contents of the compulsory A-module. Taken together, these modules can be understood as the articulation of the often-quoted definition from Sen we cited above (in section 1.1), as well as the definition that Robeyns starts with (also quoted in section 1.1), unpacking key terms from these definitions. I list them in the following table.

Table 2. The Content of the Compulsory Module A[78]
A1: Functionings and capabilities are core concepts
A2: Functionings and capabilities are value-neutral categories
A3: Conversion factors

[73] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.5.

[74] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.9.

[75] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.9.

[76] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.9.*Emphasis mine.*

[77] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.9.

[78] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6, Table 2.2.

A4: The distinction between means and ends
A5: Functionings and/or capabilities form the evaluative space
A6: Other dimensions of ultimate value
A7: Value pluralism
A8: Valuing each person as an end.

The first two, A1 and A2, which concern functionings and capabilities, are directly related to *achievements and freedoms* and *beings and doings*. First, we need to establish these terms: functionings and capabilities. These are, maintains Robeyns, "the most important distinctive features of all capabilitarian theories."[79] *Capabilities*, on the one hand, are what humans are free to be and do, the real opportunities available to them (a.k.a. their *freedoms*). On the other hand, *functionings* are the human *achievements* that correspond to these capabilities. For instance, one may have the freedom (capability) to travel, and one moving overseas is an achievement (functioning) of that freedom. Robeyns emphasizes that the capabilities and functionings that concern the capability approach are those that are specifically *human*; as she writes,

> It is hard to think of any phenomenological account of the lives of humans…which does not include a description of a range of human functionings. Yet, not all beings and doings are functionings; for example, flying like a bird or living for two hundred years like an oak tree are not *human* functionings.[80]

Capabilities and functionings, as the terms are used in the CA, can thus be understood as constitutive of human life; and, like human life itself, these are value-neutral. This implies that capabilities and functionings are not exclusively of positive value. There are beings and doings that are of negative value—such as the capability for violence—that are nonetheless elements of human life that are within the purview of the capability approach; these must be discussed in any capability theory or application and cannot be ignored or passed over, regardless of the nature of the theory or application. As Severine Deneulin and Frances Stewart put it, "[Hence] we cannot escape the imperative to decide which ones we want to support and enable, and which ones we want to fight or eliminate."[81]

This leads directly to A5, which states that the evaluative space consists of capabilities, functionings, or both; any evaluative stance taken by a capability theory or application takes place in relation to capabilities and/or functionings. When one uses the CA to make comparisons or normative evaluations, these comparisons and evaluations are in terms of which sets of capabilities and/or functionings are better or worse. As Robeyns puts it, these

[79] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.1.

[80] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.1.

[81] Séverine Deneulin and Frances Stewart, "Amartya Sen's Contribution to Development Thinking," Studies in Comparative International Development vol.37 no.2 (2002):67, https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02686262. Quoted in Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.2.

valuations "can be used to compare the position of different persons or states of affairs (as in inequality analysis) or it can be used to judge one course of action as 'better' than another course of action (as in policy design)."[82]

Aside from A5, the modules A4, A6, A7, and A8 also have to do with value determinations. Module A4, which focuses on *the means-ends distinction*, articulates how in the CA one "should always be clear, when valuing something, whether we value it as an end in itself, or as a means to a valuable end."[83] This module is often at the heart of many capabilitarian theorists' critiques of other normative theories of development or justice; from a capabilitarian perspective, other theories have been too concerned with the means, to the detriment of the ends that these means were supposed to lead to. To illustrate this, let us consider how a capabilitarian theorist would critique an economic development paradigm focused on a country's Gross National and Gross Domestic Product (GNP and GDP). They would point out that it is too focused on national income, at the expense of what income is *a means for*—in this case, income is a means for human development, which can be expressed through a variety of ends, such as improving people's health outcomes, or improving people's access to basic education, and so on. However, it would be a misreading of the CA to conclude that the approach does not pay attention to means at all; rather, it emphasises the need to make clear the distinctions between valuable means and valuable ends in any given application. As Robeyns asserts, "[this] implies that the capability approach requires us to evaluate policies and other changes according to their impact on people's capabilities as well as their actual functionings; yet at the same time we need to ask whether the preconditions—the means and the enabling circumstances—for those capabilities are in place."[84]

Module A6, *the recognition of other dimensions of ultimate value*, and module A7, *value pluralism*, are directly related to the open-ended and underspecified nature of the approach, which leaves room for the individual's particularity, the variation in the "reasons to value" that people have. These modules are rather self-explanatory, as the capability approach has been, and continues to be, applied to research and development questions that involve other dimensions of value, and in a variety of socio-cultural contexts. For someone unfamiliar with the approach, however, it is important to note the implications of these two modules: 1) Not only has the CA been applied to a wide variety of research questions, it has also led many capability scholars to draw upon other dimensions of value or even other theories and approaches beyond the CA literature, as well as having capability scholars who do not share the same dimensions of ultimate value; 2) These also reflect the multidimensionality of the approach, which Robeyns highlights as well. As she explains, it does not make sense to look at functionings and capabilities in isolation, writing that "the very reason why the capability

[82] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.5.

[83] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.4.

[84] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.4.

approach has been offered as an alternative to other normative approaches is to add informational riches—to show which dimensions have been left out of other types of analysis, and why adding them matters."[85]

The final module related to valuation, module A8, is how each individual person is considered as a moral equal, which Robeyns calls both "the principle of each person as an end," drawing from Nussbaum's phrasing of the principle, and "ethical individualism or normative individualism."[86] She clarifies that "ethical individualism forces us to make sure we ask questions about *how the interests of each and every person are served and protected*,"[87] and does not preclude capabilitarian scholars from considering individual persons' social, cultural, economic contexts, and so on. Indeed, to be faithful to capabilities and functionings, one cannot avoid dealing with context; as Robeyns points out, "these are dimensions of a human being, which is an embodied being, not merely a mind or a soul."[88] The embodied reality of capabilities and functionings is directly related to the last A-module I have chosen to discuss, A3.

Module A3, the *importance of conversion factors*, concerns the preconditions and enabling circumstances for these capabilities and functionings. As Robeyns explains: "*persons have different abilities to convert resources into functionings.* These are called *conversion factors*: the factors which determine the degree to which a person can transform a resource into a functioning."[89] She notes that conversion factors have been an important area in Sen's work, and in the work of scholars influenced by him. Moreover, conversion factors refer not only to abilities to convert material resources—these may include other non-material conversion factors as well. As she writes, "In Sen's work in welfare economics, the notion of 'resources' was limited to material and/or measurable resources (in particular: money or consumer goods) but one could also apply the notion of conversion factors to a broader understanding of resources, including, for example, the educational degrees one has."[90]

A commonly used example for illustrating the concept of conversion factors is the use of a bicycle. A bicycle, as an object, is something we value not in itself, but as a means for attaining our human ends—most usually, transportation. However, people will not get the same level of functioning out of it. For example, someone who is able-bodied and has been cycling continually from a young age, would have a greater ability to use the bike for mobility (or, in

[85] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.6.

[86] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.8. Robeyns cautions the reader, however, that "ethical individualism" has often been misinterpreted as a form of atomism (ontological individualism), which the CA does not endorse, which also explains why she has also used Nussbaum's formulation of the "principle of each person as an end."

[87] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.8. *Emphasis from original.*

[88] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.8.

[89] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.3.

[90] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.3.

the vocabulary of the CA, have a higher conversion factor) than, say, someone who does not know how to ride a bicycle at all, or someone who has a physical impairment. It is therefore fair to say, following Robeyns, that conversion factors "represent how much functioning one can get out of a resource; in our example, how much mobility the person can get out of a bicycle."[91]

In the CA literature, these conversion factors are often categorized into three groups. The first, *personal conversion factors*, are factors that are literally or figuratively internal to the person, such as their physical features, intelligence, or skills. Returning to the bicycle example, one's skill at cycling is a personal conversion factor. On the other hand, *social conversion factors* are those that result from one's social context, such as social norms, formal policies, or cultural norms; in the case again of cycling, an example of this is whether it is socially acceptable for women to ride bikes.[92] Finally, *environmental conversion factors* result from the context in which one lives, one's physical and/or built environment, such as the presence of bike lanes and safe roads.[93]

Conversion factors are thus important not only for concrete capability applications, but also for capability theories as well; any capabilitarian discussion must focus not only on capabilities and functionings, but also on the conditions that make these capabilities and functionings possible. As Robeyns concludes:

> Once we start to be aware of the existence of conversion factors, it becomes clear that they are a very pervasive phenomenon… The three types [of conversion factors] all push us to acknowledge that it is not sufficient to know the resources a person owns or can use in order to be able to assess the wellbeing that he or she has achieved or could achieve; rather, we need to know much more about the person and the circumstances in which he or she is living.… The advantage of having a clear picture of the resources needed, and the particular conversion factors needed, is that it also gives those aiming to expand capability sets information on where interventions can be made.[94]

I have left discussion of this module for last for this very reason; the central importance of conversion factors to the CA makes it imperative for us pay attention to the *enabling conditions* of capabilities and functionings. As we have seen in the previous chapter, these enabling conditions are precisely the kind of elements overlooked by the reasoning used to justify policy support for small farmers' shift to HYV corn in the Philippines. Moreover, ensuring the market availability of HYV corn seeds and inputs—resources, in the sense of the CA—is not enough to ensure that farmers benefit from bigger yields and larger incomes. In the context of the Upper Pulangi watershed, social norms, patron-client relations, having farm plots on sloping land—all these factors have an impact on small farmers' abilities to convert resources

[91] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.3.

[92] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.3.

[93] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.3.

[94] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.3.

into functionings. These factors, seen through the lens of the CA, are undeniably *conversion factors,* and following Robeyns' point above, studying them as such is crucial to better understand capabilities available *and* where interventions can be made. This is a point that I shall return to again shortly in subsection 1.2 of this chapter; before this however, I will quickly discuss the B- and C-modules, to complete our overview of Robeyns' account of the CA.

1.1.3 The B-modules and C-modules

As mentioned above, according to Robeyns, the B-modules and C-modules have a variable relationship to the CA, unlike the A-modules which are all present in all capability theories and applications; but they are nonetheless broadly characteristic of the existing CA literature and are helpful to discuss here. As I go along with the discussion, I will flag or emphasize modules of particular interest to my own questions in this work that I shall return to in the succeeding sections.

The B-modules are described as "non-optional modules with optional content," and I have listed them in the table below. Robeyns says that the content of these modules will depend on the decisions and needs of the particular context or application of the approach. These considerations are ones that come up in all capability theories and applications, says Robeyns, though the content and the depth of development will vary depending on particular theories or applications. I shall proceed to discuss the B-modules individually, after which I provide a few examples from the current CA literature to illustrate them more concretely.

Table 3. The B-modules: Non-optional modules with optional content[95]
B1: The purpose of the capability theory
B2: The selection of dimensions
B3: An account of human diversity
B4: An account of agency
B5: An account of structural constraints
B6: The choice between functionings, capabilities, or both
B7: Meta-theoretical commitments

Module B1 may seem rather self-explanatory, but Robeyns notes that being explicit about the purpose of the capability theory or application is of particular importance to the CA because it addresses questions of the scope and limitations of the particular use of the CA. She observes that this need to be explicit "is stronger in the capability approach literature than in other approaches, because in comparison…it has a much more radically multidisciplinary uptake."[96] This radical multidisciplinarity is reflected in module B2 as well, as the capability

[95] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.7, Table 2.3.

[96] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.7.1.

theorist or practitioner must determine the particular capabilities most relevant to their articulated purposes. This determination cannot be haphazard nor technocratic, either; Robeyns notes that this is a "deeply normative" process.[97] Though Robeyns does not explicitly state it this way, determinations of what capabilities count (and don't count) for one's research are also reflective of the researcher's own implicit values and assumptions.

These implicit values and assumptions that the capability theorist or practitioner holds come to the fore in module B3, which states that any use of the CA has an implicit or explicit account of human diversity. Indeed, this room for human diversity is a "core motivation for developing the capability approach in the first place,"[98] as a critique of the one-dimensional accounts of human beings implicit, for instance, in utilitarian theories.[99] Robeyns clarifies however that the account of diversity one capability theorist gives need not be endorsed by another. She writes, "[whether] one is a Marxist or a libertarian or one of the many other positions one can take, once always, either implicitly or explicitly, endorses a view on human nature and on human diversity. That choice should be made in capability theories, since the capability approach rejects the use of an implicit, unacknowledged account of human diversity."[100]

Modules B6 and B7 are also highly determined by the specific use of the CA within a wide variety of fields. Module B6 concerns the evaluative space that was delineated by module A5, the space of capabilities and functionings. Robeyns says that depending on the particular use of the CA in a theory or project, one may find that they focus just on capabilities, or just on functionings, or on both capabilities and functionings. She adds, "there are good reasons why people could reasonably disagree on whether the capability analysis they are conducting should focus on functionings or capabilities or a mixture."[101] What's more important is that there is internal consistency and an articulation of these choices within the capability theory or application. Module B7, which concerns additional metatheoretical commitments, can be even more idiosyncratic in nature, determined often by the conventions internal to a particular field of study, which in turn the scholar may be unaware of themselves as not conventional outside of that field. As Robeyns observes,

> often, these meta-theoretical commitments are shared commitments within one's discipline or one's school within that discipline, and as a graduate student one has become socialised in accepting these meta-theoretical commitments as given. As a consequence,

[97] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.7.2.

[98] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.7.3.

[99] For instance, the conception of the *homo economicus*, which assumes that humans are consistently rational and driven by self-interest, which can be traced back to John Stuart Mill, "On the Definition of Political Economy and the Method of Investigation Proper to It," 1836, reprinted in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill,* Volume 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967).

[100] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.7.3.

[101] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.7.6.

it often happens that scholars are not even aware that there are such things as meta-theoretical commitments.[102]

Because of this, Robeyns opines that articulating these metatheoretical commitments and making them explicit in one's work, as with articulating the other reasons for the premises of one's work as shown in module B6, would make a difference for many debates within the CA, and between the CA and other approaches.[103]

Again, I have left for last the modules particularly important for my own work, modules B4 and B5. Module B4, which Robeyns describes variously as "the acknowledgment of human agency" and "an account of human agency," relates to an individual's capabilities and functionings (their freedoms and achievements), *more particularly* the freedom of an individual to act according to her values. Robeyn has a very minimalist explanation of this module, writing that "[a]pplications of the capability approach should endorse *some account* of agency, except if there are good reasons why agency should be taken to be absent, or why in a particular capability application agency is simply not relevant."[104] In short, any piece of research that claims to be a capability theory or application cannot ignore agency.

However, what agency means, or what it consists of, is left minimally defined by Robeyns as well. Aside from asserting that the CA is "not committed to any particular account of agency," she cites Sen's broad definition from *Development as Freedom*, which states that an agent is "someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well."[105] What I find rather striking, however, is how, in Sen's phrasing, agency seems necessarily concerned with bringing about change (whatever that change may be); to be an agent is to be an agent of change. What an individual agent does has an impact on their context, and can bring about change in their context, whether for good or for ill. This is something that I shall return to shortly, because articulated in this way, this recognition of agency is intertwined—and in tension—with the next B-module, B5.

This brings us to B5, which Robeyns describes as "the account of structural constraints: the institutions, policies, laws, social norms, and so forth, that people in different social positions face. Those differences in the structural constraints that people face can have a great influence on their conversion factors, and hence on their capability sets."[106] These are certainly context-dependent, and thus variable, depending on the temporal-social-cultural context of the capability theory and/or application. Moreover, Robeyns notes how structural constraints are not just constraints on the access to *material* resources. Rather, structural constraints have

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[102] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.7.7.

[103] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.7.7.

[104] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.7.4. *Emphasis from original.*

[105] Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Random House, 1999), 19. Quoted in Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.7.4.

[106] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice,* Chapter 2, Section 2.7.5.

an impact on capabilities *in general*, writing that "structural constraints also play a role in the shaping of people's capabilities that are not heavily dependent on material resources… [and will also affect] the capabilities that do not rely on resources directly, such as opportunities for friendships or for a healthy sense of self-confidence."[107] Indeed, we have seen this in the previous chapter, where constrained capabilities include relationships across different social statuses and the confidence to interact within structural constraints. Given this characterisation, social-structural constraints have a direct impact on individuals' agency.

Nonetheless, the characterisation of agency in B4 implies, conversely, that an agent can have an impact on structural constraints as well, through effecting change. As I mentioned above, there is a relation-in-tension, a mutual or looping relationship, between individual agency and structural constraint. I find the relationship highlighted by modules B4 and B5 particularly interesting for my own understanding of questions of justice in this project, and I will return to it in the next section (section 1.2) of this chapter, because it not only helps us better understand concrete contexts of where agency is constrained, it also provides an opportunity to understand the possibilities for interventions for changing structural constraints.

Before I develop that relationship further, however, let me quickly discuss the C-modules, and wrap up my discussion of the modular account of the CA that Robeyns presents. In Robeyns account, the following are the contingent C-modules of the CA.

Table 4. The C-modules: Contingent modules[108]
C1: Additional ontological and explanatory theories
C2: Weighing dimensions
C3: Methods for empirical analysis
C4: Additional normative principles and concerns

These modules are themselves contingent, and both their use and content would depend on the parameters of the capability theory or application at hand. As the CA is underspecified and open-ended, module C1 may be needed if it is being used, for instance, in a qualitative sociological study or in evaluating the ethical status of a development project; moreover, the additional ontological and explanatory theories need not be the same across various applications. Similarly, modules C2 and C3 would be particularly important for more empirical applications of the CA, less so for more theoretical applications. Finally, C4 is a nod to additional normative principles not included in the A-modules and B-modules that may be relevant for the particular application of the CA.

[107] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice,* Chapter 2, Section 2.7.5.

[108] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice,* Chapter 2, Section 2.8, Table 2.4.

To illustrate how these modules can be seen in the CA literature, it would help to go through a few examples. Let us begin with capabilitarian theories of justice, such as those formulated by Rutger Claasen[109] and Martha Nussbaum[110] (which I shall discuss again later in this chapter). In both cases, we have the CA used for the purpose of formulating a systematic theory of justice (module B1). Each have an account of human diversity (module B3) and human agency (module B4), though they differ in crucial details—on the one hand, Claasen makes agency a central concept in his theory of justice, whereas Nussbaum considers agency an important aspect of her concept of human dignity. Human dignity is the central concept for her theory.[111] However, in keeping with the more theoretical nature of their work, neither Claasen nor Nussbaum have an extensively developed module C3 (methods for empirical analysis).[112]

What about a less theoretical use of the CA, such as Sabina Alkire's work *Valuing Freedoms*?[113] Alkire's work is an articulation—or in her words, an "operationalization"—of the CA as applied to microeconomic assessments of poverty reduction programs.[114] Despite this 'non-theoretical' application, Alkire nonetheless is quite clear in her articulation of the purpose of her work (module B1),[115] the accounts of agency and human diversity she assumes (modules B4 and B5),[116] as well as the metatheoretical commitments (module B7) she seeks to address, particularly within the field of development economics.[117] In addition, we can see in her work significant specific C-modules developed in more depth than in the more theoretical work of Nussbaum and Claasen—the first part of her book is devoted to the development of methods of empirical analyses out of ethical principles and methods of valuing and comparing capabilities[118] (modules C2 and C3), while the second part consists of an application of these methods to one specific practical example.[119] She also explains why and how she draws from work of the legal scholar and moral theologian John Finnis to flesh out and augment her framework[120] (which I find provides a good example of modules C1 and C4 in action).

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[109] Rutger Claasen, *Capabilities in a Just Society: A Theory of Navigational Agency*, first paperback edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[110] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 18-20.

[111] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 29-31.

[112] I discuss the works of both Nussbaum and Claasen further in this chapter, in section 3.3.

[113] Sabina Alkire, *Valuing Freedoms: Sen's Capability Approach and Poverty Reduction,* Queen Elizabeth House Series in Development Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[114] Alkire, *Valuing Freedoms,* 1-3.

[115] Alkire, *Valuing Freedoms,* 1-3.

[116] Alkire, *Valuing Freedoms,* 4-11.

[117] Alkire, *Valuing Freedoms,* 14-15.

[118] Alkire, *Valuing Freedoms,* 20-21. Cf. 25-195.

[119] Alkire, *Valuing Freedoms,* 21-22. Cf. 199-296.

[120] Alkire, *Valuing Freedoms,* 15-18.

In a more recent work, which has become influential in applying the CA to educational policy research, Caroline Sarojini Hart develops both a theoretical grounding and a methodology for applying the CA to assessing the role, purposes, and effectiveness of education in cultivating human well-being, particularly, as the title itself suggests, the relationship between students' aspirations, education, and social justice.[121] I find that this work, in particular, illustrates the flexibility and applicability of the CA and the B- and C-modules that Robeyns describes: The work articulates clearly the purposes and scope of the particular capability application (in this case, the understanding and evaluation of education in relation to its effects on human well-being and on social justice), identifying particular capabilities and functionings that are the most relevant to the application, and drawing from additional normative theories and concerns (in this case, the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu) most relevant to the particular application. Hart also applies this particular capability framework to studying empirical responses from about 1000 students, developing a method for educational policy research based on both the CA and the work of Bourdieu, which she applied to two studies of students in higher education institutions in the United Kingdom.[122]

1.1.4 The usefulness of Robeyns' modular account of the CA and its limitations

Taken altogether, Robeyns' modular account of the CA tries to do two things: 1) give us a sense of the normative concerns at the heart of the capability approach—human capabilities and functionings, the freedom to act and the ability to actually achieve that freedom, while also 2) do justice to the actual diversity of its applications and uses. The modular account also helps us understand how one capability scholar need not endorse all the other positions taken by other capability scholars, but that there is nonetheless a family resemblance across their work. As Robeyns herself concludes,

> In sum, there is much *pluralism within the capability approach.* Someone who considers herself a capabilitarian or capability thinker does not need to endorse all capability theories… It is presumably coherent to be a Marxist capabilitarian, and it is presumably also coherent to be a libertarian capabilitarian, but it is not coherent to endorse the views taken by those two positions, since they are incompatible.[123]

This commitment to making the plurality-yet-commonality of the CA accessible to a wide variety of researchers is why I have chosen Robeyns' account of the CA to discuss here. It is able to astutely identify particular areas that are of central importance to the CA, that also make it distinctive from other approaches. This does not make the account flawless, however. There are some areas of contention or further questioning in Robeyns' modular account.

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[121] Caroline Sarojini Hart, *Aspirations, Education and Social Justice: Applying Sen and Bourdieu* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012).

[122] Hart, *Aspirations, Education and Social Justice,* 5-6, 65-134.

[123] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice,* Chapter 2, Section 2.11. *Emphasis from the original.*

An overview of some issues can be found in Nicolás Brando's review of the book,[124] but for my purposes I have chosen to highlight a contention raised by Christine M. Koggel. Koggel notes that one of the criticisms of the capability approach that Robeyns sought to address with this modular account is the CA's individualism which, as we have discussed above in relation to the A-modules, Robeyns takes pains to distance from atomistic views of the individual. However, according to Koggel, Robeyns takes this criticism of individualism as coming from the wrong direction. As Koggel writes,

> One problem is that Robeyns takes the critique of individualism to come mainly from communitarian philosophies. In my view, this misses the work of feminist relational theorists who are committed to ethical/normative individualism in taking the unit of ultimate moral concern to be individuals (not communities), but who can be said to take the beings and doings of individuals to be more clearly and accurately revealed when the focus is on relationships as the 'unit of moral analysis'.
>
> Using the lens of relationships can better capture (from the start) the effects of oppressive structures and of power on individuals and groups. It isn't that individuals disappear from the analysis. Rather a relational approach moves immediately to the normative and ontological implications of our being embedded in networks of relationships at all levels – of the personal, public, institutional, national and global. Feminist relational theorists thereby uncover the role of norms, structures and power to generate theories about their effects on what individuals can be and do.[125]

This critique of the limitations of 'ethical individualism' (module A8) that Robeyns claims as a core part of the CA, asserts that some capabilitarian theorists and practitioners (including Koggel herself) draw from feminist relational theory, which takes *relations* as the basic unit of moral evaluation, while still respecting the individual person, and how this seems to be overlooked in Robeyns' modular account. This overlooked area of the literature is nonetheless a valuable part of the CA, particularly in relation to the subset of CA theories and applications in development ethics.[126] Since the relations between farmers, traders, and various institutions and groups emerged as a significant factor in my fieldwork (as seen in the previous chapter), this is an important shortcoming to take note of. As I shall show in the succeeding chapters, this emphasis on the evaluation of relations, and the impact these relations have on capabilities and functionings, is an important area in my own use of the CA.

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[124] Nicolás Brando, "Shaping the Capability Approach: Robeyns' Modular View," *Global Justice: Theory, Practice, Rhetoric* 11 no.2 (2018): 92-95 https://doi.org/10.21248/gjn.11.02.215.

[125] Christine M. Koggel, Review of *Well-being, Freedom and Social Justice* by Ingrid Robeyns, *Economics and Philosophy* vol. 35 no. 3 (2019): 579, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266267119000154. See also Christine M. Koggel, Ami Harbin and Jennifer J. Llewellyn, "Feminist Relational Theory," *Journal of Global Ethics* 18 no.1: 1-14, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449626.2022.2073702.

[126] Aside from Koggel's own work, notable capabilitarian scholarship within the realm of development ethics, have been from Stacy J. Kosko, Lori Keleher, and Jay Drydyk. A good introduction is through volumes they have edited, particularly Stacy J. Kosko and Lori Keleher, eds., *Agency and Democracy in Development Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) and Jay Drydyk and Lori Keleher, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Development Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

For myself and my own work, a question that I have with Robeyns' modular account of the CA regards the relationship between the CA and the concern for the reduction of injustice. I will take this up in more depth in section 2 of this chapter, but I will briefly outline my question here. While I agree with Robeyns that we need to distinguish *the CA as an interdisciplinary approach* from *capabilitarian theories of justice* (as particular applications of the CA), I find that this overlooks a its more fundamental concern for addressing injustice. More specifically, it seems to de-emphasize how a concern for alleviating situations of injustice is central to the approach, and how the concern about inequalities in people's life outcomes, social arrangements, and poverty as more than just an issue of income as articulated in Sen's *Inequality Reexamined.*[127] It is easy for one relatively unfamiliar with the CA to read Robeyns' account and misunderstand what she means in module A5 (i.e., capabilities and functionings are the evaluative space of the approach) to mean the distribution of capabilities and functionings. It de-emphasizes as well how the concern for addressing concrete injustices is what has made the CA so attractive across disciplines in the first place. Placing individual human beings and their capabilities and functionings as the most important moral concern when we assess our social-economic arrangements is, I assert, at heart a concern for injustice.

Despite these concerns, however, Robeyns' modular account nonetheless offers a comprehensive starting point for capability scholars. As Brando notes, despite his own misgivings about some of Robeyns' claims, she nonetheless "achieves the dual purpose of ensuring unity and cohesiveness among the plural uses of the capability approach while leaving a certain plasticity and adaptability in its implementation in order to account for the variety of possible uses and applications it may have in different disciplines, and from particular political inclinations."[128]

1.2 The relationship between agency, structural constraints, and conversion factors in the CA

For my own concerns in this work, aside from the notions of capabilities and functionings themselves, the modules A4 (conversion factors), B4 (an account of agency), and B5 (an account of structural constraints) are the modules that I have found most compelling in the CA, and Robeyns succinctly captures why these elements are crucial to the CA, and how they can be employed in applications of the approach.

As I mentioned above, these three modules—conversion factors, an account of agency, and an account of structural constraints—are very relevant to situations of injustice like those in the Upper Pulangi that I discussed in the previous chapter. In this section, I delve deeper into how these three modules are relevant to my own research questions about describing and evaluating social structures that are unjust.

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[127] Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1-11.

[128] Brando, "Shaping the Capability Approach," 92.

The first point I want to highlight is how these three modules are interrelated and mutually influence each other. Conversion factors have a direct relation to agency and to structural constraints, and vice versa, regardless of what conception of agency one holds. This is easiest to see, in my opinion, if we follow Sen's own conception of agency from *Inequality Reexamined* (further developed later in his book *The Idea of Justice*[129]). This conception of agency asserts that agency is *not* a matter of the capability to pursue of one's well-being (which Sen and other capability scholars call *well-being freedom*) but rather concerns, properly speaking, the capability to pursue goals and principles that we have reason to value apart from our own well-being (which Sen has called *agency freedom*).

The most common explanatory example for this distinction (first found in *Inequality Reexamined*) is the difference between fasting and hunger. While the *functioning* (or lack thereof) is the same for both fasting and hunger (that is, no intake of food and inadequate nutrition), the *capability* is quite different. Unlike hunger, which can be understood as inadequate *well-being freedom* (for instance, an impaired capability to feed oneself), fasting is a situation of exercising *agency freedom.* Fasting is a situation in which an individual chooses to not take in food and other forms of nutrition *even if they have the capability to do so*, because of values other than/beyond their own well-being. These values could be religious, political, or cultural in their source, but regardless of the source of these values, it is the individual agent who must find these values meaningful enough to *act on the basis of these values*. Thus, we see that this notion of agency Sen articulates implies a whole range of conversion factors, social relations, and structural constraints which make up the context in which individual agents develop these values, make choices, and act. What arises from these three modules, taken together, is how the *relations* between the individual agent and their (individual, social and environmental) circumstances and context are crucial considerations within the CA. In this, I agree with Koggel's criticism of Robeyns, that *relations* are a crucial part of analysis in a capability application.

This is an insight as well that we can draw from my previous chapter on my field research: we see that analyses that focus on policy and on a macro scale, without consideration of particular contexts, of particular agents, and of the interventions available to agents in these contexts, are problematic. The problems arise because these types of analyses emphasize only one element of a particular context—for instance, only specific structures or only specific agents, taken virtually in isolation. We see this, for example, in the justification for agricultural policy—why HYV corn seeds should be allowed on the market is based exclusively on its greater yields in comparison with traditional corn seeds, without looking at the enabling structures and relationships that make these increased yields possible, or without considering the environmental factors that allowed these greater yields, and so on. In contrast, the modules that I highlight above (conversion factors, agency, and structural constraints) pay attention not

[129] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 208-221.

only to many factors, but also (and just as importantly) pay attention to what lies "in-between": the relationships and dynamics that bring together individual agents and their environment in a specific context. These relationships and dynamics, furthermore, can be reified in the form of informal and formal social structures. The CA therefore can be used to ask, in specific circumstances, the following questions: What capabilities and functionings do individual agents (not) access? What are the factors that enable or disable these agents? What is/are the source/s of these factors? Are these factors enabling or constraining? Do these factors unfairly advantage some agents over others, or deprive some agents of capabilities and functionings in comparison to others?

1.3 The capability approach vs. capability theories, revisited

Through the preceding discussion, we have seen how the CA is an approach with a broad range of applications, due to its open-ended and under-determined qualities, reflected in the modules that Robeyns articulates. Part of the reason for emphasizing this versatility and plurality in the modes of deploying the CA is to avoid simplification of the capability literature. It seems fitting here to quote Robeyns again, who reminds us: "It is a mistake to understand the capability literature as a field with two major thinkers who have each proposed one version of the capability *approach*, which have then inspired the whole work by many other scholars. Rather, there is *only one* capability approach which is a generalization of the work by Sen together with further developments by many others."[130]

For my own purposes, I draw from the CA to formulate what Robeyns would call a capabilitarian theory, particularly focused on the tension between agency and structural constraint, in relation to the situation of structural injustice that small farmers experience in the Upper Pulangi watershed of the Philippines.

Before I develop this further, however, I find that there is another question left unanswered in my own efforts to understand the capability approach: if the CA is an approach with a broad range of applications, why are there so many capabilitarian theories and applications that are concerned about justice? Or, put more simply, what is the relationship between the CA and justice?

2. The capability approach and justice

Because of Sen's early work, "Equality of What?" and *Inequality Revisited*, it is easy to read the CA as simply another version of distributive justice. Its innovation has often been understood as proposing a more appropriate "content" that ought to be distributed, as though capabilities are an alternative *distribuendum* to Rawlsian primary goods. As Robeyns explains, "Sen asked the famous…question: assuming we advocate a form of equality, what kind of good should be equalized? (…) While Sen coined the idea of capabilities in the specific discussion on

[130] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.11. *Emphasis from the original.*

equality, it soon became understood as a proposal within theories of distributive justice more generally."[131] However, she also asserts that this is a limited view of the CA.[132] I agree with this assessment, but I go further: as I argue later in this section, this is a simplification of the CA's relationship to the question of justice and injustice.

Nonetheless, reading the CA as response to the limitations of Rawlsian distributive justice is not unreasonable, as many works early in the CA literature, particularly the work of Sen and Nussbaum, were direct responses to and critiques of Rawls's ideas. As Robeyns points out, one of the central issues Sen takes up with Rawlsian distributive justice is how the notion of primary goods is unable to account for the differences between people and their abilities to make use of these goods, using the example of people with severe disabilities.[133] In his later work, Rawls tries to address the conditions of people with disabilities, but does not address Sen's broader critique.[134] This reading of the CA as a form of a distributive justice theory has also led to the question of which capabilities are most relevant for an assessment of justice. As Robeyns explains:

> Those working in a more practical line of political philosophy have argued that considerations of justice require that we demarcate morally relevant from morally irrelevant and morally bad capabilities (Nussbaum 2003; Pogge 2002; Pierik and Robeyns 2007). Put differently any capability account of justice will have to tell us which capabilities are relevant and which are not for purposes of justice.[135]

While Sen himself refuses to identify such morally relevant/irrelevant capabilities for justice, arguing that this ought to be a context-dependent and democratic process,[136] many other capabilitarian theorists have made their own proposals, two of the most prominent of whom have been Nussbaum and Elizabeth Anderson, who in turn exemplify two different approaches to addressing this question. Anderson approaches the question by identifying the *criteria for* identifying the relevant capabilities for justice, not by naming the capabilities themselves. She asserts that the capabilities most relevant to justice ought to meet the following criteria: these capabilities ought to be "necessary to enable [people] to avoid or escape entanglement in oppressive social relationships," and "necessary for functioning as an equal citizen on a democratic state."[137] In contrast, Nussbaum provides us with an objective

[131] Robeyns, "The Capability Approach," 109.

[132] Robeyns, "The Capability Approach," 109-110.

[133] Robeyns, "The Capability Approach," 115-116.

[134] John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). Cited in Robeyns, "The Capability Approach," 115-116.

[135] Robeyns, "The Capability Approach," 120.

[136] Robeyns, "The Capability Approach," 120. See also Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 241-243.

[137] Elizabeth Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 109 no.2 (1999), 316. Also quoted in Robeyns, "The Capability Approach," 120.

list[138] of capabilities relevant to justice. Nussbaum's list is well-known and presented across different works, identifying what she calls the ten "central human capabilities."[139]

Robeyns asserts however that neither of these amount to a complete capabilitarian theory of justice. The capabilitarian critique of Rawls provides an alternative metric of justice to Rawlsian fairness, and Anderson and Nussbaum tell us how to identify capabilities most relevant to justice. However, these are still not complete proposals for social justice, that is, prescribing the values and principles underpinning justice, defining the modes of just social organization, and so on. Not even Nussbaum meets the complete criteria for such a complete proposal: as Robeyns writes, "Nussbaum (2000, 2006, 2011) offers us a capability theory of justice, but her theory too doesn't amount to a full theory of social justice."[140] Robeyns outlines what else is required to come up with such a complete capabilitarian theory of justice in her estimation, and how it's perfectly reasonable to come up with different capabilitarian theories of justice following her modular articulation of the CA.[141]

However, I propose another angle altogether from which to understand the relationship of the CA to justice. Rather than understanding the question "equality of what?" as concerned with equal distribution, I propose interpreting it as a concern for addressing *injustice*—understood in an egalitarian context as *inequality*—in *all* its varied forms. The capabilitarian critique of Rawlsian distributive justice theories (and of utilitarian theories of justice as well) are not so much concerned with the proper *distribuendum*, i.e., what ought to be distributed, but even more fundamentally, is *a critique of the premises of justice theory*. What do I mean by this?

Theories of justice, especially in western philosophy, have generally started with defining the idea of justice, its conditions, and how to bring it about in the world. Injustice, if it is ever directly addressed, is often simply described as the absence of justice. The tradition of western political philosophy has treated the topic of injustice in what metaphysicians would call the *via negativa*: that is, defining something by focusing our attention on what it is not. If the concern is bringing about justice in the world, it seems commonsensical to first of all define justice as a goal, and to conclude that working towards that goal eventually leads to the eradication of injustice. Most mainstream contemporary theories of justice are like this, as well.

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[138] Robeyns uses the term "objective-list" following Derek Parfit's definition of "objective list theories" of justice. See Robeyns, "The Capability Approach," 120.

[139] The list most cited can be found in Martha Nussbaum, "Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements: Sen and Social Justice," *Feminist Economics* 9 no.2-3 (2003): 41-42 https://doi.org/10.1080/1354570022000077926. However, Nussbaum has further developed and refined this list in other works. See Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) and *Creating Capabilities*.

[140] Robeyns, "The Capability Approach," 124.

[141] Robeyns, "The Capability Approach," 124-126. See also Robeyns, *Well-being, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 3, Section 3.13.

Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, arguably the most influential theory of justice to emerge in the late 20th century, is almost exclusively focused on conceptualizing the nature of justice as fairness. Based on this definition, the theory focuses on how we can form procedures and policies that ensure fairness—particularly the fair distribution of primary goods—within states and between its citizens. What of injustice? Rawls's position basically treats injustice as the absence of justice, eventually remedied by the consistent application of just basic structures, policies and laws.[142] Underlying this theory is an assumption about the natures of justice and injustice: that injustice comes about because of the unfair distribution of basic resources in a society, and thus a fair distribution will remedy the situation.

In contrast, what does the capability approach direct our attention to? As we have seen in the preceding discussion of Robeyns' modular articulation of the CA, it directs us, first and foremost, to the real conditions of inequality and injustice on the ground. It gives us the vocabulary and the framework to understand the plural causes of these inequalities, allowing us to broaden our view of the concrete circumstances and their dynamism. Instead of narrowly focusing on a particular ideal of justice that we ought to attain, based on assumptions about concrete circumstances that may or may not be correct, the capability approach gives us ways to articulate, identify, and define the varied forms *injustice* takes in the world. It directs our moral concern towards individual human beings and pays attention to the inequalities in their real capabilities and functionings. From observing inequalities in capabilities and functionings, we can conclude that *injustice is not merely the absence of justice; rather, it is something that has varied forms and contents, and impinges on our diverse lived realities.* Giving injustice a positive definition and content is an assertion of primacy and priority, an assertion that anyone interested in social justice must *first* concern herself with understanding how social injustice is manifested. Real people's lives take primacy over the formulation of a definition of justice and of a systematic and comprehensive theory of justice, if such a theory is even possible.[143]

While the project of developing capabilitarian theories of justice (which I shall discuss further in the succeeding section) is, as Robeyns points out, a valid field within the broader CA literature, I am proposing here an alternative articulation of the CA's relationship to questions of injustice. Robeyns has asserted in her modular account of the CA that her account seeks to preserve the open-endedness, under-specification, and commitment of value pluralism at the heart of the CA. By emphasizing a better understanding of inequalities in capabilities and functionings, and of the factors that influence the inequalities, the CA offers us not a *theory of justice*, but rather an *approach to* justice, in view of reducing injustice, without proscribing a particular set of values or criteria of justice, or an over-specified set of goals. The word "approach" here can be understood in two senses: firstly, in the methodological sense that

[142] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, original edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 7-11.

[143] I discuss the primacy of real people's lives in the next section, and in more depth in Chapter 5, section 2 of this work.

Robeyns has been using in her own work, as a way of doing research; but also secondly, in the sense of *drawing nearer to justice.* I shall argue in the next section that this is an understanding of the CA's relationship to justice (and injustice) that resonates with Sen's later work, *The Idea of Justice,* and one that can be used in contexts such as those I described in my first chapter, and as an alternative to capabilitarian *theories of justice* that are more liberal in their character.

3. Sen's realization-focused capabilitarian approach to justice

Sen begins *The Idea of Justice* by contrasting his approach to justice, which he describes as a "realization-focused comparative approach," against what he describes as "transcendental institutionalist" approaches to justice, exemplified by Rawls's take on the contractarian tradition.[144] But what is most striking, I find, is his explanation for *why* he begins with this contrast. Sen points out that many people have been compelled to address injustice, not because of some grand ideal of justice, but in order to remedy the injustices that they saw in the world. In the preface, Sen writes,

> What moves us…is not the realization that the world falls short of being completely just—which few of us expect—but that there are clearly remediable injustices around us which we want to eliminate. (…) It is fair to assume that Parisians would not have stormed the Bastille, Gandhi would not have challenged the empire on which the sun used not to set, Martin Luther King would not have fought white supremacy in 'the land of the free and the home of the brave', without their sense of manifest injustices that could be overcome. They were not trying to achieve a perfectly just world (even if there were any agreement on what that would be like), but they did want to remove clear injustices to the extent they could.[145]

Though there has been a long tradition, dating back to the Enlightenment, of theorizing justice that begins with a grand ideal—the aforementioned transcendental institutionalist approach to justice—Sen asserts that there has been an equally long tradition, though perhaps less popular, of acting on justice in a comparative approach, focusing on social realizations.[146] The former is focused on formulating perfect justice, and thus is primarily interested inthe ideation of social institutions that would bring about such a state of justice.[147] In contrast, the latter is focused on "relative comparisons of justice and injustice,"[148] and is primarily interested in "the removal of manifest injustice from the world that they saw."[149] Citing Adam Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft and Karl Marx (among others) as examples of this approach to justice, Sen asserts that "Even though these authors…proposed quite distinct ways of making social

[144] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 5-18 and 69-70.

[145] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, vii.

[146] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 5-7.

[147] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 5.

[148] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 6.

[149] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 7.

comparisons, it can be said…that *they were all involved in comparisons of societies* that already existed or could feasibly emerge, rather than…transcendental searches for a perfectly just society."[150]

In his estimation, contemporary theories of justice are predominantly transcendental institutionalist approaches to justice, exemplified by the work of Rawls and its continued influence.[151] Sen positions his approach to justice as a version of the comparative approach, against Rawls and what Sen considers Rawls's excessive focus on developing ideal institutions and systems of social organization.[152] Instead of focusing effort on theorizing a perfectly just social arrangement—which we are not even sure is possible—Sen wants to direct our efforts to understanding the real lives that people lead—thus the value and importance of studying people's capabilities and functionings. As he asserts:

> The need for an accomplishment-based understanding of justice is linked with the argument that justice cannot be indifferent to the lives that people can actuality live. The importance of human lives, experiences and realizations cannot be supplanted by information about institutions that exist and the rules that operate. Institutions and rules are, of course, very important in influencing what happens, and the are part and parcel of the actual world as well, but the realized actuality goes well beyond the organizational picture, and includes the lives that people manage—or do not manage—to live.[153]

3.1 Is Sen's approach to justice a nonideal theory?

These preceding assertions from Sen support my claim that the CA can be understood as an *alternative approach* to justice. In Sen's account, he views his approach as an alternative to the tradition of transcendental-institutional theories of justice, differing in their fundamental starting point. In contrast to transcendental-institutional theories that begin with formulating ideals "from above" which are applied to reality later, Sen's realization-focused, comparative approach to justice could be described as starting "from below" or "from the ground." This contrast against ideal theories of justice that Sen makes has predominantly been interpreted as Sen's approach to justice being a kind of "nonideal theory" of justice.[154] In this section, I want to briefly address this dominant interpretation. I disagree with this interpretation because the distinction between ideal and nonideal theory is itself rooted in the tradition of transcendental-institutionalist approaches to justice.

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[150] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 7. *Emphasis mine.*

[151] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 7-8.

[152] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 12-15 and 18.

[153] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 18.

[154] See for instance Christopher Thompson, "Ideal and Nonideal Theory in Political Philosophy," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (2020) https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1383. Robeyns also seems to agree with this interpretation in "Are Transcendental Theories of Justice Redundant?" *Journal of Economic Methodology* 19 no.2 (2012): 159-163, https://doi.org/10.1080/1350178X.2012.683587.

We can trace the use of the terms "ideal theory" and "non-ideal theory" to Rawls himself; he uses these terms to describe what he calls the two parts of justice theory. In the original edition of *A Theory of Justice,* he writes:

> The intuitive idea is to split the theory of justice into two parts. The first or ideal part assumes strict compliance and works out the principles that characterize a well-ordered society under favorable circumstances. It develops the conception of a perfectly just basic structure and the corresponding duties and obligations of persons under the fixed the fixed constraints of human life… Nonideal theory, the second part, is worked out after an ideal conception of justice has been chosen; only then do the parties ask which principles to adopt under less happy conditions… One consists of the principles for governing adjustments to natural limitations and historical contingencies, and the other of principles for meeting injustice.[155]

From Rawls's text, we can see that ideal and nonideal theory are two parts or stages of one larger process of justice theory. Rawls himself says that his own concern as a theorist is ideal theory; the work of nonideal theory is what comes after, only after the completion of ideal theory. Nonideal theory is thus tasked with the work of application, of applying the ideas from ideal theory in the imperfect world, or to use his words, how to meet injustice. Given this Rawlsian characterization, some commentators have interpreted Sen's position as a form of nonideal theory.[156]

However, I assert that characterizing Sen's approach as a nonideal theory of justice—whether or not it is an improvement of Rawls's concept of nonideal theory—subsumes it into the very approach to justice that he seeks to distance his work from.[157] This interpretation of Sen's work loses sight of the real shift in the kind of questions the CA asks in the face of social justice issues—a shift that is easily lost to the philosophical reader if they do not see the breadth of the applications of the capability approach. Following Robeyns's method in her book, if we use Sen simply as a starting point and example, and extrapolate from the existing capability literature, we find that *the kinds of justice questions* that are asked are, despite some overlap, rather more different and diverse from those in transcendental-institutional theories of justice. In the CA literature, philosophers like Nussbaum and Claasen,[158] whose works ask transcendental-institutional questions such as "what does a just human society consist of?" stand beside and are outnumbered by philosophers working on addressing educational

[155] Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 245-246.

[156] See for example Kristina Meshelski, "Amartya Sen's Nonideal Theory, *Ethics and Global Politics* 12 no.2 (2019): 31-45 https://doi.org/10.1080/16544951.2019.1622398 and David Schmidzt, "Nonideal Theory: What It Is and What It Needs to Be," *Ethics* 121 no.4 (July 2011): 772-796 https://doi.org/10.1086/660816.

[157] Sen is not alone in distancing himself from the transcendental approach to justice, and especially the Rawlsian notion of ideal/non-ideal theory. Philosophers like Onora O'Neill (1987, 1993) and Charles W. Mills (2009) share in finding this mode of doing theory problematic, to say the least.

[158] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities.* Claasen, *Capabilities in a Just Society.*

inequalities,[159] epistemic injustice among marginalized groups,[160] sustainability and indigenous philosophy,[161] the ethics of development,[162] and exploring the frontiers of justice in the contemporary world.[163] These latter philosophers, by and large, are not asking questions of transcendental-institutional justice; rather they are asking questions of *public philosophy.*

3.2 The capability approach to justice as a critical public philosophy

My use here of the term public philosophy is drawn from the work of political philosopher James Tully, particularly from his work "Public Philosophy as a Critical Activity," where he writes, "Public philosophy as a critical activity starts from the present struggles and problems of politics and seeks to clarify and transform the normal understanding of them so as to open up the field of possible ways of thinking and acting freely in response."[164]

Tully says that what he calls public philosophy is one possible way of doing political philosophy, and his objective in this work is to articulate how and why this way of doing political philosophy is distinctive from others. He identifies four central characteristics of this manner of political philosophy, namely: 1) how it *begins from* and *grants primacy* to current practices of governance and how these are experienced as oppressive by the people within these practices;[165] 2) how it is both *interpretative* and *critical*, aimed towards not only providing a thick, ethnographic description of these experiences of practice and oppression in order to clarify the nature of the problem/s people face, but also to help reframe these in a manner that "transforms the self-understanding of those subject to and struggling within it, enabling them to see its contingent conditions and the possibilities of governing themselves differently;"[166] 3) how it makes use of critical and historical surveys to understand how present practices emerged, to have a *point of comparison* in order to "open [the present limits] to a dialogue of comparative evaluation, and thus to develop the perspectival ability to consider

[159] Hart, *Aspirations, Education and Social Justice.*

[160] Su Ming Khoo and Aisling Walsh, "Regenerating Education from Below—Endogenous Tertiary Education in Alternative Development Niches," *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review* Issue 22 (Spring 2016): 10-34. https://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue/issue-22/regenerating-education-below-endogenous-tertiary-education-alternative-development accessed 6 Sept 2022.

[161] Krushil Watene, "Valuing Nature: Māori Philosophy and the Capability Approach," *Oxford Development Studies* 44 no.3: 287-296 https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2015.1124077.

[162] David A. Crocker, *Ethics of Global Development: Agency, Capability, and Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); David Alexander Clark et al., *The Capability Approach, Empowerment and Participation: Concepts, Methods and Applications* (London: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2019) https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-35230-9; Kosko and Keleher, *Agency and Democracy in Development Ethics*.

[163] Krushil Watene and Jay Drydyk, eds., *Theorizing Justice: Critical Insights and Future Directions* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

[164] James Tully, "Public Philosophy as a Critical Activity," *Public Philosophy in a New Key Volume I: Democracy and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 37.

[165] Tully, "Public Philosophy," 16.

[166] Tully, "Public Philosophy," 16.

different possible ways;"[167] and 4) how it seeks to establish "an on-going mutual relation with the concrete struggles, negotiations and implementations of citizens who experiment with modifying the practices of governance on the ground….It is *an interlocutory intervention on the side of the oppressed*."[168]

These four characteristics Tully names have a great deal of similarity to some of the modules Robeyns articulates as crucial to the CA (particularly the modules focused on real capabilities and functionings, the conversion factors that influence these capabilities, and the social-structural context of these capabilities and functionings), as well as to Sen's description of his realization-focused comparative approach to justice, the primacy it places on beginning from the real inequalities and injustices that people experience, its use of social comparison, and how the purpose of the comparison is ultimately the reduction or elimination of these injustices.

Further affirming the congruence between Tully's concept of public philosophy and the capabilitarian approach to justice that Sen articulates is Tully's account of the historical origins of this way of doing political philosophy, particularly in the Enlightenment thinkers who focused their attention on critical analyses of the political practices in their own contexts. There are names that Tully cites that are, undoubtedly, those that Sen identifies as exemplars of the realization-focused, comparative approach to justice: As Tully writes:

> Although this type of public philosophy can be interpreted as a tradition which goes back to the Greeks and up through Renaissance humanism and Reformation critical philosophy, I am primarily concerned with its three recent phases: the practice-based political philosophy of the Enlightenment (Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, Hegel, Marx and Mill); the criticisms and reforms of this body of work by Nietzsche, Weber, Heidegger, Gadamer, Arendt, Dewey, Collingwood, Horkheimer and Adorno; and thirdly, the reworking of this tradition again in the light of new problems by scholars over the last twenty years.[169]

These numerous similarities lend credence to my assertion that the realization-focused, comparative approach, as an approach to questions of inequality and injustice, is not a form on nonideal theory. Rather, its affinities lie with a less idealist and more critical tradition in political philosophy, which Tully calls public philosophy. I shall return to this affinity with critical theory in my succeeding chapters, particularly in chapters 3 and 4. Moreover, this also clarifies why the realization-focused, comparative approach to justice is the form of the capability approach most relevant to situations of injustice like those I described in the first chapter of this work. A focus on people's real capabilities and functionings, and the constraints on these that arise from their social relationships, enable us to not only better understand the very real implications on people's agency (or lack thereof), but also explore how these injustices can be reduced or remedied.

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[167] Tully, "Public Philosophy," 17.

[168] Tully, "Public Philosophy," 17. *Emphasis mine.*

[169] Tully, "Public Philosophy," 17-18.

3.3 Other varieties of capabilitarian justice theories

This is not to say however that the realization-focused comparative approach to justice is the only way capabilitarian scholars have articulated the CA's relationship to justice. Indeed, as Robeyns has said, it is possible for a liberal capabilitarian theory of justice to exist, as long as it is clear about its assumptions about human agency and human diversity, and that it will most likely not hold the same assumptions about human agency as a non-liberal capabilitarian theory of justice. I have deliberately passed over these capabilitarian theories of justice—particularly those of Nussbaum and Claasen—and in this section I will discuss why I have chosen not to draw from their work.

Martha Nussbaum's capabilitarian theory of justice is probably the best-known of the capabilitarian justice theories and has been articulated across many of her works. It is most famous for the list of fundamental or central human capabilities, mentioned in the previous section (section 2). What are these central human capabilities and how do they fit into a broader capabilitarian theory of justice?

Nussbaum adopts the vocabulary of human rights and incorporates it with the capabilitarian emphasis on capabilities and functionings. The starting point of her theory of justice is the inherent dignity of every human being, which she develops from Aristotelian and Marxian concepts.[170] As she explains, "The core idea is that of the human being as a dignified free being who shapes his or her own life in cooperation and reciprocity with others, rather than being passively shaped or pushed around by the world in the manner of a 'flock' or 'herd' animal. A life that is really human is one that is shaped throughout by these human powers."[171]

Based on this inherent dignity, a just social order ought to meet the basic requirements that enable all human beings to live their lives in this way. As Nussbaum writes, "Considering the various areas of human life in which people move and act, this approach to social justice asks, What does a life worthy of human dignity require? At bare minimum, an ample threshold level of ten Central Capabilities is required."[172] These ten central human capabilities are, as follows: 1) life; 2) bodily health; 3) bodily integrity; 4) senses, imagination, and thought; 5) emotions; 6) practical reason; 7) affiliation; 8) other species; 9) play; and 10) control over one's environment (both political and material).[173] For Nussbaum, it is also clear that her capabilitarian theory of justice is a liberal one. In her account, political liberalism is what will allow her theory to remain value neutral in the face of the plurality of different ways of life. As she explains,

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[170] Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 70-72. See also Nussbaum, "Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements," 40-42 and *Creating Capabilities,* 33-34.

[171] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 72.

[172] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 32.

[173] Nussbaum, "Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements," 41-42. See also Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 33-34.

> Compared with many familiar theories of welfare, my approach also subtracts: my capability-based theory of justice refrains from offering a comprehensive assessment of the quality of life in a society, even for comparative purposes, because the role of *political liberalism* in my theory requires me to prescind from offering any comprehensive account of value.[174]

One final point that I want to highlight from Nussbaum's theory is the role of the central human capabilities in relation to systems of government. In her theory of justice—akin to Rawls—it is the task of government to ensure that the minimal conditions for the central human capabilities are met. As she writes, "Given a widely shared understanding of the task of government (namely, that government has the job of making people able to pursue a dignified and minimally flourishing life), it follows that a decent political order must secure to all citizens at least a threshold level of these ten Central Capabilities."[175]

I chose to highlight these three specific aspects of Nussbaum's capability theory of justice—its political liberalism, the ten central human capabilities, and the crucial role governments play in ensuring the threshold level of these capabilities—because they best illustrate how and why Nussbaum's capabilitarian theory of justice is not the best fit for my questions in this project. My questions in this project are less about what ought to be the minimum threshold for justice and how institutions like governments ought to ensure these minimums, but rather are more questions of understanding a concrete and specific situation of injustice and its conditions, in view of reducing the experienced injustice—questions that better fit the comparative, realization-focused approach to justice, the critical public philosophy, that Sen articulates. Nussbaum's approach better fits the transcendental-institutional approach to justice that Sen contrasts himself against. Moreover, Nussbaum's explicit intention of working towards justice through governments and their formal institutions makes it difficult (though not impossible) to address injustices that do not violate any institutions of government, like the injustices experienced by the small farmers in the Upper Pulangi. In their context, none of the other agents involved in the system of HYV corn farming in the area—whether traders or agro-chemical companies—are in violation of any laws or state policies. An approach with a focus on how formal institutions of government can meet the minimum threshold for ten central capabilities can be helpful for high-level policy making, but less so for grounded, specific, and community-level development questions.

A more recent capabilitarian theory of justice has been proposed by the philosopher Rutger Claasen, with a particular focus on agency. He positions his theory as an alternative to both the approach taken by Sen and the theory Nussbaum proposes. He writes:

> Most…choose either a Nussbaum-style substantive, objectivist-list theory of well-being or a Sen-style proceduralist reliance on the democratic process. This dichotomy reinforces the impression that one either has to go for a substantive (but largely perfectionist) theory or a procedural (but largely empty) theory. I believe this is a false dilemma. My theoretical

[174] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 19. *Emphasis from original.*

[175] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities,* 32-33.

> inclination is to agree both with those who object that proceduralist theories miss the normative substance necessary for a full capability theory of justice and also with those who object that Nussbaum's capability theory is too perfectionist. The solution, as I see it, is to go for a substantive but thinner capability theory, based on a liberal conception of free and autonomous agency.[176]

As he states above, at the core of his theory is a conception of *navigational agency.* By this term, he means to refer to "the ability to move freely between social practices."[177] Claasen incorporates the communitarian critique of liberalism, acknowledging that agency is necessary embedded in a specific social context and playing social roles (what he calls *participational agency*), while still asserting that individuals still nonetheless have the freedom to choose how to play these roles or to reject their role for another one, that "in a just society, this is what individuals are genuinely able to do."[178] On the basis of this concept of agency, Claasen then argues for a metric of justice, a specification of the distributive principle,[179] and then enumerates the basic categories of capabilities required for navigational agency, which are empowerment capabilities (capabilities related to civil liberties), subsistence capabilities (capabilities related to socio-economic justice), and political capabilities (capabilities related to democracy).[180]

Claasen's capabilitarian theory of justice, in my opinion, touches on many aspects of injustice that seem relevant to my project, particularly in how it explicitly acknowledges the role that social practices play in relation to individual agency. He indeed proposes a theory that is much less perfectionist than Nussbaum's and highlights the important role of democratic agency that seems to be lost, or at least de-emphasized, in Nussbaum's theory. However, this does not change how his work is firmly a transcendental-institutional approach to justice; Claasen himself notes that he has "had to leave out of consideration several potentially important dialogues with other approaches,"[181] adding that "Political realists, (radical) democratic theorists and some critical theorists and post-structuralists will probably (no, certainly) feel the theory remains too close to the kind of mainstream liberal theorizing they look upon with suspicion."[182] I am inclined to agree with his assessment, at least for the purposes of my present project and its rather obvious realist, comparative, and critical point of departure. Despite his efforts to move away from Nussbaum's theory, Claasen's work remains nonetheless too close to transcendental institutionalist justice theories; this

[176] Claasen, *Capabilities in a Just Society,* 5.

[177] Claasen, *Capabilities in a Just Society,* 6.

[178] Claasen, *Capabilities in a Just Society,* 6.

[179] Claasen, *Capabilities in a Just Society,* 8.

[180] Claasen, *Capabilities in a Just Society,* 135-163, 164-191, 192-217.

[181] Claasen, *Capabilities in a Just Society,* 13.

[182] Claasen, *Capabilities in a Just Society,* 13-14.

transcendental-institutional inclination render their work rather inflexible for the purposes of this project.

4. Moving beyond Sen: towards a critical, capabilitarian account of the interplay between agency, conversion factors, and social relations and practices, in view of reducing injustice

In this chapter, we have gained a better understanding of the capability approach, its varied applications, and the key features and elements shared by these varied applications which Robeyns has described as the A- and B- modules. We have also examined the relationship between the capability approach and questions of social justice. From this discussion, I have narrowed my focus to the key modules of the CA that concern agency, conversion factors, and social relations/practices because of their relevance to the questions raised in the context of HYV corn farming in the Upper Pulangi.

We have also seen how the CA can be applied not only as a transcendental theory of justice, as it has been developed by philosophers like Nussbaum and Claasen, but as a way of doing critical theory or public philosophy, if we build on what Sen calls the "realization-focused, comparative approach to justice."

In the succeeding chapter, I will examine articulations and descriptions of agency, inter-agent relationships, and their interaction with social relations within the capability approach and highlight the particular area/s of this interaction that is/are unjust. We will see through the work of Sen, Drèze, Alkire, and Drydyk that *structural injustice* seems to be an important, though undertheorized, conception in the realization-focused, comparative approach to justice.

Chapter 3
The Relations Between Agency and Structure in the Capability Approach: Towards Structural Injustice

In the previous chapter, I presented an account of the capability approach (hereafter shortened to CA) drawing from the work of Ingrid Robeyns, as well as exploring the relationship that the CA has to questions of justice/injustice. From Robeyns' modular account of the CA, one sees the central importance of individual agents' capabilities and functionings to the CA: capabilities are not so much an alternative distribuendum for distributive justice, but rather an alternative paradigm of human development, in contrast to predominantly economistic and welfarist paradigms of development. This has contributed to its broad appeal as an interdisciplinary approach to research across various fields, from philosophy, to development economics, to educational policy, and many fields in between related to human well-being.

Of its varied applications, one possible application of the CA, I argue, is its use in analyses of specific situations and contexts of injustice, as a kind of critical public philosophy. Such an analysis pursues the following line of inquiry: What capabilities do agents have or not have? What are the factors that enable or disable these agents? What are the sources of these factors? Do these factors unfairly advantage some agents over others, or deprive some agents of capabilities and functionings while enhancing the capabilities and functionings of others? How can we change this state of affairs, alter the factors to reduce or eliminate disadvantage?

Following this line of questioning requires us to focus, not on individual agents alone, or solely on state institutions. Rather, it requires us to focus on individual agents, their relationships with each other (also called 'inter-agent' or interpersonal relationships), and their broader context—that is the background of social relations and structures, or what I have also described as 'the in-between'. More particularly, if one examines closely the relationship between the modules of agency, structural constraints, and conversion factors that Robeyns identifies—these three modules, taken together, demonstrate how the relations between the individual agents and their individual, social, and environmental circumstances/context are crucial to a capabilitarian analysis. I appropriate here the words that Christine Koggel et al. used to describe feminist relational theory to describe my own capabilitarian interest in this line of argument:

> we are interested in *networks and structures of relationships*, as creating the context for the dynamics of smaller scale interpersonal relationships… Another way to put this is that interpersonal relationships provide part of, but not the whole picture. Interpersonal relationships are nested in broader social, economic, and political relationships, ones that shape personhood and possibilities for autonomy.[183]

This chapter will thus focus on examining what the existing capability approach literature has already articulated about agency, the effect/s interpersonal networks and social relations have on agency, capabilities and functionings, and broader still, the interplay of agency, social

[183] Koggel et al., "Introduction: Feminist Relational Theory," 4. *Italics from original text.*

relations, and situations of injustice. Focusing particularly on the work of Amartya Sen, Sabina Alkire, and Jay Drydyk, I seek to highlight the role of the "in-between," the informal and formal relationships between agents, their relations in turn to informal and formal social structures, and how these relationships enable or disable agency. This is, in turn, in view of developing an approach to analyzing existing injustices, with the objective of possibly reducing or eliminating these injustices.

1. Sen on agency and relationships

In the previous chapter, I noted that the qualitative distinction Sen makes between *well-being freedom* and *agency freedom* is crucial to understanding his application of the capability approach. Sen's understanding of the concept of agency is rooted in this distinction. Understanding this is even more crucial in view of developing a capabilitarian approach to analyzing the relationships between agency, conversion factors, and structural constraints. Let us first revisit the distinction as discussed previously.

1.1 Well-being freedom vs. Agency freedom

Well-being freedom refers to a person's capabilities for pursuing and attaining their well-being, while agency freedom refers to one's freedom to live one's life according to her 'reasons to value.' This phrase, 'reasons to value' (though contentious within the capability approach as a whole)[184] is a kind of shorthand for Sen, referring to considerations of value and of moral reasoning. Thus, there is a difference between starvation (i.e. the absence of the well-being freedom of physical sustenance) and fasting (i.e. the freedom to refuse well-being from sustenance, as a means of making a statement of moral or political commitment).[185] Well-being can thus be subsumed into agency freedom, insofar as one may value their well-being; but it is also equally possible that one may have reasons to value something other, over and above their well-being. It is important to understand that both, taken together, give us a fuller qualitative picture of the freedoms available to a human individual, but are nonetheless distinct despite their overlaps.

This distinction runs as a through-line in much of Sen's work. The distinction comes up, for instance, in *Development as Freedom*, notably in the chapter "Women's Agency and Social Change." In that chapter, Sen highlights the tensions and problems that arise when there are projects or programs intended to improve women's socio-economic well-being, but these efforts treat women as 'patients' to be helped, forgetting or overlooking women's agency. As Sen writes:

> To see individuals as entities that experience and have well-being is an important recognition, but to stop there would amount to a very restricted view of the personhood of women. Understanding the agency role is thus central to recognizing people as

[184] See Robeyns, *Well-being, Freedom and Social Justice*, Chapter 2, Section 2.6.2.

[185] See Sen, "Inequality Reexamined," 52 and 111-112 and *Idea of Justice*, 237.

> responsible persons: not only are we well or ill, but also we act or refuse to act, and can choose to act in one way or another. And thus we—women *and* men—must take responsibility for doing things or not doing them. This elementary acknowledgment, though simple enough in principle, can be exacting in its implications, both for social analysis and for practical reason and action.[186]

Sen asserts in this passage that the role of agency is particularly crucial *both* for social analysis and for practical reason and action, and he briefly outlines the relationship between them as follows—relationships that, he is quick to clarify, are far more complex and 'exacting' in reality than as conceptualized: Within the CA, human freedom cannot be understood as ending at the level of well-being; freedom also includes agency, the choices we make as responsible persons (the process of practical reason), and the impact that these choices have on others (social analysis). While these two things—the process of practical reason and social analysis—are closely intertwined for Sen, I will begin by discussing them separately, just for the practical purposes of my work.

1.2 Agency freedom and practical reason

I shall begin with what Sen means when he talks about "practical reason." In its simplest sense, he uses the term to refer to how we reason about our actions, their effects, and our obligations in our day-to-day lives; that is, the forms or modes of ethical reasoning people employ. Sen recognizes that there is a plurality in these forms or modes of reasoning, contrasting his position with economic and political theories that assume a kind of uniformity or unity of moral reasoning among people.[187] Additionally, he asserts that the capability approach as he formulates it makes use of a particular mode of ethical/practical reason, while still recognizing that it is not the *only* form of practical reason. This is the mode of reasoning he describes in both *The Idea of Justice* and in an earlier article, "Consequential Evaluation and Practical Reason." In these works, Sen claims that the form of ethical reasoning employed in a "realization-focused comparative approach to justice" is a variation of consequentialist ethics, which I shall call, for my purposes, responsibility-for-choice-oriented consequentialism.

In both the article and *The Idea of Justice*, Sen uses a story about Arjuna from the epic *Mahabharata* to illustrate what he means by a responsibility-for-choice-oriented consequentialism. Sen focuses on the conversation that Arjuna has with the god Krishna, in which Arjuna wrestles with his conscience: on the one hand, he knows and believes that the war he is waging morally righteous; it aligns with his principles so strongly that it is a moral obligation to wage the war. On the other hand, he is also grappling with the realization that waging this war will lead him to have blood on his hands and destroy his relationships; that he

[186] Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 190. *Emphasis from original.*

[187] Sen criticises particularly the assumptions of social contract theory (which assumes that people form social contracts out of a sense of mutual benefit) and of welfarist theories (which assume that all people are in pursuit of well-being/happiness as their sole reason for living). See Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 52-74; 272-286.

will have to kill numerous people in order to win this war—not just strangers, but also people with whom he is intimately linked: relatives, friends, former comrades in arms.

Sen tells us that traditional interpretations of the *Mahabharata* hold Krishna as the model of deontological ethics.[188] Krishna convinces Arjuna to stay the course, to remain faithful to his principles and to wage this just war, despite his consequentialist misgivings—i.e., his guilt feelings about the blood he needs to shed to uphold his principles. By convincing Arjuna to pursue warfare, Krishna won this "debate" between deontology and consequentialism. However, Sen invites us to consider this scene less as a debate but more of a conversation that illustrates how different forms of ethical reasoning can and do exist together, as in the person of Arjuna, and as well in our real-life moral dilemmas.[189]

In this scene, Arjuna is grappling with not only the high toll that war exacts, but also and more importantly, his own personal sense of responsibility for his choice to go to war and the far-reaching effects of this choice. In "Consequential Evaluation and Practical Reason," Sen uses this sense of personal responsibility for the consequences of one's choices as a starting point for describing his alternative vision of consequentialism, in order to differentiate it from the more familiar and ubiquitous form of utilitarian consequentialism.

As Sen writes, "I intend here to take the other side—that of Arjuna—and proceed from the basic idea that one must take responsibility for the consequences of one's actions and choices, and that this responsibility cannot be obliterated by any pointer to a consequence-independent duty or obligation."[190] Just because we have some deontological maxims fixed in our minds doesn't eliminate the reality of how we inevitably have to deal with the consequences of our choices. We cannot avoid these consequences because we are necessarily embedded in specific, concrete contexts. This is what Sen means by talking about a responsibility-for-choice-oriented consequentialism.

To distinguish this form of consequentialism further from the utilitarian form of consequentialism, Sen describes the reasoning process it entails. Though the discussion of this process is further refined in *The Idea of Justice,* particularly in view of justice theories, I find that the outline Sen makes in the article "Consequential Evaluation and Practical Reason" raises points that are not tackled in the longer, later text—particularly, its description of the practice or the practical application of this form consequential evaluation.

As it is a form of evaluation that is oriented towards agents taking responsibility for their choices, Sen determines that there ought to be at least *three crucial features* of this process consequential reasoning. Firstly, he says that this is a process of *situated* evaluation. An agent cannot use this form of consequential evaluation divorced from a concrete and specific situation. My choices are choices I make within very definite circumstances and parameters;

[188] See Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 209-210 and "Consequential Evaluation," 480-501.

[189] Sen, "Consequential Evaluation," 481-482.

[190] Sen, "Consequential Evaluation," 481-482.

therefore, if I am to take responsibility for these choices, or if I want to weigh the options available to me before making a choice, I must be clear about the situation in which these choices occur.[191] To return to the story of Arjuna, it is clear to him that the choice to follow his principles comes with the consequences of having to turn on (and kill) people whom he loved and cared for, as well as the massive destruction his choice would bring upon a land that he cared for as well.

Secondly, Sen says that this form of consequentialism must make room for incompleteness. That is, it allows for situations wherein one cannot have a complete informational base from which to make decisions. This contrasts with welfarist consequentialism, particularly the economic-oriented ones, which require completeness of information as a prerequisite in order to make any judgment or choice. Realistically however, there are situations in which incompleteness is the case and completeness is impossible—for instance, if I am making choices that have an impact on the future, I have no way of predicting what the future holds and no way of adding that to my informational bases for decision-making.[192] Returning again to Arjuna, despite the assurances from the god that his war is righteous and thus his future victory is assured, Arjuna himself has no way of foreseeing his success, or of foreseeing the effects of the war on future generations.

Finally, Sen says that this form of consequentialism ought to be a process that doesn't exclude any factor from consideration. This is again in contrast to certain forms of utilitarian consequentialism employed in economics and rational choice theory, which try to specify the "relevant factors" and exclude others as external to the decision-making process.[193] Sen argues that if an agent is to undertake a process of situated evaluation, excluding some factors from ethical consideration renders that evaluation no longer accurate to the agent's experience and situation.

It is in the context of describing this process—situated reasoning that allows for incompleteness and doesn't exclude any factors—that Sen brings up the term "imperfect obligations," which he appropriates from Kant, via the work of Onora O'Neill. He specifically uses "imperfect obligations" to describe how people indirectly implicated in the situation being evaluated—such as, perhaps, compassionate bystanders who only distantly participate or observe an unjust situation—are nonetheless moved to act and 'be responsible.' He uses "imperfect obligations" to capture the kind of "wiggle room" or the practical flexibility that people have when they make their own choices and when they figure out how to fulfil their moral commitments in a concrete situation which can often have competing moral demands. I also think he uses this term as a deliberate contrast to the constraints in the Kantian sense of

[191] Sen, "Consequential Evaluation," 483.

[192] Sen, "Consequential Evaluation," 486-487.

[193] Sen, "Consequential Evaluation," 486-487.

perfect obligations—that one has an obligation that ought to be discharged only in this particular, predetermined way.

Sen develops his version of consequentialism further in Chapter 10 of *The Idea of Justice*. There, he focuses even more closely on the nature of Arjuna's arguments from the *Mahabharata.* He identifies three related but distinct arguments that Arjuna makes concerning the nature of ethical reasoning, namely: 1) "his general belief that what happens to the world must matter and be significant in our moral and political thinking,"[194] which requires a more expansive understanding of the effects and realisations resulting from an agent's choices and actions; 2) "a person whose decisions bring about some serious consequences must take personal responsibility for what results from his own choices,"[195] which places particular emphasis on taking note of an agent's influence and power relative to their context; and 3) "Arjuna's inclination to take note of personal relations with others involved in a particular act,"[196] acknowledging the reality of all agents' embeddedness in personal and social relations. The implications of these three arguments about the nature of Arjuna's ethical reasoning are what I explore in the next subsection.

1.3 Social relations, imperfect obligations, and asymmetries of power

These observations' claims about the scope of realization-focused consequential evaluation echo the ones Sen made in his article "Consequential Evaluation and Practical Reason," particularly in its insistence that this process ought to be contextualized according to the evaluator's particular positionality, ought to take note of the personal responsibility of the person undertaking the evaluation, and ought not to exclude any possible factors or outcomes. Yet, it bears further attention that in *The Idea of Justice*, Sen also takes this as an opportunity to specify what he means by "realizations."

According to Sen, *realizations* are social in nature, and comprise *both* agent-relative and agent-independent concerns. These include not only the direct outcomes of an action, but also the processes involved, the other agents affected, and the varieties of ways that these agents relate to each other—in short, the web of relations in which agents are enmeshed, though Sen does not use this specific description himself. Thus, realizations in the capability approach are more broad ranging than the usual scope of consequences considered in utilitarianism, for instance, which has a narrower, more linear scope. For Sen, the narrowness of scope of utilitarianism is ultimately a problem if we are to consider its relevance to questions of justice in world, in all its complexity. As Sen writes,

> I have emphasized the importance of recognizing that the perspective of social realizations is a great deal more inclusive than the narrow characterization of states of affairs seen as culmination outcomes. A person not only has good reason to note the

[194] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 212.

[195] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 213.

[196] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 214.

> consequences that would follow from a particular choice, but to also take an adequately broad view of the realizations that would result, including the nature of the agencies involved, the processes used, and the relationship of people.[197]

Sen anticipates that one objection to his characterization of consequentialism is that of *consistency*. For instance, those accustomed to the quite linear and neat norms of utilitarian consequentialist reasoning may find this version of consequentialism rather messy and difficult to replicate from case to case. As Sen writes, putting himself in the shoes of the objector, "if we want to take note of agencies, processes, and personal relations, is there any real hope of getting a *consistent* system of evaluation of social realizations on which reasoned and responsible decisions can be based?"[198]

Sen contends that the assumptions underlying this objection are themselves contentious. This objection assumes that we ought to make these ethical judgments impersonally, in a uniform manner—precisely ignoring the social relations that crucially influence the consequences and realizations that result from an agent's action. The objection is, for Sen, ultimately unrealistic, despite its centrality to the utilitarian version of consequentialism. Sen's emphasis on positionality precisely asserts that consequential reasoning ought to be firmly anchored on the complexity of *practical* action, and how in practice one's personal choices are *never* made in a vacuum but rather always within a greater social context. "The perceived problem here clearly arises from the temptation to see the evaluation of social realizations in strictly impersonal terms,"[199] Sen points out, and continues:

> In fact, the roles of different persons in the development of a state of affairs are totally different, it would be rather absurd to make the demand that the two must value that state of affairs in exactly the same way. This would make nonsense of taking note of agencies that are integral parts of social realizations.[200]

Though Sen does not emphasize it in this chapter, there is nonetheless an undercurrent of *practical reason* running through this articulation of consequential reasoning, which links back to his description of imperfect obligation in "Consequential Evaluation and Practical Reason" which I discussed above. His description of imperfect obligation allows for *both* guiding values *and* the wiggle room for the individual to figure out how those values apply in a particular concrete situation. This is consistent with his continual reference to the concept of *nyaya*, which he borrows from the tradition of Indian jurisprudence, as his inspiration for his comparative approach to justice.[201] I shall return to this idea of *nyaya* in the succeeding

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[197] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 219.

[198] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 219-220.

[199] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 220.

[200] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 220.

[201] As Sen explains in *Idea of Justice* (20-22), there are two words in classical Sanskrit that can be translated to 'justice': *niti* and *nyaya*. The former refers to a kind of propriety, and correctness, the adherence to institutional rules and strictures, while the latter to a more practical moral reasoning. I shall discuss the concept of *nyaya* in subsection 1.4, the next subsection of this chapter.

subsection, but before this, I find it important to highlight the final sentence of the passage I quoted above: the recognition of how, as Sen puts it, different agencies are integral parts of social relations. What does this mean?

If we examine it more closely, Sen's description implies some additional features of agency freedom, beyond what Sen provides in his contrast between well-being freedom and agency freedom. What are these additional features? First, the descriptions in both "Consequential Evaluation" and *The Idea of Justice* repeatedly assert the embeddedness of agency within personal and social relationships. Sen's conception of an agent is not of an atomistic individual ultimately autonomous from other agents; it is, rather, an agent who lives in and among a network of relations.

This embeddedness in personal and social relationships lead us to the next implicit feature of agency—that is, by virtue of their embeddedness, an individual agent's actions have an impact on other agents they are related to, whether intimately or more distantly, whether linearly or non-linearly. Whether or not the impact of their choices is ultimately predictable or unpredictable, there are nonetheless consequences and effects that result from an agent's choices.

This social enmeshment and the resulting unpredictability of the effects of an agent's choices within it, moreover, lead to the next implicit feature: that agents occupy *differing positions* within these relationships, and these positions have a part in determining the reach of the consequences of their choices. It is important to understand an agent's positionality in a social relation—for instance, to determine if they are in a position of relative power and influence, or in a position of low esteem—in order to understand the reach of their agency in social realizations. An agent who has greater influence over others within a network of social relations will have a larger effect on the social realizations of the network, compared to another agent who occupies a less influential position. An agent may even be so critical to a social network that the impact of their choices can make the difference between positive and negative social realizations. While this may seem commonsensical from the perspective of a development practitioner, it is important to understand that this is quite a departure from more mainstream consequentialist ethics and disciplines that arose from it, such as some forms of economic theory. This has crucial implications on how we ought to understand capabilitarian social analysis in contrast to more mainstream economic social analysis—and we shall see one such development in Section 2 of this chapter, in the work of Sabina Alkire.

Occupying different positions of power and influence within social relationships has another implication on the nature of agency—that is, the moral obligation to act is related to the effectiveness and the reach of the consequences of an agent's actions, and the social positions that agents occupy. Unlike the previous two features I've discussed, however, this is the one that is the most implicit, least articulated in the work of Sen. We find this alluded to, for instance, in Sen's discussion of obligations in *The Idea of Justice*, more particularly in his discussion of possible motivations for acting on one's moral and/or social obligations. Against

some social contractarian theorists who argue that cooperation and mutual benefit are the main (or sole) motivation for fulfilling obligations to others, Sen argues for what he calls "the obligation of effective power," which he explains is the argument that "if someone has the power to make a change that he or she can see will reduce injustice in the world, then there is a strong social argument for doing just that."[202] I read this as a recognition of the difference that occupying a position of power makes on the effectiveness of one's agency, the degree of control and influence that one has over outcomes and social realizations. This position of power, for Sen, implies another form of obligation to act—a kind of responsibility that is directly related to the asymmetry of power one agent has in relation to other agents.[203] At the same time, this moral obligation can also apply to those who are not in positions of great formal social power or influence, because despite being an 'ordinary individual', an agent may be in a position of *informal* power or influence—perhaps in one's community or in other more intimate forms of social relationships—and thus an agent can still choose to act in a way that reduces injustice.

Sen alludes to this as well in the succeeding chapter of the same book, in his discussion of consequentialism. As we have seen in the preceding discussion, Sen contrasts his version of consequential reasoning with utilitarian consequentialism, and instead of focusing on utility outcomes exclusively (as the varied forms of utilitarianism do), he tries to develop a more expansive understanding of outcomes and consequences, through his discussion of the story of Arjuna. As Sen writes in that chapter:

> Arjuna's moral and political reasoning is deeply concerned with outcomes in their comprehensive form. The idea of social realizations…demands that outcomes be seen in these broader terms, taking note of actions, relations, and agencies.
>
> (…)
>
> It is part of the approach of the work presented in this book that a comprehensive understanding of states of affairs can be integrated with an overall evaluation of social realizations.[204]

This whole discussion highlights how Sen's description of his version of consequential reasoning implicitly recognizes the connection of agency, moral reasoning, and their effects on social realizations. His description also emphasizes the important role these relations play in capabilitarian evaluations of how agents can act in situations of injustice, in view of reducing injustice. However, before I go into a more specific articulation of this in Sabina Alkire's work, it also seems appropriate to close our discussion of Sen's account of consequentialist moral reasoning by summarizing his understanding of moral reasoning and its relationship to agency freedom—which, he says, is based on one of two concepts of justice from classical Sanskrit,

[202] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 205.

[203] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 205.

[204] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 216-217.

the notion of *nyaya.* I briefly mentioned the concept of *nyaya* in footnote 19 of this chapter; however, a closer examination of *nyaya*, I argue, helps not only to articulate the kind of practical reason that underlies and motivates an agent in Sen's account, but also further clarify how Sen understands the relationship of individual agents to each other and to justice in general.

1.4 Agency freedom: action on the basis of nyaya

What does Sen mean when he refers to the term *nyaya*? While I cannot speak on whether his reading of classical Indian philosophy and jurisprudence is canonical (nor is it within the scope of this work for me to do so), his discussion of *nyaya*, and how it contrasts with its companion concept *niti*, helps illuminate further his understanding of individual agency and its relation to other agents and to situations of injustice.

It is in the introduction to *The Idea of Justice* that Sen first brings up the distinction between *niti* and *nyaya*, two words which both refer to the general concept of justice in classical Sanskrit, albeit with crucial differences. *Niti*, he notes, refers to justice in the sense of "organizational propriety or behavioral correctness."[205] It is a strict and formalized conception of justice based on rule-following—in a footnote on the same page, one of the most influential classical Sanskrit jurists who wrote on *niti* is, says Sen, often described as 'a fascist law giver'—giving us a sense of how severe these laws and rules are conceptualized. One could say that this parallels the English idiom of how one ought to follow "the letter of the law" regardless of the costs to oneself or to others.[206]

In contrast, Sen describes *nyaya* as concerned with justice as lived and realized, as put into practice. As he writes, "the roles of institutions, rules, and organization, important as they are, have to be assessed in the broader and more inclusive perspective of *nyaya*, which is inescapably linked with the world that actually emerges, not just the institutions and rules we happen to have."[207] This view of justice contextualises the justice set out in rules and laws within the broader social reality and institutions that these laws and rules exist in and function. The law is not taken in isolation, but rather understood within its lived reality.

In latter chapter of *The Idea of Justice*, Sen goes on to contrast this sense of justice as *nyaya* with the contractarian approach and with the utilitarian version of consequentialism. In the second chapter, "Rawls and Beyond," where he surveys Rawls's work and its influence, Sen likens the nature of Rawls's ideal theory to the view of justice as *niti*, unconcerned with the realization of justice in practice.[208] He contrasts this with understanding justice as *nyaya*,

[205] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 20.

[206] Another illustrative example that Sen uses here is the statement 'fiat justitia, et pereat mundus' ('let justice be done, though the world may perish') famously made in the 16th century by Ferdinand I of the Holy Roman Empire. See Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 21.

[207] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 20.

[208] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 66-67.

asserting that "What really happens to people cannot but be a central concern of a theory of justice."[209]

Taking these discussions of *nyaya* together with our previous discussion of Sen's version of consequentialism serves to emphasize the grounded nature of this form of moral reasoning and highlight the varied relationships that connect agents to each other and to the consequences of their actions. The clear-cut principles and rules that dictate justice as *niti* are contrasted with the difficult, complicated, and relational realities that one needs to explore, understand, navigate, and weigh in a consequential reasoning process modeled on justice as *nyaya*.

This *nyaya*-inspired process of moral reasoning also seems quite similar to Aristotelian *phronesis*, i.e. the Aristotelian formulation of practical wisdom, of weighing how to act in a particular situation in view of the virtues one desires to live out in the world. However, within the capability approach literature, the approach's affinity with Aristotelian ethics has been mostly dominated by Nussbaum and those drawing from her work. The affinity between Sen's description of practical reason and Aristotelian phronesis has not gone unobserved, though. As Trevor Tchir notes, there is considerable resonance between Sen's overall approach to justice (as outlined in *The Idea of Justice*) and Aristotle's approach to justice in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as well as Nussbaum's interpretation of Aristotle in her book *The Fragility of Goodness*.[210] Among Tchir's observations, what stands out is the comparison he makes particularly between Sen's and Aristotle's conceptions of *practical reason.*

As I noted in the previous discussions, Sen's description of his realisation-focused consequentialism is thoroughly practical, anchored in the concrete context that one must examine and reason about. It requires one to sift through one's preferences, choices, values, and actions and reflect on how these relate to one's broader social context. This description resonates with Tchir's characterisation of Aristotelian practical reason:

> Practical reason aims at non-contradiction and consistency, but the account must be true to the appearances, it must remain committed to the *pragmata*, the way humans actually live, act, and see. Aristotle is empathic that practical reason (*phronesis*) is not scientific (*episteme*) but, rather, anthropocentric. It is related to various categories of human goods as available through experience, not one stable, Platonic Idea of the Good.[211]

Jay Drydyk develops further the resonance between Sen's work with Aristotelian ethics, developing Sen's comparative approach to justice further along the lines of Aristotelian virtue ethics. Drydyk intends to bolster Sen's assertions that a comparative approach to justice is

[209] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 68.

[210] Trevor Tchir, "Aristotelian Practical Reason in Amartya Sen's *Idea of Justice,*" 26 March 2011, Western Poitical Science Association 2011 Annual Meeting Paper, available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=1767011.

[211] Tchir, 15.

more useful for combating injustice, and that idealist theories of justice are neither necessary nor sufficient for the practical work of reducing injustice in the world.[212]

These claims are contested by other capabilitarian scholars on two counts: first, on the count that an idea of perfect justice or an ideal theory of justice is required to determine how agents ought to act justly in situations; and secondly, on the count that ideal theories of justice are also necessary for motivating an agent to ask to act in just ways.[213]

In response to the first contention, Drydyk asserts that an agent's just act does not require the existence of an absolute ideal—i.e., the just agent does not require an absolute idea of justice in order to act justly. This is supported by the tradition of virtue ethics, harkening back to Aristotle's criticism of Plato.[214] The claim that a process of ethical evaluation need not require a transcendental ideal, to determine what is the just option in a given situation, is a claim not unique to Sen. For Drydyk, drawing from the tradition of virtue ethics can further specify and bolster Sen's claim, particularly if we develop it along the lines of Aristotle's characterisation of just agents and just actions.

Drydyk summarises Artistotle's conception of just agents and just actions as follows: "Just people are concerned about inequalities that are somehow disproportionate, and just action avoids the imposition of such inequalities either on others or on oneself."[215] Taking this as his framework, Drydyk articulates what inequalities concern the capability approach, what constitutes a disproportionate inequality within it, and how the CA conceives of action and agency. Focusing particularly on the foundational work of Sen and Nussbaum, he formulates what he calls a 'capabilitarian account of just action', identifying six areas of concern in the capability approach:

> On this account…acting justly involves achieving and harmonizing six objectives: (1) reducing capability shortfalls; (2) expanding capabilities for all; (3) saving the worst-off as a first step towards their full participation in economy and society, (4) which is also to be promoted by a system of entitlements protecting all from social exclusion; while (5) supporting the empowerment of those whose capabilities are to expand; and (6) respecting ethical values and legitimate procedures.[216]

For Drydyk, this capabilitarian account of just action demonstrates how transcendental theories of justice are neither necessary nor sufficient for taking just actions. Observing capability shortfalls within a given context of injustice, determining which capabilities are limited in that context, identifying who are the worst-off—all these are comparative operations, *not* transcendental ones. Moreover, these operations do not require one to have

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[212] Jay Drydyk, "A Capability Approach to Justice as Virtue," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 15 (2012): 23–38, http://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-011-9327-2.

[213] Drydyk, "Justice as Virtue," 28.

[214] Drydyk, "Justice as Virtue," 29.

[215] Drydyk, "Justice as Virtue," 29.

[216] Drydyk, "Justice as Virtue," 33.

a specific ideal theory in mind in order to do them. As Drydyk claims, "If this is right, then knowing how to act justly does not require knowledge of ideal theories; knowledge of comparative justice is sufficient."[217]

Against the second objection, Drydyk draws from both Aristotelian moral psychology and contemporary social psychology. This detour makes sense because the second objection is an argument based on moral psychology, alleging that comparative approaches cannot inspire positive feelings in agents in order to motivate just action, in contrast to the awe-inspiring, grand ideals espoused by transcendental approaches. This objection ultimately raises the question of why anyone should want to act justly in the first place, and how this desire to act can be sustained—i.e., how emotions play a role in motivating and sustaining action.

Though the *Nicomachean Ethics* itself doesn't develop this emotive aspect of justice in detail, more recent scholarship in virtue ethics has tried to develop this by drawing from Aristotle's broader moral psychology of virtue.[218] Aside from this literature, to have a fuller and more contemporary moral psychology of virtue, Drydyk also draws from the literature on justice in social psychology.[219] These two sources help Drydyk sketch a moral psychology of a capabilitarian justice as virtue. Though Drydyk leaves this part of the discussion as an open-ended sketch, he emphasises how the desire for agency and the feelings of solidarity and empowerment—which the capability literature emphasizes as well—have roles to play in fostering the desire to act in view of justice. He further asserts that neither the desire for agency nor the feelings of solidarity and empowerment in view of ending injustice require the existence of some ideal conception of justice in order to be fostered in agents, thus refuting the second objection against Sen's comparative approach to justice.

In all these discussions, however, the emphasis has been on the agent, the type of moral reasoning involved when agents act, the practical reality of how these agents' actions are imbedded within and conditioned by (and inevitably affect) informal and formal social relations, and the obligation to act in view of justice. However, we have not yet explored the 'other side' of the relationship, so to speak—that is, these social relations in which agents exist, are obliged to act, have effects on, and which in turn enable or constrain agents' actions. How ought we to understand and characterise the relationships in which agents exist and act, and how social interactions and agents relate to each other, will be what we will pay attention to in the next section.

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[217] Drydyk, "Justice as Virtue," 33.

[218] Howard Curzer, "Aristotle's Account of the Virtue of Justice," *Apeiron* 28 no.3 (1995): 233-236. Cited in Drydyk, "Justice as Virtue," 34.

[219] Melvin J. Lerner, *The Belief in a Just World* (New York: Plenum, 1980); Melvin J. Lerner and Susan Clayton, *Justice and Self-interest: Two Fundamental Motives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Ali Kazemi and Kjell Törnblom, "Social Psychology of Justice: Origins, Central Issues, Recent Developments, and Future Directions," *Nordic Psychology* 60 no.3 (2008): 209–234, https://doi.org/10.1027/1901-2276.60.3.209. Cited in Drydyk, "Justice as Virtue," 35.

2. Alkire and agents within unjust structures

This brings us to the work of Sabina Alkire and the article "Structural Injustice and Democratic Practice,"[220] where she articulates the CA's theoretical assumptions regarding the nature of agency in social contexts, more specifically contexts of structural injustice, in view of understanding and situating agents' capabilities for democratic action in and against unjust structures.

Why does Alkire do this? Primarily because she says that *structural injustice* is the kind of injustice that the capability approach is oriented towards.[221] She defines structural injustice as a situation in which "multiple agents coordinate joint action, the fruits of which are unjust—thus multiple agents would have to act differently in order to reverse the injustice,"[222] in contrast to situations in which there is one specific agent that causes the injustice.[223] Further, Alkire points out that these multiple agents (whose actions lead to unjust effects), act in and through institutions which have been "designed to take into account and further some set of interests, but are not designed to take into account other interests that they harm, certain capabilities that they can cause to contract, or opportunity costs that their operation entails."[224]

In short, in situations of structural injustice there is no single agent that one can point to as directly responsible, from whom one can demand response and redress. Yet, these situations are nonetheless pressing and need an urgent response, and still require agents to act to reduce or end the injustice.

2.1 Structural injustice and the capability approach

While Alkire's objective in the article is primarily to examine, articulate, and interrogate the nature of democratic action in Sen's writings, her text also offers a kind of 'transposition' of the sociological concept of structural injustice to the vocabulary and evaluative space of the capability approach. Alkire offers additional descriptions and definitions of structural injustice within the capability approach in two ways: first, through the metaphor of the Trojan horse; and second, by drawing from capabilitarian economic analyses of India conducted by

[220] Sabina Alkire, "Structural Injustice and Democratic Practice: The Trajectory in Sen's Writings," in *Transforming Unjust Structures: The Capability Approach*, eds. Severine Deneulin et al. Library of Ethics and Applied Philosophy 19 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 47-62.

[221] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 47-48.

[222] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 47-48.

[223] For instance, when one commits an offense against a friend, or when one violates the trust of another. Alkire herself uses the example of the child with a grievance against their parent in her essay (47).

[224] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 48.

development economists Sen and Jean Drèze,[225] and articulating their underlying theoretical assumptions regarding the nature of agency in contexts of structural injustice.

The tale of the Trojan horse is familiar to many, referring to the device from the ancient Greek epic used to finally defeat the seemingly impenetrable walled city of Troy. Pretending to have called a retreat, the Greeks delivered a giant wooden horse as a "peace offering" to the Trojans. Unbeknownst to the Trojans, inside the belly of the wooden beast lurked Greek soldiers, and when night fell, these soldiers proceeded to open the gates and allow the rest of the Greek armies to take Troy. How is this an illustration of structural injustice? Alkire takes the metaphor a bit literally: it illustrates how it is the actions of the individual people within an unjust structure (that is, the soldiers within the horse) that perpetuate the injustice; yet it is the structure itself (the horse) that brought about the problem, not the individual actors within it. Thus, there is no single person or easily identifiable subset of people from whom we can immediately demand redress.[226] While I think this is not an effective metaphor for structural injustice,[227] it is nonetheless useful in highlighting how individual agents participate in an unjust structure, yet they cannot be individually held liable for that injustice.

On the other hand, the injustices of famine and extreme hunger demonstrate how structural injustice does not necessarily involve the violation of law; in many circumstances, unjust structures can be perfectly legal.[228] Sen's seminal study on famine shows how the famines of the 20th century were not so much due to a lack of supply of food, which was the general assumption of its cause, but rather because of people's lack of entitlement to food.[229] As Sen writes,

> That famines can take place without a substantial food availability decline is of interest mainly because of the hold that food availability approach has in the usual famine analysis. It has also led to disastrous policy failure in the past. The entitlement approach concentrates instead on the ability of different sections of the population to establish command over food, using the entitlement relations operating in that society depending on its legal, economic, political, and social characteristics.[230]

In these situations, culpability is just as diffuse as in the metaphor of the Trojan horse. In famines, there is no single agent who is to blame for the inequality of an economic, social or

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[225] The studies referenced are the monograph by Sen, *Poverty and Famines* (first published by the International Labour Organization, 1981), and the monographs co-written by Sen and Drèze, *Hunger and Public Action* (first published 1989), and *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity* (first published 1995). These can be found collected in *The Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze Omnibus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[226] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 47-48.

[227] The static nature of a giant wooden horse is not a good comparison to the more flexible and dynamic nature of social structures and institutions, whether these are formal or informal in nature, though they are both human creations.

[228] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 49-50.

[229] Sen, *Poverty and Famines,* 39-51, and 154-166.

[230] Sen, *Poverty and Famines,* 162.

governmental order; moreover, these inequalities often occur or become apparent only in the relationships between people as they participate in these institutions.[231]

In Alkire's view, the work of Sen and Drèze taken together are an indictment of how social institutions are, in many ways, themselves the cause of injustice through depriving specific groups of participants in the institutions of their capabilities and functionings. She writes:

> [Sen and Drèze's studies on India] portray institutions as culpably negligent of (or indifferent to) the human cost of their actions. They do this by attempting to establish not only the seriousness of the harm, but also the causal responsibility of the institution for the harm (directly or through negligence)—links that are often energetically disputed by the accused institution. Finally, they try to establish that the institution, differently constructed, could undertake constructive work without these costs (obviously the prior assumption is that the institution is doing some constructive work).[232]

For Alkire, it is precisely this diffuse, *participatory* nature of structural injustice that also gives us insight into how to respond to injustice and work towards its reduction. As she points out, in their work both Sen and Drèze discuss various examples of the roles played by *democratic practices* in the transformation of unjust structures.[233] *Democratic practices* are distinguished from *democratic ideals* (such as that of free speech, distribution of power, accountability) and *democratic institutions* (such as the existence of an independent press, the existence of democratic policy-making and governance bodies, etc.), as this emphasizes the importance of people's *agency* within these institutions. *Democratic practice,* that is, "the ability of an active public-at-large to influence democratic institutions so that these respond to public values,"[234] demonstrates that it is through the action of the participants in these institutions that these unjust structures both persist and through which these structures can be changed. By their participation, agents can either perpetuate injustice or promote justice within the structure. There is in their work an appreciation of "the considerable power that public action and participation and democratic practice can have."[235]

This, however, raises what Alkire calls the "embedded collective action problem," that is, the intertwined questions of *why* individual agents would even care to participate in changing institutions for the promotion of justice, *how* public action and outcry about an unjust structure begins, and *when* it transforms into a successful change or when it fizzles out. Alkire herself points out that neither Sen nor Drèze solve this problem, but they do give us concepts that help clarify the discussion.[236] The emphasis placed on the agency of individuals is one key

[231] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 54-55.

[232] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 56.

[233] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 51-53.

[234] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 52.

[235] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 52.

[236] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 48, 53-54, 58.

area. More specifically, Alkire notes that for Sen and Drèze, agency has not only an instrumental relationship to structures (that is, structures can be changed only through agency), but also an *intrinsic* and *constitutive/constructive* relationship as well. After all, structures cannot exist without agents; nor can the values and data that inform these structures exist without agents to possess and critically examine these information and values.[237]

The other key concepts Sen and Drèze discuss, says Alkire, are the different relationships that bring people together, cutting across differences of class and power, with a sense of collective purpose, towards collective action, which they describe variously as *solidarity, imperfect obligation*, and *plural affiliations*.[238]

Solidarity, according to Sen and Drèze, refers to how people in more privileged social and economic positions can advocate and advance issues that have an impact on the underprivileged and marginalized, who may be "voiceless" in their context; they base this description on their observations of participatory action in India.[239] We also encounter again that term Sen borrows from Kant, *imperfect obligations*; Alkire interprets this term as referring to incompletely specified obligations, which arise not out of a specific law or moral norm, but are what obligations that one owes to another by virtue of the other's humanity.[240] Finally, *plural affiliations* refer to how we as individuals are able to identify ourselves with multiple groups, and how these identifications are often catalysts of many contemporary calls for justice across the limits of national borders.

While Alkire also discusses the limitations of each of these described relationships, what is more important to notice is what these three relationships have in common *despite* their differences. They all assume a sense of 'fellow-feeling', a capacity of compassion of some sort, to be critical for collective action against structural injustice. As Alkire writes, "It sounds quite fragile and unlikely…were it not the case that so often it appears to be *precisely* a lack of 'fellow feeling' which impedes the further actions that would be required to redress structural injustice."[241]

It is this observation in turn which leads her to typify the interaction between, or formulate a typology of, different groups of agents in an unjust structure—which is the most crucial contribution of this text to this thesis project. I shall return to this shortly. It bears reemphasizing here that the emphasis on agency in this text is important because Alkire shows that agency not only has an instrumental relationship to structures, but rather it has an intrinsic and constitutive relationship. Agents not only make structures or bring structures into

[237] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 53-54.

[238] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 54-56.

[239] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 54.

[240] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 55.

[241] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 56.

existence; agent's individual actions, taken together, are either what perpetuate structures or change them.

2.2 A typology of agents within unjust structures

Returning to Alkire's typology of different agents in unjust structures, such a typology shows how democratic practices against structural injustice do not take place on some hypothetical level playing field, where all agents are equal. Even though all agents participate in the structure, they participate in different ways and with differing degrees of power and influence. Agents are not equal in concrete situations of structural injustice. However, these categories are not intended to be used as strict rubrics to put people in boxes, but rather to help us understand better the power dynamics, processes, and practices that occur within unjust structures between individual agents. It also emphasizes how, despite our different positions and relative amount of influence within these structures, we all still have the capacity for agency.[242]

Alkire determines that the deliberate cultivation of some form of fellow feeling is crucial for collective action against structural injustice, because agents do not experience the same unjust structure in the same way; some people may occupy a position in a social structure where they do not perceive or experience the injustice of that structure at all. Put another way, people occupy differing positions in any social structure or institution, with differing levels of power and influence, and thus do not have the same collective experience of the structure. It would, therefore, be helpful to have a general picture or typology of these different positions and the relationships between these positions—not only to 1) understand better *how* the structure is unjust, but also 2) to see which relationships and agents potentially have more influence on changing the structure, and 3) how we can better cultivate fellow-feeling between different groups of agents. She identifies four major categories of agents within these structures: *affected persons*, *compassionate bystanders*, *committed activists*, and *partially decisive powerbrokers*.

Affected persons are the ones directly affected by the injustice—they are the ones who are deprived, and thus whose capabilities and functionings are constrained, by the unjust institution, which has prioritized interests other than theirs. As Alkire explains, "an identifying feature of structural injustice is that it unnecessarily *excludes* attention to certain capabilities or to the capabilities of a group of people, and that this exclusion proves detrimental to them."[243]

Compassionate bystanders are not directly affected, whether positively or negatively, by the unjust structure. Nonetheless, they perceive that they are somehow *indirectly* affected by the deprivation of others. One way of thinking of this is how an individual's well-being can be

[242] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 56.

[243] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 56. I also want to note here how Alkire doesn't use the word 'victims,' nor does she use it in the rest of the text; the emphasis remains, consistently, on capability.

indirectly affected by the knowledge that they participate in an institution which, in turn, causes others to suffer. Alkire adds that "[t]his is related to the argument of sympathy, where the wellbeing of person Y – be it one's son or distant strangers, has a direct influence on the wellbeing of person X."[244]

Committed activists differ from these compassionate bystanders by how they move beyond sympathy into a commitment to act towards justice, and towards the change or even dismantling of the unjust structures. They are indirectly affected by structural injustice not just in terms of their well-being freedom, but in terms of their *agency freedom* as well—that is, through the things that they have 'reason to value' over and above their own well-being, which Alkire designates moral commitments.[245] As she explains, "Other people may value the capability to work to change such structural injustices in an informed and effective manner… the ability to be a part of a movement that rolled back the dread of hunger, for example, could be meaningful and valuable to people, even though it does not directly affect their well-being."[246]

Finally, we have those who Alkire calls *partially decisive powerbrokers*. These are agents who are in a position of relatively more influence, because they may have more relative power over, or even coordinate some of functions within the structure; or, as she describes them, those who have "super-charged agency freedoms" within the structure.[247]

What I find important to note in this typology is how Alkire's descriptions hinge on agency and the capabilities that the individual agent has within an unjust structure. Not only does an agent within an unjust structure occupy different positions or is a part of multiple groups, but it also shows how an agent's freedoms can be *exercised* and *expressed,* in, despite, and through unjust structures. This is shown quite clearly in this clarification and the examples she offers:

> A further clarification in this very rough setting of the table is to note the obvious: the groups are likely to overlap. Person X may be directly impacted by chronic hunger (Affected person), but also devastated when his child perishes in infancy (Compassionate bystander). Yet he may still rise to his feet and use all his strength to mobilize for change so that others in his community do not experience a similar fate (Committed activist). Or, at the other end of the spectrum, Person T may be a vice president in an offending institution (Partially decisive powerbroker), yet be quite committed to using her post to bring about positive change (Committed activist). She may also occasionally become overtaken by depression about the damage her institution continues to inflict (Compassionate bystander).[248]

This brings us back to the account of agency within the capability approach and how it is closely linked with agency freedoms. Bringing Alkire's account of agency and democratic

[244] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 56.

[245] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 56.

[246] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 56.

[247] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 56-57.

[248] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 56. 57.

participation in structures of injustice together with Sen's account of a responsibility-for-choice-oriented consequentialism, what can we conclude about a capabilitarian account of relation between agency, relations, and structures?

2.3 Situating Alkire's typology in a broader capabilitarian understanding of agency, relations, and structures

Following Sen's articulation of justice as *nyaya* as an approach to justice that focuses on the reality of how agents do not act within "perfectly just social relations" that we discussed above, we can take Alkire's work as an effort to articulate the mechanisms of these imperfect social relations. Alkire's typology is an entry point towards understanding the nature of the injustices that occur within these social relations which, as we have seen, is an area that has not been explored extensively in the capability approach. This is merely an entry point, however, and points further the direction that my own project ought to take.

Why should this area be developed further, though? Does a capabilitarian understanding of agency and how it impacts relations and structures (and the reverse, how relations and structures impact on agency) have something new to contribute to the broader theoretical and practical discussion of injustice? The next section of this chapter will focus on a recent article that partly explores this question.

3. Drydyk on oppression, capability, and agency

My discussion of Jay Drydyk's recent article, "Capability and Oppression," will dwell mostly on the first half of his text, which focuses on developing a 'capability-agency perspective' from which to understand oppression.[249] Drydyk's work affirms my own intuition that capability-agency taken together can help illuminate the social structures that are underlying causes of injustice; in his text, the injustice that he focuses on is oppression.

As Drydyk asserts at the very beginning of his work, "the capability approach need not and should not refrain from discussing oppression, because in fact the capability approach has much to say about oppression."[250] But what kind of injustice specifically is oppression? Our everyday notion of oppression is a limited one, and Drydyk invites us to expand this understanding of oppression. He writes,

> As Iris Marion Young has observed, [the] stereotype of oppression as cruel, tyrannical, and deliberate is not at all consistent with contemporary conceptions of *systemic* oppression, which can result from 'the normal processes of everyday life' in which people are 'simply doing their jobs or living their lives, and do not understand themselves as agents of

[249] The article's latter half is nonetheless interesting, as it outlines a capabilitarian account of the mechanisms of oppression and to what they owe their persistence, but it is less relevant to my project.

[250] Jay Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 22 no. 4: 528, https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2021.1982880.

> oppression' (Young 2011a, 41-42). In other words, the agents whose choices originate or implement systemic oppression may not be cruel or tyrannical at all.[251]

According to Drydyk, from within the capability approach, we can begin to better understand what oppression consists of, and account for systemic oppression through the lens of capability outcomes. He points out that oppression has a considerable impact on capability, pointing out that "what is wrong with oppression, in part, is that oppressed people's capabilities are stuck at low levels, so that they are unequally and unnecessarily unfree to live well."[252] Oppression curtails the agency of oppressed peoples; but what or who curtails them?

This is where the quoted passage from Young becomes more relevant to Drydyk: while indeed there are agents who employ their agency to directly and intentionally restrict the agency of others, there are also forms of oppression that are systemic in nature, which individual agents contribute to, but do not necessarily directly intend. As he writes,

> When people contribute to systemic inequalities, they are acting on purposes, but often their purposes are not focused on restricting the choices and advantage of others. (…) Some oppressors do aim to restrict the agency and advantage of people they oppress, and we should not overlook the fact that racism, patriarchy, caste hierarchy, and so on are implemented intentionally and even vehemently by some people. But systemic oppression also results from a whole lot of agency that is not intentionally oppressive or hostile but is disconnected from its oppressive effects.[253]

However, the lack of direct causal connection—or as Drydyk puts it, the lack of a 'causal chain' between individual agents' actions and the outcomes (i.e. the constraining effects on capability) of oppression—can make it easy to overlook the causes of systemic oppression. As he writes, "The absence of strict liability challenges us to think, is nothing wrong with systemic discrimination, except the outcomes?"[254] He says that capabilitarians have much room for new thinking in this area, as the conception of agency within the capability approach—particularly the conception of agency freedom that began with Sen—highlights what Robeyns calls the structural constraints on agents. This has the potential to address what he calls "a blind spot in our assessment of how oppressive practices are wrongful"[255] which can lead to "ignoring the causal background that makes these outcomes happen."[256]

Drydyk thus proposes what he calls a 'capability-agency perspective' for assessing systemic forms of oppression, which highlights both the oppression that oppressed people experience, but also how these oppressions are caused by and/or through the actions of others, whether intentional or unintentional, and have much to do with the social practices or

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[251] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 530.

[252] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 530.

[253] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 530.

[254] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 530.

[255] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 530.

[256] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 531-532.

systems that agents participate in. As he asserts, "It is important to insist, therefore, that two things are wrong with oppression. One is that oppressed people are less free to live well. The other, not to be over-looked, is that being oppressed—being stuck in this condition—results from the agency of others."[257]

Thus far, these observations that Drydyk makes do not seem very different from those that Alkire made in the article discussed in the previous section. Drydyk's innovation it seems is in making the link between existing work in social and political philosophy on systemic oppression—through the work of Iris Marion Young. However, I think his more notable innovation is to be found in his development of the capability-agency approach.

3.1 A capability-agency perspective on systemic inequality

If we are to follow Drydyk's suggestions, using a capabilitarian lens to further analyze issues of inequality and oppression allows us to see the different dimensions of oppression on which we can focus our analyses—what he describes as the foreground, the middle range, and the background of the oppression. He explains, "For inequalities of gender, race, indigeneity, and so on, there is a foreground, a mid-range, and a background. About each zone, we have different questions and different explanations are available. Capabilities are in the foreground, agency runs throughout, and combining them properly makes the whole perspective coherent and meaningful."[258]

By foreground, Drydyk refers to an oppressed agent's immediate circumstances, particularly the constraints on capabilities and agency. Zooming out a little from the foreground allows one to focus on the mid-range and examine the possible causes of these constraints: for instance, "policies and practices may limit choices externally or objectively, and choices may also be limited internally or subjectively, especially within significant relationships."[259] Finally, zooming out further to focus on the background, one enters into the realm of broader explanations for the existence of these policies, practices, and the conditions for internal limitations. These explanations can be cultural-historical in nature, applications of general theories, systemic explanations, and the like.[260] Drydyk adds that the mid-range and background level of analyses add two more sets of questions, which he describes as *synchronic* and *diachronic* questions,[261] which investigate how these practices are perpetuated across space (synchronic) and through time (diachronic).[262] As he summarises:

> Returning once again to an overall perspective, we see different explanatory factors emerging at different levels of analysis. The foreground question is: how does reduced

[257] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 532.

[258] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 532.

[259] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 532.

[260] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 533-534.

[261] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 533-534.

[262] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 534.

> capability result from restricted choices? The mid-range question is: by what social policies, practices, attitudes, and relations are those choices restricted? There are two background questions. The *synchronic* question is: Why are those choice-depriving and disadvantaging policies, practices, attitudes, and relations so widespread? The *diachronic* question is: How are they reproduced over time?[263]

Drydyk observes that most of the existing scholarship within the capability approach asks foreground and mid-range questions—questions of capability measurement/assessment are examples of foreground studies, and policy and program-oriented research are examples of mid-range studies.[264] Background questions are less common in capability research, he observes, but this can nonetheless be an area where the CA has much to contribute, and he identifies three possible contributions within the current CA landscape: 1) studies that cluster capabilities and their effects on each other contribute to explaining the spread and reproduction of capability deprivation; 2) studies on collective capability can contribute to questions of how these capability deprivations can be challenged by oppressed groups themselves; and 3) capabilities can be used as a good point of comparison, to assess different explanatory theories for specific oppressions.[265]

3.2 The capability-agency perspective in context

From here, Drydyk continues in the text to use the capability-agency lens to outline his capabilitarian explanation of why oppression is morally wrong. For the purposes of my work, however, I shall focus solely on the preceding discussion of how capabilitarian research can contribute to explanatory questions regarding oppressions. Indeed, I found myself quite struck by how Drydyk's work echoes the intuitions I have had about the capability approach and the direction in which its conception of capabilities and agency can be taken in addressing questions of injustice; but Drydyk also notes its limitations. One crucial aspect of the capability-agency perspective that Drydyk highlights is that of *agency*. Though oppression constrains people's capabilities for action, this nonetheless does not negate agency altogether. Moreover, since the constraints on capability are the result—whether directly or indirectly—of people's actions, this also means that these constraints can be challenged, even eliminated, through people's actions as well. As he writes, "We should remember when we speak of oppressive social structures walling people in, that we are using the words 'structure' and 'wall' metaphorically…it is important to remember that the walls are made by people in action."[266]

This harkens back to a key point I raised at the end of the previous chapter—that is, of how individual agency in the CA, particularly in Sen's formulation, is an alternative to extreme liberal and libertarian conceptions of the individual. This conception of agency recognizes the

[263] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 534.

[264] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 534.

[265] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 534.

[266] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 535.

individual's embeddedness in a society and a physical environment that both enables and limits their agency—the importance of relations, as Koggel put it—without sliding to the other extreme of losing individual agency altogether, subsumed completely into the larger forces of society and nature. Indeed, juxtaposing Sen's writing on agency freedom, responsibility for choice consequentialism, and justice as *nyaya*, together with Alkire's typology of agents in an unjust structure, and with Drydyk's capability-agency perspective, seems to me compelling evidence for how the capability approach is, and can be used as an alternative to idealist, liberal, rights-based discourse on justice. Instead of focusing on the theoretical formulation of what justice consists of—whether in the form of a list of fundamental human capabilities, or of the conditions of human agency, as other capabilitarian scholars like Nussbaum and Claasen have tried to do—we are challenged to make sense of the particularities of injustice in the concrete, to not just take these at face value, and instead to analyze what these injustices consist of, how they constrain capabilities and agency in different ways for different individuals, and how these are products of human agency.

By making explicit the link between CA and the analysis of social practices and systems that are unjust and citing the works of critical social theorists such as Iris Marion Young, Charles W. Mills, and Sally Haslanger, Drydyk makes the concrete link between the CA and critical social theory as an alternative direction of the CA and capabilitarian research on injustice. Drydyk also provides us with a compelling explanation for taking such a direction with capabilitarian research on injustice, as it addresses the biggest limitation of the capability approach in capturing concrete experiences of injustice: that is, how to capture the real differences of injustice experienced by particular groups of people within the same social structure or social context. As Drydyk writes,

> The problem is: precisely because all groups can be compared within the capability space, the different sources of their inequalities and oppressions must be explained by other means, with other concepts. In the capability space, we can describe the differences in real opportunities that are enjoyed by men, women, racialized groups, and others within a society. Yet we capture these differences in a single evaluative space, and this raises a concern about overlooking the specific differences between the oppression of women, of racialized groups, of indigenous peoples, of LGBTQ+ persons and disabled people, not to mention intersectional oppressions.
>
> What I want to show now is that capability research can answer this challenge by adopting the combined capability–agency perspective that I have just introduced. This perspective not only allows for different agency pathways that hold down the capabilities of different groups, but it drives us to find them.[267]

4. The concept of structural injustice

Before proceeding to take the CA further into the direction of critical social theory, however, I think a clarification of terms is much needed. In the foregoing discussions from Sen,

[267] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 535.

Alkire, and Drydyk, there seems to be considerable fluidity in the use of the terms injustice, inequality, oppression, structural injustice, structural inequality, systemic injustice, and systemic inequality. Through the work of these capabilitarian scholars, these terms seem to even be used interchangeably, as if they are synonyms. Are these indeed synonyms for the same phenomenon? Or are they related phenomena, but not the same?

The broader literature on social structures and structural injustice can perhaps help us in clarifying these terms, while also aiding in understanding the nature of the structural phenomena that we encounter as capability researchers. Thus, in the succeeding chapter, we delve deeper into the concept of structural injustice, drawing from the broader literature in political and social philosophy—much of which is found within critical social theory.

Chapter 4
On social structures and the nature of structural injustice

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Alkire asserts that the capability approach seeks to address structural injustice. She explains that by "structural injustice," she refers broadly to a situation in which "multiple agents coordinate joint action, the fruits of which are unjust—thus multiple agents would have to act differently in order to reverse the injustice."[268] She further asserts these structural injustices can take the form of institutions which have been "designed to take into account and further some set of interests, but are not designed to take into account other interests that they harm, certain capabilities that they can cause to contract, or opportunity costs that their operation entails."[269]

This, however, is the extent of Alkire's discussion of the concept; after all, her primary concern is a close reading of two texts by Sen and Drèze, to unpack their understanding of the relationship between injustice, capabilities, and democratic action, and the relationship of the capabilities of individual agents to democratic action. However, it does give me a point of linkage between the capability approach and the broader theories on structural injustice. It is this linkage, through the concept itself of structural injustice, that I would like to develop through this chapter, particularly through the work in critical social theory of Iris Marion Young (section 2) and Sally Haslanger (section 3). However, aside from establishing this connection, it also bears clarification: what is meant by "structural injustice"? How is it different from other sorts of injustice? I shall discuss Young's answer to the first question, and the succeeding commentary on her answer, in sections 1 and 2; and Haslanger's answer to both these questions in section 3. Finally, in section 4, I will explore the implications of an account of structural injustice on justice movements, in view of its possible use in the capability approach.

1. Iris Marion Young on structural injustice

Alkire makes a simple distinction between structural injustices and other forms of injustice. We more commonly use "injustice," she says, when referring to a particular action, directed by a specific individual towards another, which affects the other in a negative way, such as by depriving them of advantages that others have. In her text, she uses the example of a child with a grievance against a sibling, appealing to their parent for fairness—which can be generalized to refer to committing an offense against another, or violating the trust or an agreement with another, and thus seeking adjudication and resolution from a third party.[270]

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[268] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 47.

[269] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 48.

[270] Alkire, "Structural Injustice," 47-48. This is an example that may cause some confusion, as it is described only in passing at the very beginning of the work. Alkire describes a young child decrying how an older sibling keeps a toy in her purse as unfair, and seeks resolution or restitution from the parent for this injustice. Why such an action by the older child is an offense against the younger child is left vague. However, *it does nonetheless illustrate what structural injustice is not*—it is not an action by one party that another party deems unfair or unjust and thus they ask for adjudication and resolution from a third party.

Because of this rather general distinction Alkire draws, I cast my net into the broader field of political philosophy for a better understanding of structural injustice. This led to the work of Iris Marion Young, one of the first contemporary political theorists to discuss the concept of structural injustice.[271] Arguably, the concept of injustice as related to structures can be traced back to Karl Marx,[272] but its most recent popular formulation in political theory has been Young's.

In her posthumous work *Responsibility for Justice*, Young examines the nature of structural injustice, before proceeding to examine possibility of responsibility for such types of injustice. In Young's account, structural injustice is distinct from injustice that comes about directly as a result of the actions of individuals, groups, or institutions. Instead, she asserts that structural injustice has to do with an individual's position within their social-structural context.[273] This social-structural context, in turn, is not the outcome of one or a few actions, or a single institutional policy, but is borne of social-structural processes. Thus, for Young, structural injustice is not solely attributable to "wrongs of individual interaction," nor is it just a case of bad luck, nor is it attributable to any single law or policy targeted against a particular group of people.[274]

To illustrate this concretely, Young develops the example of homelessness in the USA and the broader US housing crisis throughout the second chapter of *Responsibility for Justice* for, as she observes, "[the] sources of the generalized circumstances of being vulnerable to homelessness are multiple, large scale, and relatively long term. Many policies, both public and private, and the actions of thousands of individuals acting according to normal rules and accepted practices contribute to producing these circumstances."[275]

She shows this through the case of "Sandy," a working-class, single mother in a big city, whose situation positions her at a disadvantage vis-à-vis other actors within the social-structural system of urban housing, such as landlords, bankers, and more affluent tenants and residents.[276] Sandy finds herself and her family at risk of homelessness, despite all her efforts to seek housing that she can afford, even after exhausting all the legal means available to her—and these circumstances are not the outcome, as American conventional wisdom usually suggests, on her failing to "pick herself up by her bootstraps."[277]

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[271] Maeve McKeown, "Structural Injustice," *Philosophy Compass* 16 (May 2021): 2, https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12757. Also see Kirun Sankaran, "'Structural Injustice' as an Analytical Tool," *Philosophy Compass* 16 (October 2021): 1, https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12780.

[272] Maeve McKeown, "Structural Injustice," 1-2.

[273] Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 45.

[274] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 45-46.

[275] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 47.

[276] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 47-52.

[277] Young examines this more conventional American approach to poverty as a result of personal irresponsibility in the first chapter of *Responsibility for Justice*, contrasting it as well with the work of Dworkin and the luck egalitarians. Despite their differences, Young finds that both approaches to poverty are too

Young highlights the multiple asymmetries of knowledge, of power, and of choice that Sandy faces in the urban housing market, such that even though landlords and other agents in the housing system do not act unethically or illegally, Sandy is still nonetheless at their mercy as a result of her position. As Young states:

> In sum, the all-too-common social position of being housing-deprived arises from the combination of actions and interactions of a large number of public and private individual and institutional actors, with different amounts of control over their circumstances and with varying ranges of options available to them….many try to be law-abiding and decent even as they try to pursue their own interests. The process nevertheless should be described as producing structural injustice, because in it some people's options are unfairly constrained and they are threatened with deprivation, while others derive significant benefits.[278]

Structural injustice, we can therefore assert, arises from the social structures that people participate in, which can be stacked unfairly to the advantage of some, to the detriment of others. Young thus concludes:

> Structural injustice, then, exists when social processes put large groups of persons under systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities, at the same time that these processes enable others to dominate or to have a wide range of opportunities for developing and exercising capacities available to them.[279]

A key assumption in Young's entire discussion is the notion of "social structure," which she seems to use interchangeably with "structure," "social process," and "social structural processes." She draws from the sociological and critical theory literature to explain this concept further.

1.1 What is the "social structure"?

Young provides not a definition, but an account of how social-structural processes work, partly because it is "notoriously difficult to define" but also because she asserts that the existing definitions do not adequately capture the dynamism of social relations within social structures.[280] She draws her account from a variety of sources: sociologists (including William Sewell, Anthony Giddens, and Pierre Bourdieu), feminist theory, critical theory, and even existentialist philosophy, using their ideas to describe the experience an individual may have in the context of the social. She identifies four aspects of this experience which, she says, constitute the dynamic of social structures, but which she teases apart for the purposes of describing and explaining social structures. These are, namely: 1) objective constraint; 2)

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atomistic, failing to account for the individual's relationship to the background conditions of justice. This, in turn, leads her to examining structural injustice. Cf. Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 38-41.

[278] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 52.

[279] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 52. *Emphasis mine.*

[280] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 52-53.

positionality; 3) action; and 4) unintended consequences of the combined actions of many people.[281] I shall discuss each below.

1.1.1 The social experience of objective constraint

Young begins with the observation that, "[as] individuals we experience much about the society in which we live as objectively constraining."[282] These constraints are not necessarily material in nature, nor necessarily taking the shape of formal rules and laws. Individuals experience unspoken but commonly accepted social norms as constraining, as well—I am sure that most of us are familiar with the pressures of having to conform to the particular expectations of the family that raised us, or of a particular friend group, or the society we live in; or the feeling of being "a fish out of water" when we are in a foreign place, unsure about what we are able to do or how we ought to behave in an unfamiliar social and cultural milieu.

Thus, Young explains, in our experience social norms can "appear as objective, given, and constraining."[283] In turn these norms shape the relationships we have with others, requiring us to meet certain social expectations—relations, assignments, and roles—which for the most part we simply take for granted in our day-to-day life. For instance, the relationship between mother and child appears objective and given in our day-to-day experience; we take it for granted that we can expect a mother, like Sandy in Young's example, to care for their child and to provide for the child's needs. A mother is defined in reference and in relation to the child, and vice versa.

Moreover, these social norms and expectations we experience are multiple and intersecting. Returning again to Sandy as an example, as an individual woman, she is subject to social expectations about her roles as a citizen, a daughter, a single mother, or a worker—all of these, taken together, at the same time. It is fitting that Young borrows from feminist theorist Marilyn Frye the metaphor of a birdcage: each individual wire does not prevent a bird from flying away, but these wires, when collectively configured in the shape of a cage, become a real constraint.[284] As Young explains, "Social structures do not constrain in the form of direct coercion of some individuals over others; *they constrain more indirectly and cumulatively as blocking possibilities.*"[285]

However, Young clarifies that these objective constraints are not automatically unjust, nor do they immediately deprive the agent of their freedom. The injustice lies elsewhere. As she writes, "[to] say that structures constrain does not mean that they eliminate freedom; rather, social-structural processes produce differences in the kinds and range of options that

[281] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 53.

[282] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 53.

[283] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 55.

[284] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 55.

[285] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 55.

individuals have for their choices. The issue of social justice raised by the operation of social structures is whether these differences in the kinds and range of options made available to individuals by these structures are fair."[286]

At this point, it becomes clear that social structures have an important relationship to *capabilities* as commonly understood within the capability approach—that is, as the real opportunities for people to live their lives according to what they have reasons to value. Social structures are not only the milieu in which people exist and act—they are what enable and/or constrain these actions; and these actions are predicated by the options that are (or are not) available to an individual. The basis of these differences between the kinds and ranges of options available to different individuals within societies are the focus of the second aspect of social structures that Young discusses—that is, their *position* within a social structure.

1.1.2 Social Structures and Positionality

Position, according to Young, primarily considers individuals in relation to others; these social positions are "prior to interactions, and condition expectations and possibilities of interaction."[287] Following Peter Blau's metaphorical description that "a social structure can be defined as a multidimensional space of different social positions among which a population is distributed,"[288] Young describes positionality as highlighting relations of *power*, allowing us to look at the individual's relations, not just at the interpersonal level, but to the broader field of society as a whole.

This level of analysis is not unfamiliar to us—Young points out that Marx's well-known analysis of money-as-capital is a positional analysis.[289] Money-as-capital is not just a mode of exchange, but rather a relationship of power. Those who own money are in a position of power superior to those who own labor and are able to use this advantage to accumulate surplus value.

Why would an understanding of an individual's position in society be helpful in understanding social structure? Young points out that understanding people's positions in reference to others within such a broad field allows us to "identify broad structural inequalities that are far reaching in their implications for people's life courses and that persist over time, often over generations."[290]

Returning to the example of Sandy, we can see that her positionality as a working-class single mother—her social class and her gender, more broadly—place her in positions of

[286] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 55-56.

[287] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 57.

[288] Peter Blau, *Inequality and Heterogeneity: A Primitive Theory of Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1977), 4. Quoted in Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 56.

[289] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 57-58.

[290] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 58.

disadvantage,[291] making it harder for her to access training in order to qualify for higher-paying jobs because she also has to fulfil the gendered responsibilities of single motherhood. In turn, having a lower-wage job makes her less capable of accessing a larger variety of housing options, as well as limiting her eligibility for financing options.

1.1.3 Social Structures and Individual Action

The first two aspects Young discusses—which focus on understanding the positions of relative power that individuals occupy within society, and the sense of how society is experienced as objective constraint—may seem to emphasise the power that structures hold over individuals, and discount human agency altogether. It may therefore seem that the individual's life is governed by social forces beyond her individual control.

However, the latter two aspects that she describes recuperate agency as part of the relationship between individuals and the societies they inhabit. To do this, Young first tries to describe how structures are themselves the result of agency, drawing from the work of sociologists Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu.

From Giddens, Young takes his explanation of how social structures are *recursively produced*—that is, social structures "exist only as enacted by individuals in relation to one another,"[292] yet are nonetheless separate from the individual themselves. Any given individual living in the world exists within social structures, which in our time have become so many and so inter-related that they can span the globe; these structures, according to Giddens are governed by rules (i.e. patterns of behaviour and relations) and resources—yet these rules and resources "exist only insofar as the individuals in the society have knowledge of them, see them as creating possibilities for themselves, and mobilize them in their interactions with others."[293]

On the one hand, Giddens's account can seem as if the individual agent is wholly determined by structure, constrained by the different rules and resources available to her in her position within it. Nonetheless structure is *also* the context that enables the individual agent, providing the conditions of possibility for agency, the parameters and resources that make action possible. Moreover, this also means that an individual's action can both reproduce *and* alter the structure. As Young writes, "On Giddens's account, when individuals act, they are doing two things at once: (1) They are trying to bring about a state of affairs that they intend, and (2) they are reproducing the structural properties, the positional relations of rules and resources, on which they draw for these actions."[294]

However, Young adds that for the most part individual agents are unaware of how they participate in the reproduction of social structures. To explain this, she draws on Pierre

[291] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 59.

[292] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 59.

[293] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 60.

[294] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 60.

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, that is, "our internalized bodily comportments and reactions…typical of people in similar social positions."[295] Following Bourdieu, she notes that even the ways we relate to each other and our practical, day-to-day preferences often—and unconsciously—mark our respective social positions in society.

Returning to the example of housing, she points out how people's preferences for housing are often unconsciously shaped by *habitus*; what one considers a "safe neighbourhood," for instance, is often shaped by perceptions of middle-class standards and unspoken social rules that we are not conscious about—perhaps these perceptions and rules include the kinds of people who ought/ought not to live in these neighbourhoods.[296] Not only then are we unaware that the *habitus* is premised on some unfair assumptions—for instance, Young cites the assumption that African American men do not belong in middle-class neighbourhoods[297]—we are *further unaware* that we reproduce these assumptions in our day-to-day life through our actions.

1.1.4 Structural injustice as the unintended consequences of the actions of many

The final point on *habitus* and the unconscious and unintended reproduction of unjust structures ties into this final aspect of social structure that Young discusses. Social structures are produced and reproduced by and through the unintended consequences of the actions of many; and one of the unintended outcomes of these actions is how it reproduces or reinforces the vulnerability of the marginalized in society. As Young writes,

> Social structure, then, refers to the accumulated outcomes of the actions of the masses of individuals enacting their own projects, often uncoordinated with many others. The combination of actions affects the conditions of the actions of others, often producing outcomes not intended by any of the participating agents.[298]

On its face, this aspect of the social structure that Young identifies can be easily written off as naïve (it has been described as such by Sally Haslanger)[299] and criticised as ignoring or overlooking "intentional oppression."[300] However, in my opinion, this reading of Young's claims overlooks how she is presenting an account of social structures, and how injustice can come from these social structures, apart from the injustices that arise from the actions of individuals. In my reading, it isn't morally naïve; rather, it is merely a description phrased in an open-ended,

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[295] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 61.

[296] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 62.

[297] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 62.

[298] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 62-63.

[299] This comes up in the Q and A of the following online lecture: Sally Haslanger, "Systemic, Structural, and Institutional Injustice: What's the Difference?" (online, The Royal Institute of Philosophy Annual Lecture, London, 29 November 2021, http://youtu.be/vXpQSxBCN40).

[300] Madison Powers and Ruth Faden, *Structural Injustice: Power Advantage and Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 2-3. For a summary of common criticism on this aspect of Young's conception of social structure and structural injustice, see McKeown, "Structural Injustice," 3-5.

morally pluralist manner. I use "morally pluralist" here to refer to different, plural levels or forms of moral evaluation; and more particularly in this instance, I mean to say that Young sees that it is of value as an analytical tool to evaluate social structure *qua* structure.

Returning to the quote from Young above, an individual's intended outcomes for their projects can have all sorts of moral status (Young leaves the moral status of these projects unspecified), and the situation that results from the combination of outcomes can be assessed as fair or unfair even when taken independently of the particular, individual actions. Regardless of the moral status of the individuals' actions, the combined outcomes that results from these actions not only reproduces existing social structures, but may also result in new social structures as well; moreover, without critically examining these emergent social structures *as structures*, and merely examining the moral status of individual actions, we remain unaware if these structures are just or unjust. As Young concludes, "Many other circumstances that we judge unjust are also the outcomes of the normal and accepted actions of millions of individuals, outcomes often not intended by them, even though after decades of repetition they can be predicted."[301]

Taken together, these four aspects of the social structure that Young describes, seek to capture the dynamic reality of social structures, as experienced and enacted by the individuals who participate and constitute these structures. They help Young emphasize her point about the need to focus our assessments and judgments of justice/injustice not exclusively on individual/discrete actions, but to focus as well on the structures of our societies. As we have seen, these social structures, and the positions that individuals occupy within them, have a direct relationship to their capabilities and opportunities for action. Some of these structures may be depriving some to the advantage of others, but we are unable to notice this until we make social structures the focus of our analysis. Young's observation has had an enduring influence, especially in political and social theory.

1.2 Structural injustice: developments in social theory and philosophy after Young

After the publication of *Responsibility for Justice*, philosophical interest in structural injustice has slowly grown, with much interest in the last decade. As Maeve McKeown points out in her recent comprehensive survey of the literature, much of the subsequent philosophical literature following Young has focused on the application of the concept of structural injustice to various injustices, such as gender inequality, colonialism, and the impact of climate change,[302] noting that these studies "take Young's conception for granted."[303] Outside political philosophy, there has been broad practical interest in structural injustice as well, especial as recent global and local events have brought to light injustices prevalent in

[301] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 64.

[302] McKeown, "Structural Injustice," 3.

[303] McKeown, "Structural Injustice," 3.

global and local social structures and institutions—the inequalities spotlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement are just two examples.[304]

This growing interest in structural injustice demonstrates how Young's articulation of structural injustice is compelling and resonates with so many experiences of injustice the world over. However, it is also undeniable that Young's conception of structural injustice and its accompanying conception of responsibility for such injustices (which she calls the "social connection model"[305]) is unfinished.[306] For my purposes, a more in-depth account of the relationship between agency and social structures seems necessary. Specifically, my purposes concern developing further the conceptual work in the capability approach on agency and its relationship to structural injustice, to better diagnose and evaluate structural injustices and understand constraints to agency, in view of the possibility of social change. As I discuss later, in the remaining chapters of this work, focusing on an account of agency its relationship to structural injustice allows us not only to better understand the nature of structural injustices in general, it also gives us a way of approaching a specific/particular situation of structural injustice, and understanding the possibilities of change within it.

However, where can we fund such an account? McKeown notes that only a handful of theorists comment on, much less contest and develop, the conception of social structure and structural injustice after Young.[307] She identifies just a handful of philosophers who have worked in this area—Ruth Faden and Madison Powers, Alasia Nuti, Sally Haslanger, and herself.[308]

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[304] See, for example: the University of Virginia School of Medicine ,"Statement on Structural Injustices in the COVID-19 Era,"accessed 12 March 2022, https://med.virginia.edu/biomedical-ethics/education/statement-on-structural-injustices-in-the-covid-19-era/; Anthony Barr and Ariel Gelrud Shiro, "The pandemic showed why social and structural determinants of health matter. Now it's time for policymakers to act." 18 February 2022, Brookings University, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/how-we-rise/2022/02/18/the-pandemic-showed-why-social-and-structural-determinants-of-health-matter-now-its-time-for-policymakers-to-act/; Andrea O'Reilly and Fiona Joy Green, eds., *Mothers, Mothering, and COVID-19: Dispatches from a Pandemic* (Ontario: Demeter Press, 2021); Micaela Sahhar, "How Black Lives Matter is Changing the Conversation on Palestine," *The Conversation,* 31 May 2021, https://theconversation.com/how-black-lives-matter-is-changing-the-conversation-on-palestine-161429.

[305] The social connection model of responsibility is an important element of Young's project in *Responsibility for Justice*. However, due to the limitations of this thesis project, I shall not discuss this further here.

[306] Understandably so, as it was published posthumously and, as David Alexander notes, she was still working on the manuscript until her death in 2006. See Note on the Text and Acknowledgements, *Responsibility for Justice,* v.

[307] McKeown, "Structural Injustice," 3-5.

[308] McKeown, "Structural Injustice," 3-4. Cf. Powers and Fadden, *Structural Injustice*; Alasia Nuti, *Injustice and the Reproduction of History: Structural Inequalities, Gender, and Redress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Maeve McKeown, *With Power Comes Responsibility* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, forthcoming 2024); Sally Haslanger, *Critical Theory and Practice: Spinoza Lectures* (Amsterdam: Department of Philosophy, University of Amsterdam, 2017).

For my purposes in this thesis, I have chosen to focus on the work of Haslanger, particularly her formulation of structural injustice and her theory of social structure. Why so? Primarily, it is because of how Haslanger's work is more explicitly oriented towards the purposes of this thesis: that is, understanding and articulating for the capability approach a concept of structural injustice, social structures and their relationship to agency, and how this can be used for analysing situations of injustice and eventually working towards social change, i.e. reducing injustice/increasing justice. As McKeown points out, "Haslanger delves deeper into what a social structure actually is and how it can be critiqued."[309]

This is in contrast to the work of Faden and Powers, who, according to McKeown, propose a theory of structural justice, which consists of ensuring that the core well-being needs of all people are met.[310] Powers and Faden, both bioethicists, describe their approach as broadly "teleological" and Aristotelian, with human well-being as its telos.[311] To achieve this end, they establish what they consider the six "Core Elements" of human well-being, through a process of what they describe as Socratic reflection.[312] On the one hand, this is a familiar realm for the capability approach, whether those working on its theory or its practice, resonating greatly with the work of Martha Nussbaum in particular;[313] shouldn't this be a good direction for my own project?

However, this is precisely the kind of approach to justice my project is trying to articulate an alternative to: for all its practical applications as demonstrated, it still begins from some conception of what "human well-being" ought to look like, and then work out how to get to this point of justice.

Faden and Powers devote their whole Chapter 7 to discussing various examples of their theory as applied to various situations of poverty, from Appalachia to the global phenomenon of segregated cities and urban slums,[314] but nonetheless return to the six "Core Elements" they establish, how these elements are negatively affected by the various situations of poverty they discuss, and how we ought to work towards well-being as defined according to these core elements.

This is still quite removed from the "comparative approach to justice" that Sen describes in *The Idea of Justice*, which, as he describes it, does not have pre-established categories or conceptions of what human well-being ought to be. As McKeown puts it, Powers and Faden's work "is less a book on structural *in*justice and more a book on structural *justice*, conceived of

[309] McKeown, "Structural Injustice," 4.

[310] McKeown, "Structural Injustice," 4.

[311] Powers and Faden, *Structural Injustice*, 20-22.

[312] Powers and Faden, *Structural Injustice*, 27-53.

[313] A similarity that they note themselves in Powers and Faden, *Structural Injustice*, 21.

[314] Powers and Faden, *Structural Injustice*, 187-232.

in terms of well-being and human rights, with states bearing primary responsibility to secure it."[315]

In comparison, Haslanger's work makes no claims to what human well-being consists of, or what it ought to be, and instead focuses on understanding specific contexts of injustice through a social-structural explanation, in view of activism and change (a position that has much resonance with Sen's comparative approach to justice, and whose resonance I will return to in the next chapter). In *Resisting Reality,* a collection of previously published essays, she begins with interrogating concepts of gender and race from various fields of analytic philosophy. Gender and race here are used as specific examples of injustices arising from social construction,[316] on which Haslanger applies her particular approach of "ideology critique,"[317] which she understands as falling under the broader umbrella of critical theory. In turn, critical theory, she explains, "[does] not begin by asking what justice is…and attempt to provide a universal account of justice. Often a universal account of justice isn't necessary to improve the situation."[318] This understanding of critical theory and the role of the theorist in articulating the social structures—or ideologies (more on this later, in section 3)—underpinning specific contexts of injustice resonates through all her work that I shall discuss in this thesis.

For my purposes, I have also ruled out Nuti's and McKeown's work on structural injustice, but not because they don't have compelling arguments. Rather, as they focus on refining further the concept of structural injustice into more specific classifications or qualifications, albeit in different directions, their works are complementary to, but do not directly address, my primary concerns in this thesis, that is, the relationships between agency and social structure in contexts of structural injustice.

Nuti's work, *Injustice and the Reproduction of History: Structural Inequalities, Gender, and Redress*, argues that we ought to contextualise structural injustices in relation to historical injustice. Reflecting on the situation of women in formally egalitarian societies, she reflects on how these societies continue to reproduce the historical injustices into the present, despite historical change.[319] She develop's Young's conception of structural injustice by connecting it to a structural view of history and historical injustice, drawing from the work of Reinhart Koselleck, developing a category of injustices which she calls 'historical-structural injustices.'[320] She then uses this category as the basis for presenting an account of structural groups, which develops further the conception of structural groups that Young initially proposes—which in

[315] McKeown, "Structural Injustice,"4.

[316] Sally Haslanger, "Introduction," in *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4-12.

[317] Haslanger, "Introduction," 17-22.

[318] Haslanger, "Introduction," 22-23.

[319] Nuti, 1-6.

[320] Nuti, 7-12.

turn, Nuti asserts, provides fruitful alternatives for conceiving of redress for historical injustices.[321]

McKeown's forthcoming book, *With Power Comes Responsibility: The Politics of Structural Injustice*, based on her PhD research,[322] argues for further distinction within the category of structural injustice, identifying three types of structural injustices on the basis of power: 'pure structural injustice,' referring to injustices resulting from the combination of individual agents' nonblameworthy actions, where there is no identifiable perpetrator; 'avoidable structural injustice,' "where there are powerful agents with the capacity to change unjust structures [but] fail to do so;" and finally 'deliberate structural injustice' in which powerful agents "deliberately perpetuate unjust background conditions for their own gain."[323]

2. Haslanger on social structure and injustice

This brings us to Haslanger's work on social structure and structural injustice. Haslanger presents a structural account of society in order to clarify what we mean by structural injustice and, in turn, clarify the relationship between individual agents and society.[324] Drawing from her training in analytic metaphysics, social ontology and epistemology, and philosophy of language on the one hand, and from her deep interest in feminist and critical race theory on the other,[325] Haslanger develops an account of social structure that addresses what she sees as deficiencies in contemporary discussions of injustice and social justice.

She responds, on the one hand, to what she considers an overly individualistic account of sexism and racism in social epistemology,[326] as well as to what she considers contentious areas of contemporary critical theory,[327] to further support and develop a structural and materialist account of social injustice. To do this, she draws from contemporary social science (sociology, psychology, and social history) for an account of social structures and their relationship to agents, which I endeavour to briefly outline below, in subsections 2.1 and 2.2.

I think it's important to highlight before I proceed her commitment to both a *non-individualist* and *material* account of structural injustice—a stance that I think is able to move past the recognition versus redistribution debate that has dominated much of contemporary

[321] Nuti, 7-12.

[322] Maeve McKeown, Responsibility Without Guilt: A Youngian Approach to Responsibility for Global Injustice, PhD Thesis, University College London School of Public Policy, October 2014, https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1463742/3/McKeown%20Thesis%20(FINAL%2016.03.15).pdf, accessed Jan 2020.

[323] McKeown, "Structural Injustice," 4-5.

[324] Sally Haslanger, "What is a (Social) Structural Explanation?" *Philosophical Studies* 173 no.1 (2016), published online 9 January 2015: 113-114, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-014-0434-5.

[325] Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 7.

[326] Sally Haslanger, "Distinguished Lecture: Social Structure, Narrative, and Explanation," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 45 no.1 (2015): 1-3, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2015.1019176.

[327] Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 8 and 11-16.

critical theory in the last 20 years[328] as well as avoiding the extremes of individualist and institutionalist explanations of injustice.[329]

One of the overly individualistic accounts she refers to is the burgeoning literature on implicit bias. The notion of implicit bias, i.e. of unconscious attitudes that individuals have because of particular sex or racial stereotypes, Haslanger asserts, is not itself the problem (though it is a contested concept within the literature).[330] Her concern is that the literature has tended to focus on implicit bias as the *sole* explanation for persistent injustice—a tendency that, in her account, is not only too individualistic, but also minimizes the other requirements for addressing persistent injustice and effecting durable change.[331]

On the other hand, the contentious areas of critical theory she seeks to address are the areas of critical theory that have a tendency towards essentialization and determinism—whether of the economic kind or cultural kind. Concerning economic determinism, Haslanger points out, that popular interpretation of Marxist materialism is that all social phenomena are ultimately attributable to economic causes.[332] She notes that Marx's writings can seem to support this perspective, citing for example the following passage:

> The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.[333]

Conversely, critical theory has also been criticized as explaining social phenomena solely as the result of socialization and habituation—that "we enact social structures simply out of habit formed through a process of socialization."[334]

We see how Haslanger tries to address and avoid determinism in her development of the concept of ideology,[335] which resists reducing ideology to merely an individual's "false consciousness" on the one hand, or to social or group forces that completely subsume the individual. Nonetheless, Hanslanger maintains a grounding in a practical acknowledgment of

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[328] Perhaps its most well-known articulation is Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Politico-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003).

[329] Haslanger, "Oppressions: Racial and Other," *Resisting Reality*, 317-320.

[330] Haslanger, "Distinguished Lecture," 1-2 and 12 (Note 1).

[331] Haslanger, "Distinguished Lecture," 1-2 and 3-8.

[332] Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 13.

[333] Karl Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1859/1977). Quoted in Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 13.

[334] Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 16.

[335] Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 12-26. See also Haslanger, "Reproducing Social Hierarchy (or Not!)" *Philosophy of Education* 77 no.2 (2021): 185-222, http://doi.org/10.47925/77.2.185.

materiality, an acknowledgement of how power always "lands on the body," adapting this phrasing from African-American writer Ta-Nehesi Coates.[336]

2.1 Societies: resources, schemas, practices, and structures

Haslanger draws from sociology, particularly from the work of William Sewell (who, in turn, draws from Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu), in her account of social structures, which I shall attempt to summarise here.[337] In my understanding, what drew her to Sewell's work in particular is how he portrays the relationship between individual agents and social structures. Haslanger often quotes the following passage from Sewell, which is a good starting point for this discussion: "Structures shape people's practices, but it is also people's practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures. In this view of things, human agency and structure, far from being *opposed*, in fact *presuppose* each other."[338]

In her account, *social structures* result from *social practices*, which are in turn the results of following shared *schemas* (or what Haslanger later calls *cultural technē*) or patterns of behaviors relating to *resources*.[339] To understand social practices therefore, we must first understand how they are shaped by schemas and resources.

Schemas or *cultural technē,* for Haslanger, are "intersubjective patterns of perception, thought, and behaviour…embodied in individuals as a shared cluster of open-ended dispositions to see things a certain way or to respond habitually in particular circumstances."[340] These schemas can be quite local to a particular social group, or can be common to broader societies, but nonetheless share the same general features. While these schemas are cultural, they are also individually instantiated—there is a continual interaction between our individual schemas (our individual semiotic frames) and the culture around us. An example that Haslanger offers to illustrate this is the schema of the family—there is a certain range of behaviours, activities, and attitudes that are associated with a family that we tend to assume and take for granted as broadly understood. There's a certain degree of shared understanding—what Haslanger variously calls "shared meanings" or "social meanings"—of

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[336] Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015); quoted in Haslanger, "Systemic, Structural, and Institutional Injustice: What's the Difference?"

[337] The influence of her account of social structure is quite wide ranging, with implications as well for social ontology and social epistemology, but for my purposes I have chosen to focus on the points most salient to my work, which are the implications of her account to social theory and particularly to critical theory.

[338] William H. Sewell Jr., "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, Transformation," *American Journal of Sociology* 98 no.1 (Jul 1992): 4. See also Haslanger, "How to Change a Social Structure," unpublished manuscript, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/laws/sites/laws/files/haslanger_how_to_change_a_social_structure_ucl.pdf, accessed 8 Mar 2022, 5 and Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 414, 462.

[339] Sally Haslanger, "What is a Social Practice?" *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 82 (2018): 231-232, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000085. See also Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 20, 413-418, 462-464.

[340] Sally Haslanger, "'But Mom, Crop Tops *Are* Cute!' Social Knowledge, Social Structure, and Ideology Critique," *Resisting Reality*, 415.

what people in families ought to do (e.g. care for each other, fulfil parental responsibilities to children) and ought not to do (e.g. abandon children and hurt them). At the same time, particular individuals can have their own instantiations of these schemas (e.g. as a mother, I consider it is my maternal responsibility to show my daughter that women and men both ought to handle housework, in contrast to the norm in my social group, where housework is considered a 'feminine' activity).

To take the example further, it's important to notice how the behaviours, activities, and attitudes of being part of a family have much to do with how people manage not only themselves and their mental states, but also include the world around them—the physical world that allows us to feed and clothe our families, to be sure, but also the sets of objects that we associate with families, the systems of knowledge related to family life, and so on. These are what Haslanger refers to as *resources*, which is a concept she borrows again from Sewell (who, in turn, adapts it from Giddens). Resources account for the materiality of social structures,[341] but also include non-material things such as knowledge and status—in short, a resource is *anything that is of value* to people (whether positively or negatively), the use of which requires the coordination among people.[342]

Moreover, cultural technē and resources have a "looping" relationship with each other—that is, they sustain each other, and this allows them to remain stable and adaptive over time.[343] This means that schema and resource mutually influence each other: the kinds of resources that we value and that are available to us influence the norms of our culture, and conversely the norms of our culture influence how we value the resources at hand. To return to the example of the schema of a family, we can see how it can influence the way we relate to resources in the world—for example, how I now consider the suitability of a house in terms of how it accommodates children, its proximity to good schools, etc. Conversely, changing resources in the world can modify my schema of the family—for instance, more recent medical and psychological knowledge about early childhood development has changed how my generation of parents perceive the value of early childhood education and preschool, compared to my grandparents' generation.

Thus, taken together, schemas and resources form social practices, as Haslanger summarises:

> Social practices are patterns of learned behaviour that enable us (in the primary instances) to coordinate as members of a group in creating, distributing, managing, maintaining, and eliminating a resource (or multiple resources), due to mutual responsiveness to each

[341] Haslanger, "But Mom, Crop Tops *Are* Cute," 415.

[342] Haslanger discusses this in various essays, but a good summary can be found in "How to Change a Social Structure."

[343] Haslanger, "How to Change a Social Structure," 7. See also Haslanger, "Distinguished Lecture," 8-9; and "What is a Social Practice," 237-240.

other's behaviour and the resource(s) in question, as interpreted through shared meanings/cultural schemas.[344]

Now that we have an account of social practices, returning to the beginning of this subsection, Haslanger asserts, following Sewell, that social practices are what result in social structures. How so? Social structures, though they do, in a sense, have some sense of materiality, are also, as she points out, "in an important sense, the product of coordinated behaviour."[345] Social practices are what establish socially-accepted roles and relations (i.e. categories of people and the roles they fulfil within these practices, to ease coordination).[346] Power comes into play in these roles and relations—which Haslanger later refers to as *nodes*[347]—as well, as certain roles are more/less powerful in relation to other roles within this framework or network. This network of roles and the different relations (including relations of power) between these roles *qua* roles is a *social structure.* Returning again to the example of the family: the family is a social structure, composed of different roles or positions, of differing power relations (e.g. parent, child), whose roles are pre-established, in a sense, by the schemas and meaningful resources for family life that we have received through culture. As she writes, "As I see it, practices are particular patterns of behaviour…that occur as parts of social systems... Structures are, in a sense, the skeleton that connects different practices and the social relations they instantiate in a social body."[348]

What is the value of understanding social structures? For Haslanger, this is ultimately in the service of critical social theory—a critical examination of the workings of contemporary social structures, in view of social change towards less injustice/greater justice. Particular societies can be understood as social structure/s instantiated in a specific material, geographical context, and in doing so, we are in a better position to understand how particular unjust structures are reproduced by our own actions, often without our own awareness or intention. This is a point that I will return to later in subsection 3.4, the possibility of individual agents changing social structures; but to do that, it is important to first understand the relationship between individual agents and social structures within Haslanger's work.

2.2 The individual vis-à-vis social structure

One criticism often aimed at social-structural or sociological explanations is these seem to rob individuals of their agency, that individual's actions and lives are determined by social forces beyond their control, whether by economic structures or by the culture into which we

[344] Haslanger, "What is a Social Practice," 245. *Emphasis from the original.*

[345] Haslanger, "What is a Social Practice," 246.

[346] Haslanger, "How to Change a Social Structure," 8-9. See also Haslanger, "Systemic, Structural, and Institutional Injustice: What's the Difference?" where Haslanger draws particularly from Cailin O'Connor, *The Origins of Unfairness: Social Categories and Cultural Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[347] Haslanger, "How to Change a Social Structure," 3.

[348] Ibid., 2.

are born and socialized. However, Haslanger's account challenges this accusation of determinism; again, drawing from Sewell and from the social theory literature more broadly—articulating an account of individual agents' relation to social structures that highlights how social structures are the source of *both* limitation *and* agency.

Returning to the previous description of the social structure as the network of roles and relations, that are established by the looping relationship between the schema/cultural technē and the resources that we value, a particular individual can be understood as occupying a particular position within that network, or what Haslanger calls a *node* within the social structure. As a node in the structure, an agent is both constrained *and* enabled by the cultural technē, insofar as the cultural technē gives us a repertoire or set of tools with which to interact with the world. Haslanger's choice of the words "technē" and "tool" here are deliberate,[349] intended to evoke how we use tools to help us in doing. As she writes, "In each case, the lessons learned from [one culture] may help improve the other. It is the characteristic of tools that they can be repurposed: a screwdriver can be used to open a paint can. The same is true of a culture. Practices I engage in and meanings I employ in one context can transform another."[350]

While it is true that individuals often experience culture as constraining, culture also provides the milieu—the space—in which action is possible. Individual agency does not occur in a vacuum, it only exists within a specific context, a specific place and time; resistance movements can only be such if they have something to resist against. As Haslanger explains,

> Culture also creates pathways and networks for action…. In effect, social practices and structures create a topography upon which specific causal factors interact to produce probabilistic effects. Cultural scripts and narratives create valleys along which agency easily flows. Although it may be easier to flow in the valley, we have choices between valleys or to climb peaks instead.[351]

Conversely, social structures in turn are only perpetuated in and through agency; without agency, social structures would fade away, with particular cultural technēs and modes of relating to resources lost to history.

This understanding of the mutual, looping relationship between individual agency and social structures is particularly of value, Haslanger asserts, to the critical theorist, in understanding, explaining, and critiquing unjust societies and social arrangements. It is crucial in explaining and understanding "how, without being coerced, we come to enact oppressive

[349] Haslanger here is drawing from the work of sociologist Ann Swidler, who describes culture as a tool kit ("Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986), 272), and the work of social and legal scholar J.M. Balkin, famous for describing ideology as "cultural software" and his pioneering work on memes (*Cultural Software: A Theory of Ideology* [New Haven: Yale UP, 1998], 19). See Haslanger, "What is a Social Practice," 241-242.

[350] Haslanger, "What is a Social Practice," 242.

[351] Haslanger, "What is a Social Practice," 242.

structures." As she continues, "Surely, most of us are not knowingly and intentionally dominating others or allowing ourselves to be dominated."[352]

This relationship is equally crucial in understanding the possibility of social structural *change*. It is clear that many social structures have changed, in the course of history, to be less unjust and more just—and in many cases, is has been in and through the agency of individual people, and the movements that they began, that these changes have occurred. The loop between agency and social structure has been so often ignored in modern and contemporary political philosophy—especially in liberal approaches to justice, which have focused simply on individual preferences and the legislation of justice at the level of the state. I shall return to this point in more depth below in section 2.3.

To illustrate this looping relationship, let us return to the example of the social structure of the family, particularly the roles and responsibilities mothers and daughters have within it, and the equality of the roles between women and men in families. It is not simply enough that women were legislated the right to be more than the property of their husbands or fathers, the right to vote, and the right to have their own income, for change to occur. The cultural technē of what daughters and mothers ought/ought not to do in the family had to change, as well—and, as I and many others including Haslanger would argue, it still has not changed enough. As Haslanger writes, "A rather straightforward example is the division of labor in the household, i.e., women's 'second shift'; even those who are conscientiously egalitarian in their politics live in ways that burden women with housework, childcare, eldercare, care of the sick and disabled that far exceeds their fair share…Why do we continue to live these ways?"[353]

Thus, from Haslanger we can conclude that the looping relationship between a specific cultural technē and specific resources is constitutive of social structures. The looping relationship is also echoed in the relationship between the agent and the social structure—they are mutually constitutive. At the same time, it's important to highlight how, for Haslanger, this structural analysis is not the complete picture of a particular social context; as she notes in "How to Change a Social Structure," a social structure is a more abstracted view of a particular social system. To return to the example of the family, we can say the *social structure* of the family is shared and instantiated by the *social systems* of many particular families; I can view myself in terms of the node/relational position I occupy within my family (i.e. I am a daughter, a spouse, a mother), and recognize how this relation can be instantiated by other individuals, in their own families, in ways similar-yet-different from my own instantiation of the position. As Haslanger writes, "We can then distinguish the individual in a system (me), from the position within the structure (parent, spouse)."[354]

[352] Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 12.

[353] Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 5-6.

[354] Haslanger, "How to Change a Social Structure," 3.

2.3 The durability of social structure

As I mentioned above, for Haslanger, her account of the looping relationship between the individual and social structure (and its accompanying social practices) is a better account/description, one that is more faithful to/does better justice to the realities of individuals' experiences vis-à-vis social structures, and by extension, of contemporary injustice. While I will get into the discussion on contemporary social injustices as structural injustices in the succeeding section in more depth, I will end here with a summary of how Haslanger's account also accounts for the durability of social structures. This account is crucial in understanding as well the relationship between agency and structural injustice, as we shall also see in the succeeding section.

Haslanger focuses on three factors that she thinks are most relevant to understanding the durability of structures, namely: 1) the need to be incorporated into the community or the need for mutual intelligibility; 2) the distribution of value or the distribution of power; and 3) the material conditions or technology/apparatus that support practices.[355]

The first factor, the need for mutual intelligibility, has much to do with how individuals act in relation to others. This refers to the reality of how one's actions are always in a social milieu, and if one strays too far from the norms of that milieu, "one is either misrepresented or viewed as only a questionable member of the community,"[356] on the one hand, and how this recognition or intelligibility is also constitutive of one's identity. Haslanger further describes this phenomenon using the words of Bernard Williams, describing how we both seek "various structures [that] serve to build a self that will at once make sense of episodic feelings and thoughts—render the subject, as I have put it, steadier—and also relate the person to others in ways that will serve the purposes of co-operation and trust."[357] This desire to preserve the source of that mutual intelligibility—namely, the social practices that make up a particular social structure—and enable continued cooperation with others, is one factor of the durability of these social structures.

The second factor concerns the distribution of power, which arises from the distribution of value. "Power, on this account, is distributed throughout a social field and is crystalized in social relations," writes Haslanger, adding that "[this] distribution of power in practices is an important factor in their durability and the durability of the broader structure."[358] What does she mean by this? Here she refers to how, regardless of an individual's particular attitudes and beliefs, power is distributed according to the particular position or node they occupy in a structure, and the accompanying practices that specify that position. To enact one's position,

[355] Haslanger, "How to Change a Social Structure," 12-14.

[356] Haslanger, "How to Change a Social Structure," 12.

[357] Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2002), 200. Quoted in Haslanger, "How to Change a Social Structure," 12.

[358] Haslanger, "How to Change a Social Structure," 12-13.

one enacts these practices, and this in turn perpetuates the structure that the practice is a part of; by one's very participation, one perpetuates. Even though one can change the practices specific to that position, this change is often difficult as it can run into friction with other nodes, and practices that establish these nodes, which can often occupy positions of power superior or inferior to one's own—including practices and structures formalized in social institutions such as the law.

Let's illustrate this factor more concretely through the example, again, of the family. In my own family, one of the positions I occupy I the structure is that of a mother; I share the caregiving tasks for my child with the father of my child equitably—we try as much as we can to take an equal caregiving role. However, this runs against the broader norms and social practices in our specific middle-class, urban context in the Philippines, where the mother is still seen as the primary caregiver of her children; this is not only experienced on the more informal level (in my peer group, the stay-at-home-mothers who have stopped working full time to take care of their children outnumber the stay-at-home-fathers at a ratio of 5:1), but is also reinforced by Philippine family laws (for instance, fathers only get one week of paid paternity leave compared to 120 days of maternity leave). This places mothers who want to challenge these practices of "mother-ing" in a strange bind: as primary caregivers, they have some power advantage in terms of the authority they have over their children's bodies and managing care work and the household resources, yet they have a power disadvantage in terms of their ability to share the caregiving load with fathers. This places fathers who wish to take a fair share of care—or even become the primary caregiver—in a bind as well. [359]

For many, the advantages they have through the position of "mother" or "father" may outweigh the disadvantages; it is to their personal benefit that they maintain the practices and structures as well, without really being aware of how these choices have an impact on others who occupy a similar structure. As Haslanger asserts, "Occupying a position that provides one a disproportionate share of money, status/influence, health, knowledge, security, and such, allows one to have an asymmetric impact on others that helps maintain the structure and one's position in it."[360]

The third and final factor Haslanger identifies as contributing to the durability of social practices and social structures are the material conditions—including technology and apparatuses—that support social practices. She writes, "[It] is important to consider the technology or apparatus that provides material support for a practice… The apparatus for a

[359] And this is only for heterosexual parents who are legally married or recognised as partners by the state—the situation is far more complex with homosexual parents, or for parents who are unmarried, or parents whose marriage is annulled, etc., all the different particular individuals whose specificity does not comfortably fit the norm of the social position. To be fair, however, a recent law in the Philippines has recognised the particularity of single parents, and socio-cultural norms seem to be changing around parenthood as well.

[360] Haslanger, "How to Change a Social Structure," 13.

practice constrains and enables agency, and can shape what is feasible at a particular point in time."[361]

These conditions, though changeable, are nonetheless stabilizing. So much of our day-to-day activities are conditioned by these materials, technology, and/or apparatuses; thus, even if our social practices have begun to change, the ease of implementing these new practices, and thus changing the structure, also depends on whether the material conditions facilitate these new practices or not. To return again to the experiences of my own family, in our context in Metro Manila, there has been a slowly growing interest towards bike commuting for the middle class, and bike commuting with children onboard. However, the present infrastructure of the city makes this shift quite difficult and dangerous for parents especially—there are limited bike lanes, and many of these bike lanes are quite proximate to large freight truck routes, the drivers of which have limited range of vision. This in turn increases the risk for bikers, especially children, as it is more difficult for freight truck drivers to see bikes in comparison to cars. We have, instead, bought a car for our family's commute—a choice which in turn supports and perpetuates the car-centric infrastructure of our city.

Taken altogether, Haslanger's work presents to us an account of social structure that tries to avoid the pitfalls of economic and cultural essentialism on the one hand and individualism on the other, while nonetheless highlighting the dynamic process and relationships that connect individual agents with social structures. It describes how this connection is established through social practices, which in turn arise out of how particular groups of people value and allocate resources among themselves.

The multiple looping relationships that Haslanger describes—between resources and social practices, between social structures and social practices, between social structures and individuals—not only help us come to a better understanding of social structures *as experienced* and how they reproduce themselves, but *also* help us understand how injustices can be rooted in these structures. Inequalities can be rooted in social practices established long before the present, to regulate a group's access to varied resources ("things of value"). These practices have in turn led to present unjust social structures which particular people instantiate and act within, providing the "skeleton" for the particular unjust social systems ("the social body") that people live in today.[362] Thus, we now return again to the concept of structural injustice.

3. Conceiving structural injustice

As both Young and Haslanger have demonstrated, social structures are intimately linked to agents' possibilities and capabilities for action. Both are clear that what is involved in social

[361] Haslanger, "How to Change a Social Structure," 13.

[362] Haslanger, "How to Change a Social Structure," 4.

structures are the dynamic processes of the interplay between many individuals, between these individuals and their specific cultural and material context. Though they describe these social processes to a lesser (Young) or greater (Haslanger) degree, and with differing terms, they both draw from and expand the sociological literature to come up with a more realist account of these social processes. As they both describe it, structural injustice is a situation in which agents (whether individuals or groups), due to their particular position occupied in a social structure, are vulnerable to domination and oppression.

However, the discussion in this chapter so far has largely focused on understanding the "structural" part of the concept of structural injustice; in this section, I shall connect the foregoing discussion of the social structure to the "justice" part of the concept, through the lenses of Young and Haslanger. More specifically I will: 1) discuss how structure becomes related to broader contemporary strands of political and social theory, particularly in the wake of John Rawls; 2) discuss how the social justice issues of oppression and domination come to be viewed as structural; and 3) present how a structural account of injustice can help us gain a sense of the different "levers" for structural change.

3.1 From ideal theory to social critique, from "structure as the subject of justice" to structural injustice

In Young's work, her choice to focus on structural injustice is not only a natural outcome of her own women's and worker's rights activism beyond the academy[363] but also emerges as a response to the limitations of the dominant theory of justice at the end of the 20th century—the distributive paradigm of justice, as exemplified in the influential body of work of John Rawls.[364]

In Young's assessment, among the contemporary political philosophers, it is Rawls that first calls attention to the relationship between structures and justice/injustice, and opens the discussion for contemporary political philosophy. She describes her account of structural injustice as informed and inspired by his assertion that "structure is the subject of justice," a claim that she agrees with only insofar as she agrees that social structures condition the possibilities and the capabilities of agents for action.[365] This relationship between structure, or

[363] Her activism is chronicled most concisely in her obituary in the socialist magazine *Against the Current* (see Mechthild Nagel, "Iris M. Young, 1949-2006," *Against the Current: A Socialist Journal* 128, May/June 2007, https://againstthecurrent.org/atc128/p540/). However, Young herself discusses the influence of her activism on her philosophical thinking in many of her own writings. See the following for just three examples among others: Introduction to *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, reissued with a new foreword (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990/2011), 13-14, all citations refer to the reissue; "From Guilt to Solidarity: Sweatshops and Political Responsibility," *Dissent* Spring 2003: 39-44; "Responsibility and Global Justice: A Social Connection Model," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 23 no.1 2006: 102-130, http://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060043.

[364] See Iris Marion Young, "Displacing the Distributive Paradigm," *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 15-38; and "Structure as the Subject of Justice," *Responsibility for Justice*, 43-74.

[365] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 64.

what Rawls referred to as "the basic structure," and the concerns of social justice, can be found articulated in *A Theory of Justice*, where he writes:

> Our topic…is that of social justice. For us, the primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation… The basic structure is the primary subject of justice because its effects are so profound and present from the start. The intuitive notion here is that this structure contains various social positions and that men [sic] born into different positions have different expectations of life determined, in part, by the political system as well as by economic and social circumstances. In this way the institutions of society favor certain starting places over others.[366]

In this formulation from *A Theory of Justice,* Young points out that Rawls already suggests to us the importance of understanding the relationship between the individual agent and the social structure, and how an individual's position in the structure is often a source of injustice[367]—injustices that are 'profound and present from the start', to use Rawls's own turn of phrase. What exactly the notion of the basic structure is and what it consists of, however, continues to be contentious—not only within Rawls' work, but also in the literature of distributive theories of justice after Rawls.[368]

In his later work, Rawls seems to equate the basic structure to the institutions formalised in a state. For example, he describes the 'basic structure of society' as "the way in which the major social institutions fit into one system. These institutions assign fundamental rights and duties, and by working together they influence the division of advantages which arise through social cooperation."[369] In the same article, Rawls describes the possibility of creating "a workable and stable basic structure as a framework of social cooperation over a complete life," on the basis of his two principles of justice as fairness, and states: "that such a scheme can be set up is suggested by social experience, and by our reflecting on the historical development of democratic institutions, and the principles and possibilities of a constitutional design."[370] This statement may be read as leaving the concept of the basic structure open to non-formal social structures (i.e. what is suggested by our social experience), and not just formal institutions of states (i.e. the constitution of a state and its democratic institutions). This ambiguity is the basis

[366] Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 7.

[367] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 65.

[368] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 65-66. See also Serena Olsaretti, "Introduction: The Idea of Distributive Justice," in *The Oxford Handbook of Distributive Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1-9.

[369] John Rawls, "Social Unity and Primary Goods," in *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, eds. Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams (Cambridge and Paris: Cambridge University Press and Editions dela Maisons des Sciences de l'Homme, 1982), 162.

[370] Rawls, "Social Unity," 167.

of G.A. Cohen's and Liam Murphy's criticism of Rawls, whose work Young examines in relation to the development of the basic structure.[371]

Cohen takes issue with the basic structure because, in his interpretation, its ambiguity can be understood as implying that individual actions are irrelevant to structural injustice. How so? If the basic structure is the subject of justice, and it is understood as simply referring to the economic and legal institutions that operate in society, then it refers simply to the apparatus of the state; the realm of individual action is its own separate domain.[372] This seems to imply that, as long as each individual follows the rules of these institutions, justice shall prevail—even if individuals are selfish in their motivations for action and do not adhere to a "personal *ethos* of justice," an implication which Cohen finds problematic.[373] On the other hand, if the basic structure is understood as including non-formal, more convention-based relationships such as familial relationships—these conventions are usually "practices and conventions that people follow out of either commitment, habit, or a desire to conform."[374] Cohen finds this more favorable as, according to Young's interpretation of his work, this opens the subject of justice to these practices and conventions, and does not restrict it to merely the aforementioned formal institutions.[375]

Murphy uses Cohen's argument to support his proposal for 'moral monism,' versus what he calls Rawls's 'moral dualism,' which he argues is problematic because it applies the principles of justice only to institutions. For Murphy, applying the principles of justice only to institutions makes it easy for individuals to ignore the interests of justice. As he writes, "Any plausible over-all political/moral view must, at the fundamental level, evaluate the justice of institutions with normative principles that apply also to people's choices."[376] In Young's reading, Murphy argues that the shortcomings of Rawlsian moral dualism are easiest to see when applied to nonideal circumstances: "When some individuals suffer from injustice, then individuals, collectives, and institutions are all obliged to use any means available to promote justice. The primary duty is not to promote just institutions, but to promote the just outcomes that just institutions are supposedly for."[377]

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[371] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 64-66. She cites particularly G.A. Cohen, "Where the Action Is: On the Site of Distributive Justice," in *If You're an Egalitarian How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 134-147 and Liam Murphy, "Institutions and the Demands of Justice," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 27 no.4 (Autumn 1998): 251-291.

[372] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 67.

[373] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 67.

[374] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 68.

[375] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 68.

[376] Murphy, "Institutions and the Demands of Justice," 253. Quoted in Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 68.

[377] Young, *Responsibility for Justice,* 69.

At the heart of Rawls's insistence on the basic structure, in Young's reading, is the value of distinguishing between the level of social structure and the level of individual action for the purposes of understanding;[378] it is a recognition that society is not merely the aggregate result of all individual actions. The issue with Rawls's ambiguous definition—and which Cohen and Murphy sought to remedy (unsuccessfully, for Young)—was how it privileged the formal institutions of the state, designating them as *the* important or the more fundamental parts of society or social experience. Young thus frames her account of structural injustice as, to use her words and emphasis, *"a way of looking"* at the *whole* of society and its relations and processes.[379] This point of view—a structural point of view—allows us to examine the relationship of the individual to structure, including but not limited to the formal relations of citizen and state, while not simply reducing relationships outside formal state institutions to inter-personal relations. As Young explains:

> This ambiguity is unavoidable, I suggest, because Rawls thinks about structure in the wrong way. He, along with many of those who follow him, is looking for a *part* of the society, a small subset…that is more fundamental than other parts. If I have properly described social-structural processes…however, then this is a mistake… Social structures are not a part of the society; instead they [become] visible in a certain *way of looking*…one that sees patterns in relations among people and the positions they occupy relative to one another… we see how the actions of masses of people within a large number of institutions converge in their effects to produce such patterns and positioning.[380]

By taking a more process-oriented view on social structures, according to Young, we can retain Rawls's two "levels" of normative evaluation, and yet avoid the worries Cohen and Murphy bring up. By focusing on "structure as the subject of justice," we are not examining specific institutions in isolation—as in Cohen's and Murphy's interpretation—but rather the social-structural processes that are acting in and through these institutions, *but also* in and through individual's actions. Moreover, taking this process-oriented view allows us to examine how these processes, though the choices of both institutions and individuals, may be perpetuating inequalities. As Young writes,

> [We] need a point of view of moral judgment on the structure that is independent of the point of view of judgment on individual interactions… [U]nless institutions are explicitly organized to counteract [the status quo], making this distinction between evaluating the morality of individual interactions and evaluating the justice of patters of social positions produced by social processes does not imply, as Cohen and Murphy fear, that individual actors need not be concerned with issues of justice in their individual choices and interactions…it does mean, however, that as individuals we should evaluate our actions from two different irreducible points of view: the interactional and the institutional.[381]

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[378] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 69.

[379] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 70.

[380] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 70-71. *Emphasis in original.*

[381] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 72-73.

This emphasis on taking the two irreducible perspectives of individual action *and* social-structural processes that Young articulates takes us from a Rawlsian "structure as the subject of justice" towards the contemporary concept of structural injustice. It is an explicit move away from an ideal approach to justice—the application of Rawls's two principles of justice on the institutions of a just state—into an approach that *begins with* the realities of inequality and social processes. By doing so, Young's approach to justice sheds light on an area of inequality that is often ignored by Rawls and distributive theorists of justice after him.

In this sense, structure is no longer just the subject of justice; rather, structure itself is a site of injustice—*structural injustice.* The realities of day-to-day experiences of inequality are not typically caused by deliberately unfair individual actions *nor* by deliberately unequal actions taken by the state. So much of people's ordinary, day-to-day experiences of injustice are deeply *social* in nature—for instance, the social roles they find themselves in, or stereotyped into, because of their gender or ethnic background or other social-economic position they occupy—experiences that contemporary social movements have highlighted (whether from the 1960s civil rights' movement in the US, to more contemporary movements of marginalised groups such as people with disability, indigenous peoples, and the anti-sweatshop movement).[382]

3.2 Social movements against structural, systemic, and institutional injustice

Young's observation that the level of the social has been passed over and ignored by legal, moral and political theories of justice harkens back to her earlier work in political theory, notably *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. There, she explicitly articulates how her approach to questions of justice/injustice is rooted in the "new social movements" that began emerging at the end of the 20th century, writing that "[these] movements all claim in varying ways that American society contains deep institutional injustices. But they find little kinship with contemporary philosophical theories of justice."[383] By examining and articulating the internal assumptions of these social movements, she asserts that an account of injustice emerges—accounts of various forms of social domination and oppression—that had at the time been ignored by the dominant paradigm of distributive justice theories and their mistaken or incomplete social ontologies.[384]

This sense of theories of justice overlooking or ignoring the dimension of social processes and systems is echoed in *Responsibility for Justice,* particularly in the chapters devoted to developing a concept of responsibility for structural injustice. Young notes that the kinds of legal and moral frameworks available for evaluating responsibility for injustice seem to only focus on responsibility for individual actions *or* for the concerted actions of groups (as in the case, for example, for determining criminal and civil liabilities of corporations). But when we

[382] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 125-134. This discussion of the anti-sweatshop movement ties in also with Young's earlier work on justice, particularly her book *Justice and the Politics of Difference,* 6-7.

[383] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 7.

[384] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 25.

are faced with injustices whose causes are diffused across social processes and structures, without any specific causal agent (whether individual, group, or state), we have no such established and accepted legal or moral frameworks.[385]

These social-structural processes that Young seeks to cast into our view also come up for Haslanger. Like Young, Haslanger's objective for emphasizing social structures is to highlight a lacuna in theories of justice, which have largely emphasized individual actions or the actions of the state in order to address injustice. There seems to be a jump, so to speak, from understanding injustice on the level of individuals to injustice on the level of formal institutions. The insufficient social ontology that Young calls attention to is thus addressed through Haslanger's rigorous account of social structures, and how these are the results of social practices resulting from the interaction of resources and the cultural technē, is a way of filling this lacuna.

Haslanger takes the project of articulating the area of the social further into differentiating structural injustice from systemic and institutional injustice, terms that seem interchangeable in everyday language. Following her account, structural injustice refers specifically to the injustice that is attributable to the social structural process described in earlier in section 2. Since, for Haslanger, the social structure refers to the network of relations between the positions (or nodes) occupied by individuals, constituted by particular social practices of organizing people around resources, which come to light when we take a structural point of view.

Structural injustice therefore refers to how this network of relations between nodes is the root cause of people's experiences of injustice—i.e. experiences of disadvantage, domination, and oppression. These networks of relations, when instantiated and embodied in a specific context and particular relations, are what we call social systems; *systemic injustice* is therefore the specific instantiation and embodiment of an unjust structure. As Haslanger writes, "structures are networks of interdependent relations instantiated in different systems. Structures are, in a sense, the skeleton that connects different practices and the social relations they instantiate in a social body."[386] What of institutional injustice? Social institutions are a particular kind of social system—a formalized, designed social system. Thus, *institutional injustice* refers to domination and oppression experienced in formalized ways, i.e. through laws or explicitly-stated rules.[387]

To return again to the example of the family introduced in Section 2, we can speak of the social structure of the family (the roles and power relations of mother, father, child),

[385] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 95-104, and 142-151. She also raises similar points in the following: "Responsibility, Social Connection, and Global Labor Justice," in *Global Challenges: War, Self-Determination and Responsibility for Justice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 159-186; "Responsibility and Global Justice: A Social Connection Model;" and "From Guilt to Solidarity: Sweatshops and Political Responsibility."

[386] Haslanger, "How to Change a Social Structure," 4.

[387] Haslanger, "Systemic, Structural, and Institutional Injustice."

specifically instantiated in the social system of my own particular family (myself, my husband, our daughter), which in turn interacts with the institutions that relate to family life in our context—for example, the Philippine state's mechanisms for registering births, deaths, and marriages, the Family Code of Philippine law, etc. Injustice can (and does) happen, in and through these social-structural processes. But what are the injustices that can (and do) occur in the midst of these social-structural processes that individuals perpetuate by their participation in these processes? What remains, then, for this discussion is to restate and further articulate what is meant by "injustice" when both Young and Haslanger use the term "structural injustice."

3.3 Structural Injustice, Oppression, and the Dangers of Essentialization

At the beginning of this chapter, we referred to Young's most influential definition of structural injustice:

> Structural injustice, then, exists when social processes put large groups of persons under systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities, at the same time that these processes enable others to dominate or to have a wide range of opportunities for developing and exercising capacities available to them.[388]

Aside from the key terms of *domination* and *deprivation of capacities* in this definition, and Young's in-depth discussion of the example of housing deprivation in the United States, she does not provide any further definition of what constitutes *injustice* in this text—something that has been criticised as a weakness in her work.[389] However, this criticism demonstrates a very shallow understanding of Young's overall philosophical project, particularly of her most influential work, the "Five Faces of Oppression," as well "The Distributive Paradigm," her critique of distributive justice, which have been published as part of a more comprehensive monograph cited in the previous section, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Thus, to deepen our understanding of what *constitutes injustice* in Young's work, a brief discussion of these two texts is warranted.

Perhaps "constitutes" is not the precise word to use to describe Young's use of the word "injustice." As I previously discussed in section 3.2, she begins with a specific reality of injustice on the ground, and then makes explicit the implicit assumptions driving contemporary social justice movements struggling against that injustice. In "The Distributive Paradigm," she squares these movements with the distributive paradigm of justice and its attempts to accommodate their demands within their broader normative definition of justice as redistribution. In her assessment, the use of distributive justice to explain and justify the demands of these social movements—e.g. demands to end discrimination against women, racial minorities, and people

[388] Haslanger, "Systemic, Structural, and Institutional Injustice." *Emphasis mine.*

[389] McKeown, "Structural Injustice," 5.

with disabilities—is an overextension of the principle of distribution, which initially referred to economic resources.[390]

Young asserts that the demands of social movements are not demands for a better distribution of rights or distribution of power; rather, they are demands to end people's concrete experiences of having no power to assert themselves against the discrimination that they experience, or no recourse to processes of complaint or restitution.[391] These demands, Young concludes, are therefore not a matter of distribution, but rather a matter of social-structural processes.[392] Social-structural processes are unjust if people in a particular context experience *domination* (social systems or structures that block agents' self-determination, such as in the case of indigenous peoples whose land rights are not recognized by the legal system) or *oppression* (social systems or structures that block agents' self-development, such as the caste system that prevents *dalit* from accessing education), or both. As she explains,

> Oppression consists in systematic institutional processes which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings…Domination consists in institutional conditions which inhibit or prevent people from participating in determining their actions or the conditions of their actions…[structures in which] other persons or groups can determine without reciprocation the conditions of their action, either directly or by virtue of the structural consequences of their actions.[393]

Notice how Young's language here is clearly related to the language she uses in *Responsibility for Justice* when defining structural injustice as we noted above—domination and deprivation of capacities. This link is further affirmed at the very beginning of "Five Faces of Oppression," where she develops the connection of injustice and social structural processes. She asserts:

> Justice should refer not only to distribution, but also to the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation….injustice refers primarily to two forms of disabling constraints, oppression and domination.[394]

For the purposes of this work, going into the five faces of oppression that Young identifies is less important; what is more important is the connection she makes in the text between

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[390] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 24-30.

[391] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 30-31.

[392] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 32.

[393] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 38. It's also helpful to note here that Young uses "social structures," "social systems," and "social institutions," more or less interchangeably, versus Haslanger for whom these terms are more differentiated and refer to different phenomena. In my work, I have chosen to use the term "structure" more specifically, instead of the more flexible concept of "institutions," because it better captures the perception that agents can have of the fixed and seemingly unchangeable nature of social structures, despite how they are not fixed and are just the results of social processes. See also the end of section 2.3 in this chapter for my discussion of Haslanger's distinctions.

[394] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 39.

oppression and social structures. The oppression that she seeks to highlight is not the oppression inflicted by tyrants over those they rule, but rather the oppression that is, in her words, "embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols,"[395] which continue to persist, systematically reproduced regardless of who are in positions of political power and regardless of any new legislation. As with the rest of this book, she arrives at these assertions on the basis of the experiences of the 'new left social movements' that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, which called attention to the oppression of particular social groups (for instance, African Americans). Moreover, she asserts that, as a result of these systemic oppressions, it is necessary to develop a social ontology that better accounts for the injustices these groups experience.[396]

Haslanger agrees with the link that Young makes between injustice, oppression, and social structure in "Five Faces of Oppression," but is wary of the focus that Young places on social groups as the locus of experiences of oppression. In her estimation, Young focuses on groups without clarifying the nature of these groups; Haslanger is concerned that this can easily lead to essentialising groups.[397] Thus, in "Oppressions: Racial and Other," she seeks to avoid this essentialisation, while nonetheless articulating the social structural processes of oppression and developing a social ontology that accounts for these injustices.

She seems to echo Young in her effort to distinguish individual oppression (such as that of the tyrant) and social-structural oppression, writing that "the oppression is not an individual wrong but a social/political wrong: that is, it is a problem lying in our collective arrangements, and injustice in our practices or institutions."[398] However, Haslanger is also careful to emphasize how simple categorisation of belonging to a singular oppressed group, as the sole source of oppression, is difficult and dangerous—especially since individuals are always members of multiple, overlapping groups, it is not easy to single out their membership to one particular group as the root cause of their experience of oppression, as the intersectional feminist movement has pointed out.[399] Nor are all social groups self-aware and self-constituted; some groups, she points out, can be formed as a result of social structures imposed on them, for instance the distinction created in a company between salaried employees and temporary contractual workers.[400]

How then can we better describe these types of structural oppressions such that we enrich our normative vocabulary of injustice, without relying on strictly defined and essentialised groups? Haslanger proposes that we integrate the looping relationship between

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[395] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 41.

[396] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 42-48.

[397] Haslanger, "Oppressions," 321-323.

[398] Haslanger, "Oppressions," 314.

[399] Haslanger, "Oppressions," 322.

[400] Haslanger, "Oppressions," 323-324.

individuals, groups, social processes, and specific contexts, into our social ontology of oppression. She proposes the following general truth claim, which I shall endeavour to rephrase in more ordinary language:

> [For any individual *x*], *x* is oppressed as an *F* [identified member of a group] by an institution *I* in context *C* iff $_{df}$*x* is an *F* in *C* and in *C*(∃*R*) ((being an *F* nonaccidentally correlates with being disadvantaged by standing in an unjust relation *R* to others) and *I* creates, perpetuates, or reinforces *R*.)[401]

In more ordinary language, what this claim describes is how certain disadvantaged power relations between particular groups and the rest of society are built into particular social contexts, whose institutions reinforce and perpetuate these disadvantages. However, the effects of the disadvantaged relationship, as they apply to, and are realized in, particular individuals seen to be members of that group, are mitigated by the other social positions these individuals also occupy at the same time. Nonetheless, their very participation in the social context does not change the structure—and can even contribute or reinforce the overall relationship of disadvantage.

Haslanger offers three examples to illustrate this point more concretely—examples concerning women, Black men, and gay men in the United States. However, I would like to focus on and develop further the first example she offers, as this is closest to my own particular experiences and personal concerns, despite not being from the United States. She offers for our consideration how "women are oppressed as women by cultural representations of women as sex objects…iff being a woman…nonaccidentally correlates with being subjected to systematic violence, and cultural representations of women as sex objects creates, perpetuates, or reinforces the systematic violence."[402]

As a woman in the Philippines, I am often reminded of how my sexed body is not just my own. It is viewed as an object of others' pleasure—for instance, through "rape prevention" public service announcements from the police, advising women to avoid wearing skimpy clothing and being alone in public places.[403] Statistics report that women in the Philippines have limited access to reproductive health care and elevated risks of gender-based violence.[404] There is also pressure for women to take care of their physical appearance—whether as part of their job (many workplaces still have dress codes that are more stringent for women than men),

[401] Haslanger, "Oppressions," 327.

[402] Haslanger, "Oppressions," 326.

[403] Agence France Presse, "Police in Angono Slammed for Anti-Rape Advice," Rappler.com, 18 July 2018, https://r3.rappler.com/nation/207637-angono-rizal-police-facebook-post-anti-rape-advice.

[404] Kristine Valerio and Anam Parvez Butt, *Intersecting Injustices: The Links Between Social Norms, Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Violence Against Women and Girls*, Oxfam, August 2020, http://doi.org/10.21201/2020.6836, https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/intersecting-injustices-the-links-between-social-norms-access-to-sexual-and-rep-621098/.

and/or also as part of remaining sexually attractive, lest their partners leave them for more attractive women.[405]

Yet, I, as a particular individual woman in the Philippines, have been largely spared from gender-based violence, discrimination, and the pressure to be physically attractive. In university, my friends would report regular experiences of sexual harassment on public transportation: catcalled in broad daylight, being stalked through the streets, being flashed men's private parts while stuck in a bus, being groped in a crowded commuter train—experiences that I never had, perhaps because I had scholarship that allowed me to live within walking distance of university buildings, unlike my friends who had to commute daily to and from their homes. In my professional life, I have not had to face the pressure to conform to stringent dress codes, nor have I had to conform to particular cultural standards of beauty in my personal relationships—perhaps because working as an academic is still considered a counter-cultural or non-mainstream way of life.

Does that mean, then, that the claim that women in the Philippines experience gender-based violence is invalid, because I, a woman in the Philippines, do not experience it? To quote Haslanger: "The practices in question are oppressive to all members of the group, but of course to different degrees and in different ways, depending on what other social positions they occupy."[406] One's wealth or location, or in my case, my unconventional choice of life-path, can easily insulate one from particular harm; but this does not negate the broader social structures that have made the harm possible in the first place. Nor does my ability to access birth control and protect myself from sexual harassment negate the social structures. In particular, my ability to access birth control—largely due to my financial independence and access to my husband's generous private health insurance—even reinforces and perpetuates the social structures and institutions that make birth control difficult to access for women in the Philippines, structures of financial dependence which in turn lead to limited access to private health insurance.

This rather long example serves to illustrate Haslanger's point that the relationships between individuals, groups, and the social-structural processes that constitutes their social contexts and relationships shape each other—and *structural injustice* is not simply isolated to a particular group or particular context, but rather borne and sustained in and through the social structures that all people live in, and live through. As she concludes,

> Cognitive and emotional...biases do not emerge out of nothing; both are products of the complex interplay between the individual and the social that has been a theme throughout this chapter. Our attitudes are shaped by what we see, and what we see, in

[405] There is even a common Filipino phrase, *balik-alindog*, used to refer to the need to maintain one's physical attractiveness. "*Balik-alindog program*" is common slang for diets, exercise plans, and aesthetic procedures; there's even a rock song entitled "Balik Alindog" by the band Giniling Festival, which satirizes and reverses the gender roles.

[406] Haslanger, "Oppressions," 326.

turn, depends on the institutional structures that shape our lives and the lives of those around us.[407]

The social processes that permeate our daily lives and interactions, structuring all dimensions of human interactions and relations, to the disadvantage of some and the advantage of others, depriving the disadvantaged of power and capability—these are what ought to be the subject of our attention, if we are concerned with the long-term and enduring reduction of injustice and promotion of justice.

4. Structural injustice, ideology, and finding levers for durable change

As we have seen in the previous discussions, both Young's and Haslanger's objective for emphasizing structural injustice is to highlight a lacuna in theories of justice, which have largely emphasized individual actions or the actions of the state in order to address injustice. To focus on those actions alone, says Haslanger, isn't enough for durable change.[408] The social structural processes which serve as the context in which these actions are possible must be addressed as well. While mainstream theories of distributive justice have developed much theory (which have in turn influenced policy) about agents who deliberately inflict injustice on others, whether these are individuals, groups, or even states, these don't address how ordinary individuals like ourselves are implicated in the continued perpetuation of injustice on the level of social structures—much less give us tools for understanding and analysing how these unjust social structures can be changed, and what role, if any, ordinary individuals have in effecting change.

At best, these distributive theories identify two normative domains or areas of action: that of the individual agent (or groups with some form of institutionally-recognized collective agency, such as corporations); or state-level action; there may also be a passing acknowledgment of non-state actors like NGOs or civil society/humanitarian groups. However, there is a whole world of social life that is excluded from these two domains, where so much day-to-day experience of injustice is lived out—in our informal and formal interactions with others, governed by often unacknowledged, implicit social practices and cultural assumptions that disadvantage some people over others. Both Young and Haslanger seek to focus our attention on this excluded area of human experience. But what is it that we overlook when this area is excluded from theories of justice?

4.1 From social ontology to social action: consciousness raising and other opportunities for action against structural injustice

What is excluded is how we are all participants in perpetuating—but also, and more importantly, *changing*—structures of injustice. As Haslanger writes, "it is important to capture

[407] Haslanger, "Oppressions," 335-336.

[408] Haslanger, "Oppressions," 317-320. See also Haslanger, "Distinguished Lecture," 1-2.

the sense in which all of us perpetuate unjust social structures by unthinkingly participating in them…to distinguish between those who abuse their power to harm others and those who are attempting to navigate as best they can the moral rapids of everyday life."[409] Having a better understanding of the inner workings of social structures, and how these result from social practices, helps us understand in turn the persistence of structural injustices, and how our actions continue to perpetuate specific cultural technēs or particular schemas of social meaning that, often unbeknownst to us, reinforce injustices.

She uses the term "ideology" pejoratively to refer specifically to these sorts of cultural technē which lead to and perpetuate structural injustice, distorting the relations between people and between people and the resources they value. As Haslanger explains, "an ideology is a cultural *technē* that organizes us (a) in relations of domination and subordination (either through the production and distribution of goods, or in the constitution of selves), or (b) to resources whose value is misconceived or not recognized."[410] Unlike some versions of the concept of ideology that define it as related to *doxa* (i.e. beliefs and attitudes), she contends that ideologies have a material impact and reality, stating that "Ideologies are public tools for coordination…that are inscribed in an apparatus and guide us in managing the background material conditions."[411] It is important to emphasize here how ideology in Haslanger's formulation is nonetheless *material* in its impact; she presents her work as a specification of a social mechanism that makes it possible for the false ideas of an ideology to shape people's concrete experiences, on the material realities that shape people's being in the world.[412] Ideology is not just on the level of belief.

Haslanger's proposed social ontology of social practices, cultural technē, and social structures (which I outlined in section 2 of this chapter) allows us to both analyse concrete situations of injustice (the descriptive level) and to see several different levers for enduring social-structural change (this is, in a sense, the normative level). By focusing our examination on structures, the practices that constitute these structures, and how the ideology behind these practices (mis)conceive and (mis)allocate valued resources, we can begin to move from the level of description to normative assessment and action. The materiality and the public nature of ideology in this account reveal that there are multiple levers or opportunities for action, even for ordinary individuals. On the flip side, an examination of ideology also reveals

[409] Haslanger, "Oppressions," 320.

[410] Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 23. *Emphasis from the original.* Haslanger does recognize that the term "ideology" is also used in a more value-neutral way, to simply identify or describe modes of thinking that support forms of social organization, but she also explicitly notes that she uses the term in its more pejorative and Marxian sense. See Haslanger, "Reproducing Social Hierarchy," 1; "Critical Theory and Practice," 12 (footnote 4); and "How to Change a Social Structure," 10 (footnote 12).

[411] Haslanger, "Reproducing Social Hierarchy," 186.

[412] I would also claim that her work is part of the 'new materialism' in conceiving of ideology, as the late Charles W. Mills described in "Ideology," from *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice,* eds. Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. (London: Routledge, 2017), 100.

how deeply internalized it is, and how it has a visceral impact, even on ordinary individuals, gives us a better sense of the extents we have to go to challenge ideology, and the urgency of such challenges. Haslanger continually recalls a passage from the work of African-American writer Ta-nehesi Coates about the reality of racial injustice in this regard:

> But all our phrasing—race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy—serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body.[413]

One area on which Haslanger demonstrates how an examination of ideology highlights the injustice of social structures and social practices is in what she calls *interpellation*, a concept she draws from Louis Althusser, which designates a "process of producing a social subject capable of legible agency."[414] One important aspect of Althusserian interpellation for Haslanger is the role of *ideological state apparatuses*, particularly the educational system, as instrumental in subjects' internalisation of ideology, through which individuals not only learn the roles they play according to the cultural technē, but also perform these roles and learn self-correction.[415]

Using the example of race relations in the United States to illustrate interpellation, Haslanger writes:

> In one sense, then, race 'lands on the body' through the interpellation of racialized subjects: we become fluent in racial practices. We read the racial meanings directed at us; we develop the 'right kind' of racial dispositions; we participate in managing and distributing resources along racial lines. We may be aware of it or not; we may agree with it, or not. We may even resist it, but defection from entrenched practices…does not change the practice, or even one's own learned responses. It takes work to unlearn a form of subjectivity which is also a form of embodiment.[416]

How does this unlearning occur? Haslanger acknowledges that historically, there are many possible ways that unlearning has occurred, and new ways may still be discovered. As a preliminary to this, however, she focuses her work on a more modest goal, sketching an account of the process of "consciousness raising." She sketches this process in two recent articles—"Political Epistemology and Social Critique" and "Reproducing Social Hierarchies (or Not!)."[417] She phrases the important challenge consciousness raising addresses thusly: "If we,

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[413] Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 10.

[414] Haslanger, "Structural Injustice," 14.

[415] Haslanger, "Structural Injustice," 14-15. See also Haslanger, "Reproducing Social Hierarchy," 187-188, and "How to Change a Social Structure," 9-11.

[416] Haslanger, "Structural Injustice," 16.

[417] Sally Haslanger, "Political Epistemology and Social Critique," *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy Volume 7*, David Sobel et al. editors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 23-65, http://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192897480.003.0002.

ourselves, may be in the grip of an ideology, how can we judge what is emancipatory?"[418] And, from this place of judgment, how then do we move to address and change the cultural technēs that govern our social practices *on the level of structure*, not merely on the internalised beliefs and attitudes of particular participants in the structure?

To do this sketch, she draws from a variety of sources, notably including: an example of an experience of consciousness raising involving a group of girls at a US high school and their responses to the revelation that their male schoolmates were systematically ranking the females on a numerical scale on the basis of their physical attractiveness;[419] feminist writing on social protest; and the pragmatist moral epistemology of Elizabeth Anderson.[420] She is however insistent that this is just an initial sketch, meant as an opening to further discussion and development, asserting that she outlines merely one possible process of consciousness raising. She roughly describes this as a process of moving from a reaction, to a complaint, and eventually to a moral claim; she also proposes a more specific series of steps in the process (that can occur in a sequence other than what she specifies). For our purposes, let us consider a simplified overview of the process.

Haslanger writes, "Consciousness raising calls attention to the frame and its effects. In the primary cases, it does so in a first-person way: *we* are living within this unacceptable frame and *we* need to change it."[421] In very simple terms, consciousness raising requires calling attention to the frame of our experience through the negative effects it has—if not on ourselves, on others it affects the most. Though it may begin from an individual's feeling of frustration, it "[enables] one to move beyond…to a collective and historically rooted understanding of the situation."[422] Such an understanding, done collectively, results in what she describes in both texts as a paradigm shift, altering one's orientation and relation to others and the world. This paradigm shift necessarily changes the ways we relate to each other and to the resources we value in common: that is, it necessarily changes our cultural technē.

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[418] Haslanger, "Reproducing Social Hierarchy," 195, following Robin Celikates, "Systematic Misrecognition and the Practice of Critique: Bourdieu, Boltanski and the Role of Critical Theory," in *Recognition Theory and Contemporary French Moral and Political Philosophy,* eds. Miriam Bankowsky and Alice Le Goff (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 167.

[419] Dissatisfied with the school administration treating the event as an isolated transgression (the boy who started the list was given detention), one student organized her female friends and classmates to protest the school's response, which in turn led to a dialogue with the school administration and the whole student body. The girls shared testimonies of their experiences of objectification, sexual harassment, and abuse, which eventually led to the student body and school working together to implement changes in the school's culture and practices. See "The Girls Fought Back," ," https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2019/03/26/teen-boys-rated-their-female-classmates-based-looks-girls-fought-back, cited in Haslanger, "Reproducing Social Hierarchy," 199-201.

[420] Elizabeth Anderson, "How to be a Pragmatist," in *The Routledge Handbook of Practical Reason*, eds. Ruth Chang and Kurt Sylvan, 83-94 (London: Routledge, 2020). Cited in Haslanger, "Reproducing Social Hierarchy," 205.

[421] Haslanger, "Reproducing Social Hierarchy," 205.

[422] Haslanger, "Political Epistemology," 48.

Changing cultural technē, however, is easier said than done; group participation is a must in order not only to further understand and clarify the structural nature of the injustice (e.g. how it affects people who occupy different positions, and which positions are the worst off); but also in the creation of counter-publics (which creates spaces where the group can discuss the injustice without censure from the dominant group); as well as in the formulation and testing of a new paradigm that can eventually be offered as an alternative to the dominant ideological cultural technē.[423] This continual process of (re)formulation and testing is important, Haslanger notes, because not all alternative paradigms offer alternative cultural technēs or practices that actually reduce injustice—just because a paradigm is alternative doesn't automatically make it better.[424]

4.2 Structural injustice, social action, and the capability approach

Consciousness raising, as I have very roughly discussed above, is just one possible form of action that can be taken against injustice, if one takes advantage of the account of structural injustice. As both Young and Haslanger have asserted, in so many ways, an account of structural injustice focuses on the relations—looping and mutually influencing, as Haslanger describes them—between the positions individuals take in a particular social system, the social practices and cultural technēs that govern this system and the resources around which it seeks to organize people. These types of injustices, therefore, unlike the injustices of individuals against each other (e.g. moral liabilities), and unlike the obligations between individuals and the institutions of the state (e.g. policies and governance), reveal multiple possibilities for agents, multiple locations for collective action. There are, in a sense, many possible levers for change—a prospect that is both daunting and cause for hope. As Haslanger writes:

> On the account of ideology I have sketched, the target phenomenon is the structure of problematic practices and their governing frameworks of meaning and values (the cultural technēs), not just the beliefs or other psychological attitudes of those with whom one coordinates. A change in practices might involve improving rules and policies, and will often involve shifts in the cultural technē—the social meanings that guide our perception, attention, affect, memory, and action.This will often also require a change in the material conditions and the ideological apparatus.[425]

Even more importantly for Young and Haslanger, a structural account of injustice better accounts for historical experiences of social movements that have led to durable change. One could argue that the social movements that revolutionized the 20th century—the suffragette movement, the civil rights movement, gay pride, just to name a few—could not be sufficiently explained by the accounts of distributive justice that dominated the latter half of the 20th

[423] Haslanger, "Political Epistemology," 46-52.

[424] Haslanger cites for example here groups such as anti-vaxxers and neo-Nazis, who undeniably offer us an alternative paradigm, but one that is structurally skewed for the benefit of some and the suffering of many.

[425] Haslanger, "Reproducing Social Hierarchy," 204.

century. There is a whole world of social life that is excluded from the two domains of the moral and the state, where so much day-to-day experience of injustice is lived out.

Structural injustice, and the social justice movements that seek to change these structures of injustice, are what Alkire tries to point us towards when she talks of democratic action and agency in the capability approach. Yet, the term "democratic action" can itself be a very loaded one, with meanings more associated with the formal institutions and functions of a state, rather than the agency of individuals brought together against injustice. In my own experience, "democratic action" in the Philippines often takes this formal institutional character in everyday language. As a philosopher, I can conceive of democratic action from a more expansive definition, perhaps following thinkers like Hannah Arendt for whom democratic action was synonymous with political movements, but I cannot speak for other Filipinos; if my past undergraduate students are any indication, many Filipinos think of "democratic action" as the actions of institutions and statecraft far removed from their personal experience, not the actions of an engaged democratic citizenry critically reflecting on the social structures in which they live.

With these limitations and constraints on the concept of democratic action and agency, I venture that a more thorough account of structural injustice for the capability approach, influenced particularly by the work of Young and Haslanger discussed here, will be fruitful and come closer to actualizing the "comparative, non-ideal approach to justice" that Sen proposes in *The Idea of Justice*. It is to this application of the concept of structural injustice to the capability approach that the next chapter of this thesis will therefore focus on.

Chapter 5
A Sketch of a Capabilitarian Critique of Structural injustice

In this chapter, I want to bring together the different strands of the previous discussion: the capability approach (CA) and its conception of agency (and structural injustice), which I discuss in Chapters 2 and 3; the broader literature in feminist critical social theory on structural injustice, tackled in Chapter 4; and what we can learn from the concrete reality of the loss of small farmers' agency in the unjust structures of small-scale corn farming in Bukidnon that I discussed in Chapter 1.

Why do I want to bring these three strands together? Doing so will enable the use of the CA to assess and take account of structures of injustice in terms of agency, analogous to how the CA is used to assess human wellbeing through capability measurement. In turn, assessing structures of injustice in terms of agency enables the CA to contribute to explaining the 'background' conditions of injustice, to borrow Drydyk's term. This explanatory realm, Drydyk points out, is less developed in the current CA literature. As he writes,

> Capability measurement research generally occupies the foreground. Many others do research oriented to policy and programmes, aiming to identify what are likely to be successful interventions, to expand people's agency and capability. That would be mid-range research. Less common are capability researchers who contribute to the deeper synchronic and diachronic explanations.[426]

How is one to contribute to the "deeper synchronic and diachronic explanations" as a capability scholar? In this chapter I begin to sketch one such possible contribution to the CA. I am convinced that a more thorough account of structural injustice for the capability approach, influenced particularly by the work of Young and Haslanger discussed here, will be fruitful and come closer to actualizing the "comparative, non-ideal approach to justice" that Sen proposes in *The Idea of Justice*. It is the intent of this chapter to support my claim, and demonstrate its use in the analysis of a concrete situation of injustice.

1. Retracing the road thus far, and pointing the way forward

As we have seen in Chapters 2 and 3 of this work, the capability approach, and its conception of agency and constraints on capability, can be interpreted as an alternative approach to injustice versus the dominant liberal, ideal approach to justice in political theory. Though many of the works of the CA's most prominent proponents—particularly Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen—are often taken to be working within the liberal tradition of distributive justice, such an interpretation is a shortsighted view of the approach.[427] While the CA indeed emphasizes the individual and their wellbeing as the approach's central moral concern, it nonetheless recognizes how the individual is enmeshed in social relationships and

[426] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 534.

[427] Ingrid Robeyns, "The Capability Approach," 109-111. See also Chapter 2, section 1.

structures, and that this enmeshment is both enabling and constraining of individuals.[428] This two-way relationship between individual agents and their particular social relationships are often lost in more liberal-directed capability applications and theories, as we have seen previously.[429] Specifically, we have seen how the concept of agency freedom first articulated by Sen allows us to capture the potentially productive tension between individual agents and their concrete context, and how this concrete context can, conversely, be a source of injustice. As Young has articulated, structural injustice can (and does) occur even when individual agents act within the bounds of their customary moral and legal contexts *because of* these structures.

However, agents' concrete contexts do not *solely* consist of the state and other formal institutions, or their environmental constraints, but also of the network of social relations that give these physical and social phenomena their meaning within a particular social-cultural context. The discussion of the critical theory literature on social practices, social structures, and structural injustice in Chapter 4 enriches our vocabulary and our ability to name these experienced phenomena and relations. The ability to articulate what is going on in these phenomena is helpful, allowing us to identify what exactly is unjust about these phenomena, and how agents participate in and perpetuate these practices through the roles or positions they occupy in these structures, and which positions are most disadvantaged/have the least agency in these structures. Moreover, it also enables us to identify potential levers for change in these structures.

Bringing together the CA with the broader critical theory literature on structural injustice fills a surprising lacuna within the CA literature—namely, the connection between removing barriers to freedom and the reduction of injustice. Drydyk hints at this in his article when he writes: "The capability approach focuses on understanding and removing unfreedom, so it is surprising that connections between capability and oppression have been little discussed,"[430] and he proposes possible directions for developing such a connection.

Perhaps a better description of the work of this chapter is less "bringing together" these ideas but taking the CA an alternative direction, away from the more liberal, individualist, and idealist theories and applications of the approach, towards an approach to justice-as-*nyaya*, grounded in concrete practice, as we have seen in Chapter 3, section 1.4. From both the CA literature and the observations from Young and Haslanger, we see how there is an insufficient understanding of the inner workings of society in distributive and ideal theories of justice like that of Rawls, which make the jump from the rights and basic needs of individuals to the formal institutions of states and governments. As we have seen, there are large swathes of human experience that are not captured and glossed over by such accounts—ignoring the relations

[428] See Chapter 2, section 1.

[429] See Chapter 2, section 3.3.

[430] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 527.

between agents that Koggel asserts to be the ethical concern of the CA[431], or as Haslanger puts it, the social relations, practices, and cultural technēs that inform how we value our world and our own agency. It is to this often glossed over "in-between" that we direct the capability approach.

The recourse to the critical social theory literature also helps us clarify better what we mean in the CA when we talk about structural injustice—a concept that, as we have seen, is mostly taken for granted by most CA scholars and practitioners. Injustice is often elided and sometimes used synonymously as inequality, capability deprivation, and oppression in the CA. Young's work on articulating the nature of injustice as either (or the combination of) domination and oppression, and the link that her account of domination and oppression makes to capabilities,[432] can be useful working definitions for the purposes of the CA.

Taking the CA in this alternative direction, drawing inspiration and conceptions from feminist critical social theory, also reinforces the stand against ideal theory[433] shared by both the Sen's capabilitarian approach to justice and these versions of critical social theory articulated by Young and Haslanger. The question thus becomes how such a grounded version of the capability approach can be actualized, both on the level of theory and application. Or, to use the language that Drydyk employs, how capability theories and applications can contribute to addressing the background questions about injustice, in other words, explaining why "choice-depriving and disadvantaging policies, practices, attitudes, and relations are so widespread" and how "these are reproduced over time."[434] I argue that the social theory that Young and Haslanger provide, when transposed into the CA, adds to the vocabulary and analytical power of the CA, enabling it to better analyse social structures *qua* structures. I hope to do this by drawing from the work of Young and Haslanger that I discussed in Chapter 4, as well as by drawing from my discussion and analysis of fieldwork in chapter 1.

2. Conceptualizing concrete injustice: Resonances between justice-as-*nyaya* and the justice approaches of Young and Haslanger

Before attempting such a sketch, however, it seems to me important to articulate the resonances I found between Young's and Haslanger's articulations of justice and its relation to theory, and Sen's approach to justice articulated in *The Idea of Justice* (that I have chosen to call 'justice-as-*nyaya*'). In my estimation, articulating these similarities not only explains my choice to take the capability approach in an application closer to critical social theory; it also gives us insight into how we can move past the dichotomy between ideal and non-ideal theory into theorizing from the concrete, theorizing from injustice. Moreover, it gives us a means of

[431] Koggel, Review of *Well-being, Freedom and Social Justice*, 579-580.

[432] See Chapter 4, section 4. (check this)

[433] See Chapter 3, section 1.3 and Chapter 4, section 3.1.

[434] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 534.

formulating a capabilitarian conception of injustice—and, by extension, a capabiltarian conception of structural injustice.

2.1 Giving content to injustice: Sen and Young moving beyond the ideal/non-ideal theory dichotomy

Aside from his theory of justice as fairness, perhaps the other enduring contribution Rawls has made to theories of justice is the dichotomy he makes between ideal and non-ideal theory, asserting that non-ideal theory (that is, the application of the ideals of justice to concrete situations) is of secondary importance in comparison to ideal theory, and that the work of political theorists is primarily the realm of ideal theory.[435] Both Sen and Young disagree with Rawls's assertion, and the alternative approaches to justice theory they separately proposed hold many characteristics in common—not least how theories of justice involve moving from injustice to justice in a kind of *via negativa,* that is, arriving at a better understanding of justice by understanding what it is not, through examining, understanding, and gradually eliminating injustice.

Both Sen and Young confront concrete situations of injustice and seek to articulate what these situations are, why these situations are unjust, and on this basis, begin to examine how we can actively reduce injustice and work to achieve justice in these situations. Effectively, they both argue for the necessity of giving content to injustice and assert that a new approach to conceptualizing justice which begins with injustice is necessary to confront the challenges of injustice in the world today.

For Young, the concern for justice must begin from a concern for and a reflection on the realities of injustice. Contrasting her approach with theories of justice which claim a distanced, detached (and thus "objective" and "universal") vantage point from which to define justice, Young describes her own political philosophy as a situated reflection on concrete reality, following in the tradition of critical theorists.[436] Furthermore, she asserts that injustice ought to be conceptualized as oppression and domination;[437] thus, the realization of justice in a particular situation is possible through challenging and dismantling modes of oppression and domination.

Young arrives at a definition of injustice as oppression and domination through a critique of distributive justice (which will be discussed further below). She does this to highlight how social justice is not simply a matter of distribution of resources. Drawing from contemporary public outcries and movements against injustice—against racism, against inhumane wages and conditions for workers, against the forced assimilation of indigenous peoples, and against discrimination against women or the LGBTQ community—Young articulates the implicit

[435] Rawls, *Theory of Justice,* 245-246. See also Thompson, "Ideal and Nonideal Theory in Political Philosophy."

[436] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 5-8.

[437] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 9.

understanding of injustice and justice these have in common. She observes that the heart of these movements is a sense of how, for as long as people's capacities to make choices for themselves are limited or absent, as long as people are unable to live their lives according to certain values, and as long as people continue to be systematically excluded from the social life of a community or polity, there will be no justice.[438]

This observation forms the basis for her definition of injustice as *any situation in which people experience oppression and/or domination*. Moving towards justice thus requires the reduction of oppression and domination. She sums up this relationship in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* in the following discussion of social justice:

> social justice concerns the degree to which a society contains and supports the institutional conditions necessary for the realization of these values [which constitute a good life]. The values comprised in the good life can be reduced to two very general ones: (1) developing and exercising one's capacities and expressing one's experience… and (2) participating in determining one's action and the conditions of one's action… To these two general values correspond two social conditions that define injustice: oppression, the institutional constraint on self-development, and domination, the institutional constraint on self-determination.[439]

In his various articulations of the capability approach, and more specifically in *The Idea of Justice*, Sen also emphasizes the need to focus on concrete contexts, the actual lives that people lead. Though he does not spend a lot of time conceptualizing an idea of injustice, the capability approach, as we have seen in the previous chapters of this work, can be understood is a means for assessing injustice, for identifying the barriers to capability—that is, the constraints on individuals' freedoms, and the constraints that prevent the conversion of resources into achievements. This assessment is ultimately in view of enabling people to achieve greater freedoms, which Sen further specifies as well-being freedom and agency freedom.[440] Moreover, Sen emphasizes how his point of departure for discussing justice, focused on real people's lives, is *not* in the tradition of theories of justice that begin with conceptualizing a just society, what he describes as 'transcendental' theories of justice.[441]

Sen agrees with Young not only with the necessity of starting with immanent reality, but also with the implication that this starting point necessitates a change in the entire approach to justice in political philosophy. He writes:

> Importance must be attached to the starting point, in particular the selection of some questions to be answered (for example, 'how would justice be advanced?'), rather than others (for example, 'what would be perfectly just institutions?'). This departure has the dual effect, first, of taking the comparative rather than the transcendental route, and second, of focusing on actual realizations in the societies involved, rather than only on

[438] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 15-16.

[439] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 37.

[440] See Chapter 3, section 1.

[441] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 10-19.

> institutions and rules. Given the present balance of emphases in contemporary political philosophy, this will require a radical change in the formulation of the theory of justice.[442]

Though they use a different vocabulary—Sen describing his approach as immanent and comparative (vs. transcendental) and Young describing hers as reflective (vs. theoretical)—they both demonstrate the effort to recast *what* a philosophy of justice ought to be concerned about, and *how* it ought to be approached. This shared concern for injustice in Young and Sen is further reflected in their respective criticisms of Rawls's theory of justice. Though differing in their starting points for criticizing Rawls—Sen himself having been Rawls's colleague, while Young coming from feminist critical social theory—there are broad similarities in their criticisms which can be attributed to their commitment to use the reality of injustice as their starting point.

Both Sen and Young express skepticism for Rawls's reliance on the "original position," the thought-experiment foundational to his theory of justice. In this thought experiment, one is tasked with imagining a new society from scratch. To keep things as objective and as fair as possible, you are ignorant of whether you (or other people) will be born with relative advantages or disadvantages. You are ignorant of who among you will be possessed of disabilities, or who would be born with natural talents. Given this ignorance, we must formulate the principles according to which the available goods of this society ought to be distributed and organized. For Rawls, this guarantees fairness and impartiality.[443]

In Rawls's theory of justice, the abstraction from concrete situations of justice/injustice and recourse to thought experiment is justified in order to maintain objectivity and impartiality. However, both Sen and Young agree that this comes at the cost of unmooring justice from the lived reality of human lives and their complexities. They both assert that beginning from an abstracted conception of justice, or from top-down, "macro" criteria for assessing justice in a society, leads any theory of justice to miss the concern at the heart of justice: human lives, and how these human lives are inextricably situated in specific, concrete contexts. Thus, to ask the question of what justice is necessarily implicates these concrete contexts and the experiences of injustice therein, requiring what Sen calls "reasoned assessments of the world in which we live."[444]

2.1.1 The Primacy of Human Lives

A key assumption at the heart of Rawls's "original position" thought experiment is the fair distribution of primary goods—and that such a fair distribution will have the effect of creating a more just society. While neither Young nor Sen contest that access to primary goods or resources are important factors of a just society, they point out that these are *means* for

[442] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 9.

[443] Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 7-11.

[444] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 225.

human living, not the ends of these lives. If we are truly concerned with justice, we ought to focus first on the *actual* lives people lead and begin from there to evaluate their justice/injustice. As Sen asserts, "It does make a difference whether we look merely at means of living rather than at the lives people manage to have."[445] Young poses her criticism in the form of a question: "Should social justice give primacy to having or to doing?"[446]

Sen and Young have complementary sources for their criticism. Both come from a sense of immediacy, that situations of injustice need effective, timely responses; and such responses require us to acknowledge that primary goods and resources are just a part of the more complex, plural field of a fulfilled human life. Both similarly criticize the focus on primary goods and resources as reductive, albeit in slightly different ways.

Sen points out that quantitative approaches to measuring incomes or goods in a society and the equity of their distribution don't directly assess nor come to terms with the lived experience of people. However, Sen does not advocate an outcomes-based method of evaluation either, which is equally vulnerable to reducing human lives to quantitative data. He instead proposes the examination of agency freedom, and of the capabilities people are free to exercise, as a means of evaluation that captures the nuances and complexities of people's lived experience. One of Sen's examples to illustrate this is one we have cited a few times previously—the comparison one can make between a person starving and a person fasting. Neither an assessment of the distribution of goods nor a comparison of outcomes captures fully how these people differ from each other; in fact, their outcomes could be quite similar. However, an assessment of their agency freedom and capabilities would show a stark difference.[447] The person fasting has a range of capabilities and the freedom to choose from among these (for whatever reason, whether religious, political, personal), which determines her relationship to the primary goods/resources available to her, and it is on these multiple facets that her situation differs from her starving peer. Paying attention merely to the distribution of resources or to the outcome of distribution is limiting, reductive, "confining attention only to what may be described as the culmination—or aftermath—of choice."[448]

Young agrees that the focus on the distribution of goods is reductive, albeit in a different way—it reduces the complexity of human life to the access to and/or possession of goods. It ignores how human life is also undoubtedly about one's personal relationships, participation in a culture and society, thrownness into a particular situation, psychological experience, health and well-being, and the ability to participate in political life.[449] She writes, "[t]here are many such claims about justice and injustice in our society which are not primarily about

[445] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 225.

[446] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 7.

[447] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 237.

[448] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 237.

[449] One could say that these are what are identified by Sen's discussion of capabilities.

distribution of income, resources, or positions. A focus on the distribution of material goods and resources inappropriately restricts the scope of justice, because it fails to bring social structures and institutional contexts under evaluation."[450]

She notes that Rawls *does* expand the notion of 'primary goods' to include rights, to acknowledge that life is not dictated by material goods alone; however, Young contends that the very notion of rights as distributable is itself problematic and reductive, as if non-material goods like rights could be distributed in the same way as material goods.[451] She says that many distributive justice theories' blindness to domination and oppression, the day-to-day experiences of injustice in the world, is attributable to this crude reduction.[452]

It is important to re-assert here that both Sen and Young do not deny that distribution is a crucial element in justice. Primary goods are needed by people in order to live human lives. However, both assert that it is not enough to equate social justice to assessments of how resources are distributed, how people's incomes measure up against each other, and the degree of income inequality in a society. These criteria are too removed, too abstracted from the realities of injustice. As a result, one common theme underlying both Sen's and Young's criticism of Rawls is their emphasis on the actual lives that people live, and how these lives are undeniably constrained and/or enabled by not only individual capability and material resources, but also by the structures and systems in which all people participate.

2.1.2. The importance of situatedness and human plurality

The priority given to actual human lives also raises the importance of human situatedness and plurality. Any concern for the actual lives that people live would be for naught if it were to ignore or fail to address the contexts in which these lives are lived. This in turn is related to another criticism that Sen and Young level in common against Rawls—that is, the criticism against the transcendental approach his philosophy takes, as exemplified by the thought experiment of the original position.

As discussed above, both Sen and Young point out that Rawls's use of the original position and his overall transcendental approach to justice is reductive and abstracts from lived reality. They also share a similar assessment for why this transcendental approach is key to Rawls's work—it is necessary for objectivity and impartiality, to unmoor the principles of a just society from the particularities of any given culture or situation. It is thus unsurprising that their criticism of this approach is similar as well; both Sen and Young take issue with the feasibility and sustainability of such a transcendental idea of social justice, which they say comes at the expense of ignoring the lived relationship between people and their context.

[450] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 20.

[451] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 24-27.

[452] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 24-27.

Addressing the feasibility of the transcendental approach to justice from a pragmatic perspective, Sen points out that Rawls's theory "presumes that there is basically *only one kind of impartial argument*, satisfying the demands of fairness, shorn of vested interests. This, I would argue, would be a mistake."[453] In its abstraction, the thought experiment of the original position assumes a homogeneity of reasoning; it can't take into account the pragmatic reality of how a multiplicity of possible interests and positions can lead to different ways of reasoning about justice.[454] He raises the possibility of "plural and competing reasons for justice, all of which have claims to impartiality and which nevertheless differ from—and rival—each other."[455]

On the other hand, Young's criticism of the plausibility of Rawls's transcendental approach draws from the tradition of epistemology. In the introduction to *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Young says that such an abstract theory as Rawls fails in either of two ways: 1) too much abstraction makes such a theory virtually impossible to apply in evaluating the injustice/justice of concrete situations; and 2) such an abstracted approach "implicitly conflates moral reflection with scientific knowledge."[456] Unlike in scientific knowledge, "where the knower is initiator and master of the known,"[457] she contrasts the demands of justice as "the call to 'be just' is always situated in concrete social and political practices that precede and exceed the philosopher."[458] As Alison Jaggar comments, "Young does not abstract away from differences in individuals' perspectives and motivations; instead she pays attention to them. She treats human difference not as epistemic disability but rather as an epistemic resource."[459]

Sen and Young have some differences, however, in the alternative they pose to the Rawlsian transcendental approach. Sen, owing to his own background as an economist and the discipline's orientation towards policy prescriptions, acknowledges the need to strive for objectivity and impartiality while still affirming the necessity of being rooted in a particular situation and affirming human plurality. Contra Rawls, he presents a mode of public reason following Adam Smith's articulation of the "impartial spectator." Sen notes, "Adam Smith was

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[453] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 10. *Emphasis mine.*

[454] This is a theme that, aside from being discussed in *The Idea of Justice* (12-15), Sen has developed extensively, most notably in *Inequality Reexamined* (12-30) and in the essay "Equality of What?" In both texts, Sen describes competing theories of justice—most notably utilitarian theories, distributive theories, and libertarian theories—and demonstrates how these are all egalitarian in nature and how these differ only on terms of what they consider to be the basis for equality.

[455] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 12.

[456] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 4.

[457] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 4.

[458] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 5.

[459] Alison M. Jaggar, "*L'imagination au pouvior:* Comparing John Rawls's Method of Ideal Theory with Iris Marion Young's Method of Critical Theory," in *Dancing with Iris: The Philosophy of Iris Marion Young*, Ann Ferguson and Mechthild Nagel, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 98.

also concerned with the need to broaden the discussion to avoid local parochialism of values, which might have the effect of ignoring some pertinent arguments, unfamiliar in a particular culture;" such a method of approaching situations of justice can still remain grounded in a particular situation while still being impartial and able to scrutinize "not only the influence of vested interest, but also the impact of entrenched tradition and custom."[460]

On the other hand, Young draws from the tradition of critical theory in order to articulate her own approach to reasoning about injustice and justice and emphasizing their situated nature. The notions of impartiality and objectivity are de-emphasized, because of their abstraction from contextuality—a level of abstraction that is ultimately impossible for the philosopher to attain. Defining critical theory as "normative reflection that is historically and socially contextualized"[461] she envisions its role as surfacing the norms, values, and ideas of the good *implicit in* concrete, public demands for justice, and using these as the means of assessing situations of injustice. As she explains,

> [H]ow is it possible for norms to be both socially based and measures of society? Normative reflection arises from hearing a cry of suffering or distress, or feeling distress oneself. The philosopher is always socially situated, and if society is divided by oppressions, she either reinforces or struggles against them. With emancipatory interest, the philosopher apprehends given social circumstances not merely in contemplation but with passion: the given is experienced in relation to desire... The critical distance does not occur on the basis of some previously discovered rational ideas of the good and the just. On the contrary, the ideas of the good and the just arise from the desiring negation that action brings to what is given.[462]

Nonetheless, despite these differences, both Sen and Young are similar in their assertion that a situated understanding and assessment of justice must necessarily account for the concrete reality of human plurality—the plurality of subjectivities, lifeways, and cultures—and in "desiring negation" of these concrete experiences of injustice. For both, the degree of abstraction from reality Rawls and those after him have taken in their conceptualization of justice is untenable. The dichotomy Rawls creates between ideal and non-ideal theory, which separates the transcendental theorizing on justice (ideal theory) from the messiness of reality (non-ideal theory) collapses under these assertions from Sen and Young. Theorizing on justice cannot, and ought not, to be separated from the realities of injustice. Jaggar's description of Young's work is, in this regard, applicable to Sen as well: they both "[reflect] on what is actually valued by real people struggling with specific existing injustices."[463]

To begin a philosophy of justice from the realities of injustice is to accept that justice itself is a moving target, to account for how injustice is, and has always been, the reality. This

[460] Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 45.

[461] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 5.

[462] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference,* 5-6.

[463] Jaggar, "*L'imagination au pouvoir*," 98.

is opposed to theories of justice like Rawls's, which in the effort to formulate a universal concept of justice, lose sight of injustice as lived reality. Sen and Young defend an approach to justice that is immanent and comparative, reflective and normative, not ideal-transcendental. As Sen reminds the people of India (and the rest of us, his audience):

> the subject of justice is not merely about trying to achieve—or dreaming about achieving—some perfectly just society or social arrangements, but about preventing manifestly severe injustice.[464]

2.1.3 Plurality and the benefits of Haslanger's social ontology

There is, to be sure, one area in which Young agrees with Rawls—that is, their view of the role of the social structure in relation to justice, or in Rawls's formulation, how structure is the subject of justice. However, Rawls does not provide us with an adequate social ontology through which we can better understand the background conditions of injustice, the social structures that are the conditions of injustice. When Rawls brings up structure, he refers to the formal structures of governance and political organization. But as we have seen already throughout our discussions in Chapters 3 and 4, in between individual agents and formal structures lies a vast realm of informal social-structural relations that Rawls passes over in silence.

This insufficiency is something that Sen seems to recognize in his work, though indirectly—for instance, as Alkire points out, he emphasizes democratic participation and informal social relations in his writings with Jean Drèze on India.[465] However, beyond the work of Sen, a majority of the work of other capability scholars have focused on, or addressed formal institutions, though there have been efforts to study informal sectors of society (for instance, street vendors, indigenous groups).[466] Indeed, as Koggel has observed, the ability to focus on the relationships and power between individual agents and groups—whether these are formal or informal relations—is a fruitful yet mostly underexplored area within the CA.[467] How then can the CA be developed further in this direction of examining social-structural relations, of which formal institutions are just a subset? I propose that Haslanger's social ontology—particularly her articulation of the relationships between individuals, cultural technēs, relations, and social structures—will help the CA develop a better vocabulary with which it can better describe the concrete realities it wants to understand.

Like Young, Haslanger is clear about where theorizing about justice ought to begin. She says that it does not begin by defining justice, but rather with understanding better social reality—more specifically, understanding better the nature of social structures, how they are

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[464] Amartya Sen, "What Should Keep Us Awake at Night," in *The Country of First Boys and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 188.

[465] Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze, *The Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze Omnibus*. See also Alkire, "Structural Injustice and Democratic Practice," 47-62.

[466] Krushil Watene, Introduction to *Theorizing Injustice: Critical Insights and Future Directions*, 8-9.

[467] Koggel, Review of *Well-being, Freedom and Social Justice*, 579-580.

formed and how they persist through time—and this helps us better critique that social reality. Haslanger's social ontology, which I have discussed in more detail in the previous chapter, articulates further the relations between individuals and with society, and how individual agency relates to groups (whether these are informal or formal) and to society. In my view, drawing from Haslanger's social ontology would be beneficial for a capabilitarian approach to structural injustice, as it gives us the space and the vocabulary to examine the background structures of injustice, especially those that are fundamentally informal in nature, which are overlooked by the more mainstream applications of the capability approach. I shall return to this social ontology below, in section 3. Before that, however, I offer some thoughts about how to frame the concept of structural injustice in the capability approach.

2.2 Injustice as capability-deprivation: domination and oppression

Part of the approach of justice-as-*nyaya*—the approach of beginning from real, situated contexts of injustice—requires the *identification* of injustice. Identifying what injustice consists of, and the forms it can take, is the first step in working towards reducing and preventing injustice. As we have seen, within the capability approach, injustice can be understood as unfreedom, further specified as capability deprivation. We have also seen that freedom, in the capabilitarian understanding, consists of both one's well-being freedom and agency freedom.[468]

This identification of injustice with the deprivation of well-being and agency freedom definitely resonates with Young's description of injustice from *Justice and the Politics of Difference.* In its second chapter, which articulates what is perhaps Young's most well-known conceptual contribution to political philosophy, the five faces of oppression, she begins:

> Justice should refer not only to distribution, but also to the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation. Under this conception of justice, injustice refers primarily to two forms of disabling constraints, oppression and domination. While these constraints include distributive patterns, they also involve matters which cannot easily be assimilated to the logic of distribution: decisionmaking procedures, division of labor, and culture.[469]

Though this passage predates Young's work in *Responsibility for Justice* by over a decade, we already find in this passage a prefiguration of the relationship between social structures and the injustices experienced by individuals that, as we have seen in the previous chapter, she has called structural injustice. Where social structures restrict or inhibit people's access to capacities and the opportunities to cultivate these capacities, there is injustice.

Moreover, we find in this passage a distinction between oppression and domination—a distinction that Young develops along the following lines in the same work. In her account,

[468] As discussed previously in Chapter 3, sections 1.2 and 1.3.

[469] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 39.

oppression and domination both involve the constraints on, or the deprivation of conditions for, the development and exercise of individual capacities. The difference lies in how *domination* refers specifically to the *institutional constraints on the capacities for determining their actions* (for instance, women in Iran experience domination because of "modesty" and other gender-based laws and the repressive nature of their implementation), while *oppression* refers to *systemic, institutionalized constraints on people's capacity to access, develop and exercise their capabilities.*[470] This distinction is important, says Young, because though there is significant overlap between the two, it is nonetheless possible that someone who experiences domination is not oppressed, and vice versa.[471] To return to the example of women in Iran; while they are indeed subject to domination by the repressive Iranian regime, they have also achieved freedom from some of the oppressions Iranian women experienced in the past. We see that Iranian women have cultivated and exercised their capabilities in education[472] (with nearly 60% of current university students being women[473]) and political participation, as evidenced by increasing numbers of women serving as members of parliament,[474] and most recently, the mass protests spurred by the death of Mahsa Amini.[475]

As I have previously observed,[476] Young very loosely uses the word "institution," in contrast to Haslanger (for whom the term specifically applies to formal institutional structures such as governments or corporations), and it can thus be a source of confusion when parsing Young's distinction between domination and oppression. In my reading of Young, I take domination to refer to more formal, institutional structures such as colonial regimes, repressive laws, or authoritarian governments, which is supported by her assertion that "Thorough social and political democracy is the opposite of domination."[477] In contrast, I read oppression to be more focused on social-cultural processes, which can be informal and/or formal in concrete practice. Moreover, insofar as oppression is institutionalized (in Haslanger's

[470] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 37-38.

[471] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 37-38.

[472] Lisa Deaderick, "Today, girls and women in Iran have picked up gender equality fight of the generations before them" [Interview with Sanam Naraghi Anderlini], *San Diego Union Tribune*, 16 October 2022, http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/columnists/story/2022-10-16/today-girls-and-women-in-iran-have-picked-up-gender-equality-fight-of-the-generations-before-them.

[473] Garrett Nada, "Part 5: Statistics on Women in Iran," *The Iran Primer*, 9 December 2020, https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2020/dec/09/part-5-statistics-women-iran.

[474] Garrett Nada, "Part 5: Statistics on Women in Iran."

[475] Rana Rahimpour, "Fury in Iran as young woman dies following morality police arrest," *BBC*, 16 September 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-62930425; Ellen Ioanes, "Iran's months-long protest movement, explained," 15 January 2023, https://www.vox.com/2022/12/10/23499535/iran-protest-movement-explained.

[476] See Chapter 4, section 3.2.

[477] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 52.

sense), it becomes so because of its rootedness in a particular social-cultural process and structures and has existed prior to any such formalization.

I find that the distinction drawn here between domination and oppression is helpful in identifying more precisely the lacuna within the capability approach literature, particularly in how it approaches questions and concrete situations of injustice. In this regard, I agree with Drydyk's assertion that the capability approach has not spoken much on oppression despite its concern for injustice.[478] This is not to say, however, that it has not spoken about concrete conditions and situations of injustice; indeed, much of the existing capability approach literature is focused on addressing *domination*, through its efforts to address international and national policies on capabilities and human development. By developing a capabilitarian conception of structural injustice, taking inspiration and ideas from the critical theory of Young and Haslanger, and demonstrating its possible applications, we can come to a deeper understanding of *oppression* as a form of injustice, develop means of assessing and taking account of structures of injustice, and even perhaps identifying areas for action and structural change.

3. Analyzing agency and social structure: Revisiting GM corn farming in the Upper Pulangi watershed

In the previous two sections of this chapter, I have been articulating the connections and resonances I have found between the work of Young and Haslanger and of Sen and Drydyk, and pointing out potential ways that these resonances could help address what Drydyk has called the background conditions of injustice. In this section, I want to approach my project from another direction: by returning to the concrete context of GM corn farming in the Upper Pulangi.

In Chapter 1, I ventured a description and initial analysis of the social system of GM corn farming in the Upper Pulangi, and the social-structural processes that drive that system. In my account, I described how small farmers access the economic, cultural and social capital needed to farm GM corn through the trader/financiers in their locality. These trader/financiers are also local patrons—people of local social, economic, and sometimes political influence—in their communities. These relationships of patronage, in turn, were already established even prior to the introduction of GM corn farming in the area, through both informal and formal relations of friendship, of religious communities, and of local political structures (particularly through the *barangay* system). Seed and agrochemical companies have taken advantage of these pre-established relationships, tapping the influence of local patrons to promote their products through demonstration farms and other similar marketing and sales events at the local level, which have proven more effective than more commercial forms of marketing and advertising.

[478] Drydyk, "Capability and Oppression," 530. See also Chapter 3, section 3.

I also described in that chapter how the small farmers articulated the feeling that the system was unfair—that they were the worst off among all the participants in the system—and how some even articulate the desire to get away from this system while simultaneously feeling unable to do so. I interpret this feeling as a sense of loss or impairment of agency. This sense of the system being unfair or disadvantageous for farmers was also expressed by two of the trader/financiers I interviewed. One could also describe the experiences of the farmers and the financiers alike as being in the grip of an ideology—one that values farming and trading GM corn to earn cash as something that is equally beneficial for all—and that some of these farmers and financiers have begun questioning the validity of this ideology.

Faced with such articulations of loss or impairment of agency, and a sense of unfairness and of being worst off, and a sense of something wrong with the way things are done, I wanted to understand if any agents within that system could see and enact ways of either making the system less unjust, or of extricating themselves from the system. Put another way, I wanted to see if agents within the system saw and used any levers for change to reduce the injustice they participate in and/or experience. Or, to use the vocabulary of the capability approach: is anyone able to exercise their agency freedom in view of reducing injustice?

3.1 Understanding and interpreting past social change

In my interviews, farmers articulated the changes in social life brought about by the shift to GM corn farming in the previous decades: the rise of farming for cash. Farming for cash has also transformed the way people relate to each other within communities—past cultural practices of shared/communal farm labor have been replaced by doing farm work for cash. A couple of farmers referred to this as a kind of change in values, more particularly a change in the valuation of farming/farm work.[479]

This observation that farmers made has resonance with Haslanger's account of how social practices (and eventually, social structures) emerge: how agents relate to a resource, and how they regulate and organize themselves in reference to that resource, are what lead to the development of cultural technēs, and eventually to the development of a social structure. Farm work can be viewed as a resource in this case—i.e. something that agents find valuable—because it is a means for earning cash. In turn, the practices, cultural technēs, and social structures are all oriented towards earning cash through farm work—how to borrow it, how to earn it, how to make farming more efficient (lower input, higher output) to maximize cash. It also implies that the reasons for valuing farm work in the past were different, and further, that these reasons to value *can* be changed in the future.

[479] Environmental Science for Social Change, "Winds of Change," 10 December 2022, YouTube video, 16:36, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dc2lMr0fu1A.

3.2 Changing one's relationship to (and the reasons to value) resources

How can we see concretely the changes in the reasons to value a resource? Returning to the field, we can find a few examples in the experiences of farmers and traders alike. For our purposes in this and the succeeding subsection, I want to examine the actions of three farmers and one trader/financier, and through our analysis, understand the changes in their practices, and the underlying changes in value.

One response that I encountered in my interviews was shared by one farmer in a barangay I visited. In his account, he still farms corn, but has also started farming *atsal* (sweet bell peppers) as an additional crop. In his account, he saw how his cousin had started farming bell peppers and had observed that his cousin could be more strategic with scheduling harvests, coordinating with the traders to find a time when the farm gate prices for bell pepper are higher, so as not to sell at a loss (as this is what often happens with GM corn farming). He said that wanted to find other ways of earning money as a farmer, and that he likes being able to negotiate directly with the traders about pricing. He shares that he has reduced the amount of land he devotes to farming corn, and plants bell peppers and GM corn in separate plots. For brevity (and for purposes of contrast with succeeding examples), let us call this farmer's practice crop diversification, moving away from the practices of monoculture and monocropping.[480]

Another response is that of two farmers' adopting the practice polyculture or intercropping. As two farmers shared in interviews conducted by Environmental Science for Social Change, intercropping allows them to not only have multiple harvests of different crops throughout the year, but also to cultivate different crops for different purposes—crops that are consumable to ensure their food security and crops that can be sold in the market as their source of income.[481] These farmers plant specific crops for income (such as GM corn, rubber, and coffee), other crops for food (like taro and white corn), and crops that can be used for both purposes (such as calabash squash, cassava, and bananas).

One way that we can understand and conceptualize these farmers' responses is as changes in *social practice*. Changes in social practice, as we have seen through Haslanger's work, come about through changing the relationship between agents and resources. In these instances, the relationship that farmers have with GM corn as a resource has changed—what sort of change has occurred?

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[480] It seems valuable here to briefly define terms used in agricultural practice. Monocropping and monoculture are related, but not identical practices of farming. *Monocropping* refers to the practice of farming a single species of crop throughout one's land, continuously through time, whereas *monoculture* refers to the farming of a single crop in a given space. Diversification of crops within the *same space, at the same time* is called *intercropping* or *polyculture*. In contrast, *crop rotation* refers to diversification *through time*, i.e. the same plot of land that was planted with corn this year will be planted with another crop in the next year. The farmer I interviewed practices neither crop rotation nor intercropping, thus I have chosen to refer to it simply as diversification.

[481] Environmental Science for Social Change, "Winds of Change."

In the previous subsection, we have seen how, among farmers in the Upper Pulangi, the rise of GM corn farming has been closely associated with the rise of cash-driven relations. It is safe therefore to assume that GM corn is valued by farmers as a source of cash. Thus, changes in what crops are farmed can be understood on one level as farmers finding alternative resources that they value for the same reasons as they do GM corn, as in the case of the choices to farm bell peppers or rubber and coffee.

Another change that occurs is the relationship to the act of farming itself. If we understand resources to mean anything that is of value of agents, following Haslanger, we can view the act of farming as a resource. Farming is a resource in the sense that it is something considered valuable to the farmers of the Upper Pulangi. What are their reasons for valuing this activity? Not only as a means of earning an income, but also as a means of food security for a particular household or as a means of cultivating and sustaining life in general. This shift in the reasons for valuing a resource allows agents to change *how* they relate to the resource, and thus changing their practices of relating to that resource. Consequently, seeing farming as a means of sustaining life allows a broader range of ways of relating to farming—instead of looking as farming exclusively to earn more money, it is seen as a means of providing food, providing means of self-development, and as a relationship with the ecosystems and land that is being farmed. Thus, practices reflect these changed valuations and relations.

3.3 Analysis based on positions occupied in the social structure

I can further extend this observation and analysis to other agents within the social structure of GM corn farming in the Upper Pulangi—i.e., that changes in practices arising from changes in relationship to, and valuation of, resources, can occur for other agents in various positions within the social structure. For instance, I can use this lens to analyze the practices of one trader-financier that I interviewed and shadowed while he went about his day, who shared how his approach to GM corn farming has changed through the years. He shared that he began as a trader selling agricultural input, taking over the family business that his mother had started; at the time, he says, they did not engage in financing GM corn production and buying corn as a trader. He recounts that, as a newlywed, to enter GM corn financing and trading, he borrowed his initial capital from his parents-in-law.

His initial trajectory, he says, was the same as many GM corn trader/financiers, working with the big biotech and agrochemical corporations to sell seeds, fertilizers, and herbicides, and offering loans at the same (high) rates as his peers. However, after several years of this practice, he observed how small farmers were not only disadvantaged, but really suffering and did not profit from their hard work, while so others within the same (like himself and other traders) profited. According to him, he wanted to change the way he did business to bring more benefit to the farmers. Instead of providing financing, he now connects farmers to rural banks that offer low interest rates on loans and provides them not only with farming inputs at a lower cost, but also ensures that farming inputs are more suitable for the farmers' needs (based on their plot location, soil conditions, etc.) through providing technical support.

How to account for these changes in practices? What possible explanation/s may be found for these changes? The social structure has not changed, nor has the positionality of this trader. Perhaps what has changed are his *reasons to value* farming GM corn as a resource. More specifically, his reasons to value farming have changed in relation to small farmers, and in view of his positionality as more privileged or more advantageous than those of small farmers. I suggest this as a possible account based on his articulated desire to "help out small famers," and the observations he made in our interview, particularly about how he wants to present an alternative way of accessing loans and farming input, in contrast to the current practices that benefit the big corporations and the middlemen, while the small farmers gain very little in comparison. Moreover, in his interview, he shared how he has also started encouraging small farmers with less than five hectares of land move away from farming GM corn because the scale will make it difficult, if not impossible, to turn a profit, even if this means a loss of business on his part. This seems to me to suggest that he views his relationship to small farmers as extending beyond GM corn farming and the social structure built around it which is driven by capital- and profit-seeking.

3.4 Positionality and reasons to value

These analyses of the accounts of agents—farmers and trader alike—are a first step in demonstrating the usefulness of the capabilitarian-critical mode of analysis that I am proposing. More specifically, these demonstrate how the social ontology I borrow from Haslanger helps provide a more detailed account of the background conditions of injustice *in relation to* the experiences of particular agents and the different positions they occupy within the same social structure. We can see this demonstrated in the following ways:

We can first see how the different positions occupied by farmers and traders inform their perceptions of the structure and how it is unjust. For example, the aforementioned trader-financier's perception of the injustice of GM corn farming was informed by his position as a trader; the relationships he has with small farmers and with corporate sale representatives were the means through which he noticed how he and sales agents benefited more from GM corn farming than the farmers who planted GM corn themselves—relationships that he had *because* of his position as a trader.

Secondly, this mode of analysis shows how these perceptions of the injustice of the structure, and the agents' responses to the injustice, are rooted in their valuation of the resource around which arise the social practices and the concomitant cultural technēs, social relationships, and social structures. For example, we saw how some farmers' choices to move away from monoculture of GM corn, and towards crop diversification, intercropping, and crop rotation, arise from changes in the valuation, or *reasons to value* the resource of farming that is at the heart of their social practices (I shall return to this later in this chapter). In their accounts, they perceived their experiences of GM corn farming as focused exclusively on income generation or, as other farmers put it, all about earning cash. Based on their articulations, their choice to move away from GM corn farming, or to diversify the crops they

farm arises from how they value farming *not* solely for the income it generates, but for other reasons, such as food security, community relationships and/or traditions, and environmental sustainability.

These observations about positionality and reasons to value are a first step in demonstrating a capabilitarian, critical mode of analysis, showing how it helps with better describing and analyzing the background conditions of injustice from the positionality of different agents. I would like to emphasize here the capabilitarian aspect of this analysis, because *reasons to value* are integral to the CA, and more particularly, Sen's conceptualization of the approach.[482] It can also direct us towards further possibilities of description and analysis. Following the examples above, one could create hypotheses based on the positions occupied by other agents and investigate further along these lines. For example, we could inquire into the reason/s for valuing farming held by sales agents representing the seed company, how their practices are structured by these valuations, how their agency is constrained and/or enabled in the social structure, and compare these with the differing reasons to value, agency constraints, and positionality of other agents like the small farmers or traders.

These possible lines of questioning and comparison opened by this capabilitarian critical analysis allows us to focus on agents and their exercise of capabilities within social structures, and the limits and/or constraints on their agency freedom within these social structures. It offers an antidote to, on the one hand, the risk of losing sight of the context of concrete situations of injustice when focusing too much on individual agency; and, on the other hand, the risk of overemphasizing formal institutions at the expense of individual agents. It allows us to move into what Drydyk has called the background conditions of injustice, and examine these relational and social processes, without losing sight of the capabilitarian emphasis on the human agent and the human condition.

4. Reasons to value and the possibility of social-structural change

The preceding discussion, however, does not directly address one element of the capabilitarian-critical approach that I am advocating for—specifically, its orientation towards social change, in view of the reduction of injustice and the promotion of justice. In the preceding discussion, the examples of the agency taken by farmers and the trader reflects changes in their social practices and in their reasons to value the resource of farming, but it remains to be seen if these changes on the level of individual agents translate into changes in the social structure itself. One cannot draw a causal connection between the two. This leads us back to the question of how we ought to analyze social-structural change.

[482] As Sen writes, the capability approach is "an intellectual discipline that gives a central role to the evaluation of a person's achievements and freedoms in terms of his or her actual ability to do the different things a person has *reasons to value* doing or being" (Sen, "Capability: Reach and Limit," 16). See also Chapter 2, section 1.1 of this thesis.

The question of how to change a social structure is not about finding a single formula applicable to all situations, with guaranteed results—which is an approach closer to a Rawlsian theory of justice—but rather about describing and identifying different processes and levers for change. At this point, it seems fitting to return to, and explore further, Haslanger's thoughts on the possibility of social-structural change, and particularly the thoughts she has ventured on ideology critique and consciousness-raising. As Haslanger reminds her readers, "it is important to capture the sense in which all of us perpetuate unjust social structures by unthinkingly participating in them…to distinguish between those who abuse their power to harm others and those who are attempting to navigate as best they can the moral rapids of everyday life."[483] Thus, the preceding analysis, though it may not *directly* address the question of how to change a social structure, nonetheless gives us different means *through which* we can address structural injustice. A necessary part of the job is an account of the unjust structure and the different agents that participate in it, and from there, to identify those agents who have more power to harm others—as we have done in the preceding discussion, as well as in the discussion of the field research in Chapter 1.

And what can we discover in this process? As we have seen in the previous section, we can discover not only the relational dynamics between different agents within a structure and the different social practices and cultural technēs that make up the structure, but we also—and more importantly for our purposes of social change—begin to bring into view the reason/s to value the resource at the heart of the social structure, and also critique these reason/s to value. This form of analysis and critique, I assert, is a concrete example and application of what Haslanger has called "ideology critique." I further venture that ideology critique can be concretely applied in the practice of consciousness raising, and that the practice of consciousness raising in turn makes ideology critique more concrete and specific. To explain this further, my discussion here must return to Haslanger's conception of ideology and ideology critique, and her ideas on consciousness raising in relation to changing social structures.

4.1 Capabilitarian structural analysis as a form of ideology critique

What does Haslanger mean by "ideology critique"? To answer this question, we have to revisit what she means by the term "ideology" (which was briefly touched on in Chapter 4) and delve deeper into ideology critique.

In Haslanger's account, an *ideology* is a kind of cultural technē that structures relations between people and the resources that they have reasons to value in ways that are unjust.[484] This results in social structures that are based on 'distortions', and in her account, these

[483] Haslanger, "Oppressions," 320.

[484] Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 23-24. Cf. Chapter 4 of this work, as well as Haslanger, "Reproducing Social Hierarchy," 1; also "Critical Theory and Practice," 12 (footnote 4) and "How to Change a Social Structure," 10 (footnote 12).

distortions occur in two ways: first, as distortions of relationships, e.g. unequal relationships between agents through domination or oppression, or inequalities of production and distribution; and second—and, I shall argue, more importantly for this project—in misconceptions or misrecognitions of the value of resources.[485]

Haslanger asserts repeatedly that this conception of ideology ought to be distinguished from the more mainstream understanding of ideology in contemporary critical social theory, especially since the concept of ideology itself is contested, and its role in critical theory continues to be debated.[486] In her Spinoza Lectures at the University of Amsterdam, she offers an extended discussion of the limitations of current conceptions of ideology; from that discussion, two salient points emerge that are relevant for this project: that for Haslanger, ideology is not about the illusion created by a false consciousness, nor is it a false representation of reality. She contrasts this with one dominant conception of ideology as a *false consciousness*, which she describes as follows:

> [T]hose in the grip of an ideology have *false* or *distorted* ideas. Ideological thought is often contrasted with scientific thought. But even if science is not our paradigm of knowledge, the alleged source of the problem is a failure in our representations of the world: we act in self-defeating/unjust ways because (somehow or other) our social milieu leads us to adopt false or unjustified beliefs that obscure our true interests.[487]

There are multiple issues with this conception of ideology as false beliefs or false consciousness that Haslanger identifies,[488] based how this view of ideology seems to overlook how ideology is experienced not merely on the level of belief, but also on the level of reality, that ideology has a real material impact. For our purposes here, two of her observations matter most: what Haslanger calls respectively the *problem of accuracy* and the *problem of epistemic respect*.

By the *problem of accuracy*, Haslanger refers to the transformation of reality by a powerful ideology. This real impact of ideology is not captured by conceiving of ideology as false beliefs or false consciousness, as this seems to imply that ideology is a cognitive construct.[489] On the other hand, the *problem of epistemic respect* refers to the implication that someone in the grip of these false beliefs/false consciousness are hopelessly duped by ideology,[490] and seems to impart a kind of epistemic superiority to the person doing the criticism. As Haslanger writes, "attributing 'false consciousness' to those in the grip of an

[485] Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 23.

[486] Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 11.

[487] Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 14.

[488] See Haslanger, "But Mom, Crop Tops *Are* Cute!" 412-413; and "Critical Theory and Practice," 12-20.

[489] Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 15 and 24. See also "But Mom, Crop Tops *Are* Cute!" 413.

[490] Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 15.

ideology…isn't this being disrespectful of their epistemic capacities and over-confident in our own?"[491]

Haslanger thus proposes her own conception of ideology as an unjust cultural technē as one which accounts for both how ideology can itself shape lived experience and how those who are caught in its grip are not caught because of a kind of epistemic inferiority, but rather *by the need to adapt to and comply with cultural norms*. Based on this definition of ideology, Haslanger asserts that ideology critique thus consists of articulating and identifying the distortions within an ideology that governs the processes of a specific structural injustice—i.e. identifying the unequal relations and/or distortions of value in that specific cultural technē and its associated social structure. This ideology critique, in turn, allows us to identify various ways of countering these distortions, in view of the reduction of injustice and the promotion of justice. As Haslanger asserts, "Ideologies are public tools for coordination…that are inscribed in an apparatus and guide us in managing the background material conditions."[492] The ability to articulate and identify these public tools for coordinating and managing background material conditions of injustice, in view of informing action for justice, is the act of ideology critique.

It is important also to emphasize that, for Haslanger, this critique does not come from a position of superiority on the part of the theorist or whoever is making the critique. The theorist does not judge the ideology while assuming that they (the theorist) possess the truth of the matter. Rather, Haslanger aims to

> develop a notion of critique that requires more than just truth relative to the milieu of the assessor…To say that a critique is genuine, in this sense, is not to say that it is the final word; rather, it is to say that a response is called for.
>
> (…)
>
> An advantage of this notion of critique is that it would help make sense of the idea that ideology critique is transformative. If a critique isn't just a matter of reasoned disagreement, but is a matter of forming or finding a common milieu, then because a milieu is partly constituted by dispositions to experience and respond in keeping with the milieu, then possibilities for agency other than those scripted by the old milieu become socially available.[493]

One example that she proposes as a possible example of ideology critique in practice is the feminist activist conception of *consciousness raising*, which she describes as a shared or communal process of working through and articulating together the assumptions implicit in our social practices.

> Drawing attention to [ideology] is often a collective process achieved through consciousness raising. The insights and experiences of the oppressed are crucial to

[491] Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 24.

[492] Haslanger, "Reproducing Social Hierarchy," 2.

[493] Haslanger, "But Mom, Crop Tops *Are* Cute!" 425-426.

> undertaking this effectively. Moreover, the problem is cultural, not individual: we ask that our social meanings prioritize and, importantly, what they leave out, distort, or obscure. As mentioned before, the subordinated are often aware of social meanings and adjust to them without endorsing them.[494]

Haslanger draws this conception of consciousness raising from the feminist tradition, particularly the second wave feminism of the 1960s-70s as described by Catharine MacKinnon.[495] She also informs us that she won't go into examining what it consists of in detail, rather intending this reference to be more illustrative, as one possible example of a process of ideology critique, but not the only form that ideology critique can take. As she writes, "I will not dwell on what consciousness raising is or what its epistemic credentials are."[496] What is more important for Haslanger is how it gives us a concrete example of an instance of ideology critique.

For the purposes of this project, I am proposing that we imagine a process of ideology critique that draws from the vocabulary and the practices of the capability approach—more specifically, building on the conception of "reasons to value" in order to identify and articulate *distortions of reasons to value a resource*, distortions that are the basis of the cultural technēs that compose unjust social structures, and which agents perpetuate by participating in these cultural technēs.

Indeed, in the preceding analysis of the structure of GM corn farming in the Upper Pulangi, we have already identified different reasons for valuing the resource of GM corn as articulated by different agents within that social structure: (1) GM corn is valued as a source of economic profit by traders, farmers, and corporations. (2) GM corn is valued as a source of cultural and social capital (and the social status that these signify) by traders. (3) GM corn is valued as a means of sustenance and survival by farmer. And finally, (4) corn is valued as simply one crop among others, as part of a broader cultural technē of farming as self-development and as a relationship with the ecosystem one inhabits, and in some cases, informed by an indigenous cosmology. This last reason to value is a particularly important one to articulate because it implies that there is a resource and reasons to value that is obscured by the structure of GM corn farming. More specifically, it shows us how farming in general is seen by farmers as a valuable resource, and that the reasons for valuing farming as a resource are more varied and extend beyond income and profit generation.

Examining the social structure and practices of GM corn farming, we can conclude that the structure and its practices are guided by the first two reasons for valuing the resource: economic profit and the maintenance of cultural and social capital are the values that underly and coordinate the social structure of GM corn farming in the Upper Pulangi. The material

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[494] Haslanger, "Critical Theory and Practice," 24.

[495] Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, MA: 1989), 83-105. Cited in Haslanger, "But Mom, Crop Tops *Are* Cute!" 407.

[496] Haslanger, "But Mom, Crop Tops *Are* Cute!" 407, footnote 2.

conditions of injustice within this social structure are directly related to how the social structure and its practices *exclude and preclude* the possibility of valuing GM corn farming as the other latter reasons to value that the farmers identified, i.e. as means of sustenance, self-development, and ecological relations. Thus, in the process of ideology critique, one comes to recognize that in the ideology of GM corn farming that coordinates this social structure, the value of corn farming is distorted and misrecognized.

How is the value of corn farming distorted and misrecognized by the ideology of GM corn farming? This ideology and the practices that it generates are based on income/profit generation as the sole reason to value corn farming, and many farmers articulate how they feel constrained to comply with this ideology and its practices despite having alternative reasons for valuing farming—a few farmers even say it feels as if they 'have no choice' in the matter. Conversely, articulating other reasons for valuing farming—for instance, food security and ecological sustainability—also helped farmers realize the possibility of alternative farming practices beyond GM corn farming.

4.2 From ideology critique to consciousness raising to social-structural change

Through my use of Haslanger's social ontology (with a capabilitarian lens) in the preceding sections, I have claimed that an unjust social structure is one that is in the grips of an ideology which excludes and precludes reasons to value a resource *apart from* the reason to value that resource endorsed by that ideology. This has a concrete impact on the agency freedom of those who participate within the structure as their capabilities for action are limited by the ideology; if their reasons to value don't fit in with the ideology, their agency freedom is constrained because they cannot act according to their own values. We can see examples of this in the context of the Upper Pulangi, where many farmers articulate a feeling of being constrained or having no other choice but to farm GM corn. Conversely, a social structure that is less unjust is one that accommodates or makes room for the plurality of reasons to value beyond the mainstream (even hegemonic) reason for valuing a resource, and instead has room for agents to act in alignment with their values outside the mainstream; that is, it is a social structure that supports agency freedom.

My capabilitarian, critical analysis of the situation in the Upper Pulangi in the preceding section of this chapter can be considered a capabilitarian form of ideology critique because in it, I articulate the origin of the different responses to the perceived injustices of GM corn farming in the Upper Pulangi and argued that these responses from farmers and traders alike emerged from reasons to value farming apart from income- or profit-generation, which is the reason to value at the heart of farming GM corn. Generalizing from this, a capabilitarian form of ideology critique is a critique that is sensitive to *both* the ideology's dominant reasons to value and the constraints on agency that arise from it, and to the reasons the value that are excluded and marginalized by the unjust structure and its ideology. This attentiveness to what is excluded is also a way of mitigating the problem of epistemic respect that Haslanger raises. Agents themselves can articulate their concrete experiences of being limited by the specific

ideology, as well as articulating the reason/s to value that the ideology has no room for, and their experiences of being constrained or enabled to act in alignment with these reasons.

Can it be considered a form of consciousness raising? At first glance, it may not initially seem to be the case. I have engaged mainly in a kind of data analysis: based on the different data collected through various means, through surveys, group and individual interviews conducted by others, and my own interviews, I have tried to put together a clearer picture of the social structure. From this I, I tried to reconstruct the different relations and examined its underlying unvoiced assumptions. This process of data collection and analysis does not seem to fit into the "collective process" of reflection that Haslanger describes as consciousness raising.

However, consciousness raising does not necessarily have to be a structured, formal process explicitly called "consciousness raising." We need not have to organize a formal "consciousness raising session" together; conceptual spaces for ideology critique need not be formally constructed and can arise from informal conversations or other communal activities. What is more important is the creation of a space in which we can engage in critique, in view of conceptualizing alternatives relevant to that social context. As Haslanger writes, "Roughly, consciousness raising considers the way in which social thought and social reality are interdependent, offers a critical perspective on the meanings implicit in this thought-imbued reality, and proposes alternative meanings gained from a perspective within the social context in question."[497]

One thing that I noticed in the years that the LUCID Project was implemented was a sense of how the perceptions and articulations of farmers in the Upper Pulangi would become more nuanced and detailed the more familiar they were with the people engaging with them in conversation. If the covid-19 pandemic had not happened, I would have wanted to interview the same respondents at least two more times, not only to cultivate a relationship with them, but also to see if their articulations and perceptions would change, and how these would change as time passed. I had the impression that the more we—that is, all of the different people involved in the LUCID Project—talked about corn farming with them, in various forms, the more it allowed them space to think and articulate their own observations and explore their own ideas and different options available to them; that more and more farmers, especially the younger farmers, began exploring other practices. Were regular visits from researchers asking these questions creating room for ideology critique, creating informal spaces for consciousness raising among farming communities? This is a line of investigation that is no longer within the scope of this project, but perhaps is an opening for future research.

Examining what form/s ideology critique and consciousness raising can take opens many possible directions for further research. For one, it raises the broader question of whether we can consider the work of non-government organizations, people's organizations, and other

[497] Haslanger, "But Mom, Crop Tops *Are* Cute!" 407, footnote 2.

development actors as spaces for ideology critique and consciousness raising. Are these real spaces that allow for social change, or if these have not been successful in creating these spaces? It also raises the question of whether ideology critique is possible for the agents who gain the most advantages and benefits within unjust structures. Returning to the Upper Pulangi, we may ask, is it possible for government agents and agents who represent the interests of the multinational corporations who sell the GM corn seeds and other agricultural input to engage in ideology critique? What form could this ideology critique and consciousness raising take? In the case of these multinational corporations, valuing GM corn exclusively as a source of profit may seem intrinsic to the nature of their enterprise, leading to the question if it would be possible for corporations to reframe their reasons to value.

I shall return to these separate lines of questioning later; for now, I will continue tracing these lines of questioning to the point where they converge again, on the question of the possibility of social change. After all, at the heart of all this effort of ideology critique is the desire for greater justice. How do we move from ideology critique, whether in the form of consciousness raising or another form, into action, into changing social structures? Again, however, this question seems to lead into areas of theory and practice that extend beyond the scope of my present project. This is another opening for future research. As Haslanger writes:

> A further goal, of course, is social change resulting in greater justice. Ideology critique of the sort I've described can help create conceptual space for such change, but thought can never replace action. The power of consciousness raising is not just to offer new avenues of thought, but to create spaces where new schemas can be acted out, and eventually new—less oppressive—practices can become hegemonic. Describing what those practices should look like is a task for further normative debate.[498]

Nonetheless, the context of the Upper Pulangi gives us some hints at whether social structural change can indeed emerge from a capabilitarian critical analysis. The responses of the farmers and trader that I have discussed in this chapter reveal a kind of ideology critique and consciousness raising process—efforts to not only think of alternatives, but to try to act out these alternatives. However, we cannot *at this point* conclude that the social structure of GM corn farming in the Upper Pulangi has changed for the better. Returning to Haslanger's social ontology, we have seen that for a social structure to change, cultural technēs must change—and this in turn requires collective action from agents, to change their practices to align with their changed valuation of a resource, over a sustained period. Some social conditions can make it more difficult for individual agents to sustain counter-cultural practices (and indeed as social structures are means for social organization and cohesion).

It remains to be seen how the social practices initiated by the farmers and trader I have discussed in this chapter can be sustained over time, whether more farmers and traders share in their alternative values and practices, and whether these practices eventually result in a more just social structure for farmers. After all, GM corn was introduced to the Upper Pulangi

[498] Haslanger, "Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground," 475.

20 years ago. In contrast, the examples of changes in cultural technēs—specifically, farming and trading practices—have only been in practice for a few years, at best. Though some of these changes may harken back to traditional farming practices, the cultural technēs that supported and coordinated these traditional practices have already eroded—because, as Haslanger explains, of the direct, looping, mutually-sustaining relationship between social practices and cultural technēs. The erosion of one is what leads to the erosion of the other. But this realization need not just be a source of despair, it can also be a source of potential and hope for change—the social forces that eroded traditional farming practices are the same social forces that can erode the exploitative practices of GM corn farming.

5. A capabilitarian critique of structural injustice

The mode of analysis that I propose—a capabilitarian critique of structural injustice—helps bring to light the background conditions of injustice, how these are perpetuated, and even helps identify agents' responses within these structures and possible levers for change. It is able to do this by paying attention to the reasons to value resources implicit in the unjust structure, and to the reasons to value that are not recognized and excluded from the social structure. However, it is not an analysis that supplies solutions, nor is it an analysis that provides a formula for changing an unjust structure for the better. Rather, it is a means opening space for seeing what underlies and enables unjust structures—the reasons to value a resource that at the heart of social practices, and the resultant social structure—and finding possible alternative reasons to value and alternative social practices.

If I am demonstrating a new mode of analysis for the CA, what is the value that it adds to the approach? A tool that can be used to articulate and identify factors that typically aren't accounted for in typical policy-making analyses, a way of describing the background conditions of injustice in a way that moves beyond focusing on individuals and the state, focusing instead on the social relations and practices that are difficult to measure but nonetheless provide context for and drivers for change.

Chapter 6
A Concluding Postscript:
Exploring the Possibilities of a Capabilitarian Critical Analysis of Structural Injustice

I have come to the end of this project, and what remains is to draw the strands of this thesis together and point towards possible ways forward. To do this, I will first present a precis of my thesis. This is followed by revisiting two questions that I raised at the end of Chapter 5, questions I raised in my sketch of a capabilitarian critical analysis of structural injustice. Finally, I end with a more personal capabilitarian critical analysis, if you will, of my own positionality as a researcher and philosopher engaging with the capability approach through the course of this project.

1. Looking back on this project

I began this thesis with the intention of arriving at a better, more comprehensive understanding of structural injustice from within the capability approach, with a particular focus on the relationship of agents to structural injustice. I wanted to come terms not only with how agents' capabilities for action are constrained and limited by structural injustice, but also to find potential levers for change that may allow agents—even those worst off, most limited by the structure—to change the structure or even circumvent it, in view of reducing injustice and increasing justice. I decided to focus on the capability approach to begin with, because of its concern for, and applicability, to real-world situations of injustice, and how it straddles both theory and practice. I was also drawn to it because of how agency features prominently in its framework for understanding capabilities. Agency, also called *agency freedom* in the capability approach literature, is crucial for understanding the impact of social structure on capability, as social structures are factors that constrain or enable capabilities of individuals, and in turn constrains or enables their agency freedom. However, it also seemed that there was not much in the existing capability approach literature that focused specifically on social structures and the injustices that arise from such structures.

1.1 An analysis of the field context

This process of understanding agency and structural injustice began in Chapter 1 through reflecting on a concrete situation of structural injustice, involving the corn farmers and the trader/financiers who participate in the system of genetically-modified (GM) corn farming in the Upper Pulangi Watershed of Bukidnon. I sought to sketch the social structure, and the positions that these agents (farmers and traders alike) occupy within the structure, to understand better how it is the structure itself that is unjust, rather the injustices being the direct result of individual agents' actions. We saw that in the Upper Pulangi, access to economic, social, and cultural capital is dependent on farmers' social relations, particularly their relation to local influential patrons in their community who are the trader/financiers. In the Upper Pulangi, farmers themselves recognize how their own agency is constrained by the

system of GM corn farming, but they also persist in participating in the system because it allows them to access economic, social, and cultural capital that they would not have access to otherwise. The very structure that constrains their capabilities as agents (in the sense that they find it very difficult, near impossible even, to opt out of farming GM corn) also enables their agency, in the sense that it gives them access to different forms of capital, which in turn allows them to farm GM corn.

1.2 An Overview of the Capabilty Approach

In Chapter 2, I turned my attention to the capability approach. I presented an overview of the approach, following Ingrid Robeyns's modular account, which highlights the relationship of questions of injustice to capabilities and functionings on the one hand, and well-being and agency on the other. I reflected on the usefulness of Robeyns's account of the approach, while also highlighting how it seems to overlook or gloss over a feature of the capability approach that I found particularly attractive in my own reading. This feature is what Christine Koggel has described as "relationality," that is, the room that the approach makes for us to understand the impact informal social relations can have on capabilities and functionings—a feature that is overlooked in many theories and approaches to justice that focus on individual agents and/or on formal institutions of governance, skipping over whole swathes of relational and social reality that agents experience and participate in throughout their day-to-day lives. I highlight as well in this chapter how the version of the capability approach presented by Amartya Sen, in contrast to other main proponents of the approach, is most sensitive to how injustice is manifested in the constraints of capabilities and functionings, not only on the level of human well-being, but also (and more importantly for my purposes in this thesis) on the level of agency (what Sen has also called *agency freedom*), and how such agency is enabled and/or constrained by the informal and formal social relations in which it is exercised.

1.3 The place of agency, social relations and structures, and injustice in the capability approach

It is to the conceptualization of the relationship between agency, social relations, social structures, and structural injustice within the capability approach that I turned my attention to in Chapter 3. I began with a survey of the existing literature within the capability approach, with particular focus on conceptualizations of agency, structural injustice, and oppression in the works of Amartya Sen, Sabina Alkire, and Jay Drydyk. I showed how Sen's conception of agency, though often interpreted from a liberal lens, nonetheless highlights fundamental *relational* and *social* features of agency that are not captured by this liberal reading of his work. This is demonstrated most clearly, I argued, in Sen's repeated use of the story of Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Differing from conventional western interpretations of the *Bhagavad Gita* (which tend to equate Arjuna with consequentialist ethics, and the god Krishna with deontological ethics), Sen argues that the more important insight from Arjuna's story is how individual agents are inevitably situated in concrete contexts, in relation to other individual

human beings, and thus an agent's actions will inevitably be both influenced by, and have an influence on, this relational and social context.

In the work of Alkire, I find an articulation from the vocabulary of the capability approach of how injustice can arise from the relations between agents and their contextual social arrangements, which Alkire identifies as structural injustice. Using as its foundation Sen's work with Jean Drèze, Alkire develops a typology of agents within unjust social structures, identifying different positions agents can have within and in relation to unjust structures. While her text focuses on the challenge of collective social action, I take from her work this sense of how agents occupy different positions within structures of injustice, and how one's relative advantage or disadvantage has much to do with one's positionality within the structure. Finally for Chapter 3, I draw from the work of Drydyk to make the connection between the capabilitarian conception of agency and experiences of structural injustice, particularly in contexts of oppression. Drydyk articulates what he calls the capability-agency perspective of oppression, which allows us to look beyond capability measurement into understanding the background conditions—the conditions of oppression—that constrain agents' capabilities. He asserts that using the capability approach in this way allows us to understand and analyze the *background conditions* of injustice. Background conditions have been comparatively neglected in the capability approach literature; Drydyk notes that the bulk of the capability approach literature is focused on what he calls foreground and middle-ground analyses of injustice—either capability measurements and evaluations (the foreground), or policy level analyses and formulations (the middle ground). Drydyk suggests as well that the capability approach can learn from critical social theory and the role explanation plays in their work of social critique.

1.4 Social structures and structural injustice

Throughout the discussion in Chapter 3, however, one key concept remains not as clearly defined as the rest, despite Alkire's assertion that it is of central concern within the capability approach: this is the concept of structural injustice. In Chapter 4, I seek to define the concept of structural injustice more clearly, and to do so I needed to move from the capability approach literature into contemporary Anglophone critical social theory, more particularly the work of Iris Marion Young. In Young's work, we find an articulation of structural injustice that distinguishes it not only from injustices individual agents commit against other agents, but also from injustices that group or corporate agents commit against other agents. By the term *structural injustice*, Young seeks to identify injustices that occur because of the social arrangements in which agents exist and participate. These social arrangements significantly disadvantage some agents and advantage others based on the positions that they occupy within this structure. This sort of injustice is diffused across the social structure, and as a result, an individual agent can still be implicated in injustice (despite acting in ways that do not violate moral or legal norms) by virtue of their participation in the social structure. To participate in the unjust social structure is to perpetuate it and the injustices inherent in it.

To deepen this conception further in Chapter 4, I delve into the nature of social structures and social-structural processes. Here, Sally Haslanger's social ontology allows us to articulate the mutually influencing, looping relationships between individual agents and social practices; how social practices arise from groups of agents figuring out access to a resource, and how the repetition of these social practices by agents with different degrees of relation to each other and to the resource results in the establishment of socio-structural relations. Agents in turn occupy varying positions within these socio-structural relations. Their positions within these socio-structural relations are both limiting (in the sense that their capabilities and possibilities for action are constrained by the position they occupy) and enabling (in the sense that capabilities and possibilities for action are available to an agent *because* they are part of a social-structural relation that allows them access to a resource that they value).

Equipped with this better articulation of social structures, their emergence, and how these structures both enable and constrain agency, I end Chapter 4 by exploring the implications of structural injustice and its relationship to agency, more specifically to ideas of democratic action and whether democratic action can be a means for transforming unjust structures and finding levers for social change. Democratic action as understood by both Young and Haslanger, I argue, is a cognate for Sen's conception of agency freedom and its emphasis on acting according to one's reason/s to value, beyond the constraints of necessity and well-being freedom. I argue that this understanding of structural injustice from the critical social theory literature can indeed prove helpful to the capability approach, particularly in enhancing its explanatory and analytical power when faced with what Drydyk has called the background conditions of injustice.

1.5 Sketching a capabilitarian critical approach to structural injustice

Thus, in Chapter 5, I brought together Haslanger's social ontology with the more comparative, realization-focused version of the capability approach in order to propose and sketch a procedure for a capabilitarian, critical analysis of structural injustice. I illustrated this by applying this capabilitarian critical analysis to the field context of GM corn farming in the Upper Pulangi. As I developed this process, I also explored how such an analysis of structural injustice enables us to arrive at a better account and explanation of what Drydyk has called the background conditions of injustice. More particularly, it enables us to recognize what makes social structures unjust. Social structures are unjut when these exclude and preclude a plurality of reasons to value a resource—or, as Haslanger puts it, misrecognizing and distorting the reasons to value a resource. This in turn results in social practices/cultural technēs which advantage specific agents (those who share the same reason to value) while disadvantaging others (those who have other reasons to value the resource. Haslanger also alternately describes these unjust cultural technēs as the result of ideology, the distortion of the value of a resource.

A capabilitarian critical analysis, therefore, can be understood as ideology critique—a way of subjecting a social structure to analysis and revealing how its underlying reasons to

value exclude and preclude a plurality of possible reasons to value, limiting agents to specific practices that do not allow those agents the exercise of their agency freedom. Capabilitarian critical analysis, I argue, can help us come to a better understanding of the unjust social structure and its unjust practices. Moreover, it allows for the exploration and identification of possible levers for changing the unjust structure, through the process of ideology critique.

One concrete example of ideology critique that Haslanger identifies is consciousness raising, which she describes as a space created for collectively examining an ideology and subjecting it to collective critique. The new perspective generated by this process of critique, in turn, opens opportunities for new actions and practices that can lead to social structural change. However, as I pointed out at the end of Chapter 5, this capabilitarian critique of structural injustice is not a tool for assessing whether or not social structural change has occurred as a result of ideology critique and consciousness raising. Developing such a tool is beyond the scope of my work in this thesis.

At the end of Chapter 5, I also brought up two questions in relation to the scope and limits of ideology critique and consciousness-raising. The first question inquired into whether the work of non-government organizations, people's organizations, and other non-state development actors can be considered spaces for ideology critique and consciousness raising, while the second question concerns whether it's possible for agents that occupy the most advantageous positions of unjust structures to engage in ideology critique, change their values, and in doing so, reduce the injustice of the social structure. I find both these questions particularly important, despite how these lead beyond the scope of this project; it is to these questions that I now turn my attention, as a post-script to my project.

2. Two questions: Some initial explorations

Why do I find these two questions important? This is primarily because they force me to return to the concrete realities of the capability approach and structural injustice, in the hopes of anticipating possible problems or struggles that may arise. It fits well within the spirit of Sen's realization-focused, comparative approach to justice. Second, but just as importantly, the capability approach as practiced today engages in both arenas—the arena of human development policy, initiatives, and participatory development projects on the one hand, and the arena of corporate/business ethics and business's role in development on the other.[499] In this section, I will begin with some reflections and ideas in response to the question concerning

[499] The first arena is common knowledge. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the approach is influential in the field of development internationally. For corporate ethics and business, see Adela Cortina, "Capabilities, Human Rights, and Business," *Handbook of the Philosophical Foundations of Business Ethics,* Christoph Luetge, ed. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 693-708, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1494-6_19; Georges Enderle, "The Capability Approach as Guidance for Corporate Ethics," *Handbook of the Philosophical Foundations of Business Ethics*, 675-691, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1494-6_21; Domingo García-Marzá, "Business Contribution to Human Development from the Capabilities Approach Standpoint," *Handbook of the Philosophical Foundations of Business Ethics*, 719-730, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1494-6_89.

corporations, and end with the question concerning participatory development projects, as it is with the latter that I have more personal and concrete experiences to draw from.

2.1 On the possibility of ideology critique among corporations

It seems common-sensical that profit-seeking is the intrinsic value at the center of any corporate business enterprise. The income that a business earns or the losses it incurs are perceived to be the measure of its success or failure. The larger the profits—understood simply as the difference between income a business has generated and the expenses it incurred in the process of doing business—the more successful a business. This seems to be reflected in business practices such as annual reports and audits (which are often institutionalized and legally required in many countries), shareholders' meetings, and other, less formal efforts to show that a business is in good financial standing. It seems taken for granted that the very purpose of forming corporations lies in the ability to generate ever-greater profits. Based on these common-sensical conceptions of the nature of corporations, it seems easy to formulate an answer to my question in Chapter 5, whether corporations such as those involved in the social structure of GM corn could be subjected to ideology critique and consciousness raising. If the reason to value that defines business is profit—that profit is intrinsic to the nature of a business enterprise, without which it would not be considered a business to begin with—would it not be fruitless to try to challenge profit as a reason to value?

On the other hand, there is nothing that prevents us from separating corporate business enterprises *from* profit as a value, or from modifying corporations' reasons to value to allow for *other reasons to value* apart from profit. Indeed, if we return to the definition of a corporation, we find that it continues to be defined as a kind of organization, which is in turn understood as collective of people brought together by shared interests and values, and that those values may, but not necessarily, include profit.[500] Contemporary literature in business management practice itself is engaged in a continuing debate about the purposes of business organizations, and recognizes a plurality of different organizational types and views.[501] Thus, even if common sense tells us that businesses are concerned solely with profit, this does not automatically lead to the conclusion that this value cannot be challenged, nor that the fundamental nature of business is lost if we challenge this value. In this sense, the endeavor of ideology critique of business corporations is not fruitless. Moreover, business does not exist separately from social structures, and is itself a social structure. We can thus subject it to critical analysis.

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[500] David A. Statt, "Organization," The Concise Dictionary of Business Management, 1999, Routledge/Taylor and Francis.

[501] Jacob Dahl Rendtorff, "Philosophical Theories of Management and Corporations," in *Handbook of the Philosophical Foundations of Business Ethics*, 1409-1431, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1494-6_66. See also Rendtorff, "Basic Concepts of Philosophy of Management and of Corporations," *Handbook of the Philosophical Foundations of Business Ethics*, 1361-1385, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1494-6_65.

If engaging in ideology critique of business corporations is not fruitless, what form/s can it take, and can it result in durable social change? This is a question that is more difficult to answer, but even more valuable than the previous question in my estimation, because it is one that leads us back into *action*, and again points into areas beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, I venture two possible forms that ideology critique of corporations that currently exist, but whose durability and effectivity remains to be seen.

2.1.1 Encountering the other agents in the social structure through field courses

One limitation of business corporations is arguably how the size of corporations makes dehumanization quite easy, particularly if one follows the popular management adage, often attributed to Peter Drucker, that "you can't manage what you can't measure." Organizational objectives are couched in measurable terms, and it is easy to lose sight of the agents—the human beings—behind those numbers. The sales agents selling the products, the network of sellers and buyers they cultivate, the ordinary consumers—these are rarely reflected on. For the average mid-level manager, what are more important are items on a spreadsheet and the efficiency of processes as these have been outlined by those higher up in the hierarchy. It is also easy to overlook the possible human impact of these processes because of the focus on efficiency.

To re-humanize these factors, Environmental Science for Social Change (one of the organizations that headed the LUCID Project) partnered with a Philippine university, Ateneo de Manila University, to pilot a program that brought mid-career Master of Business Administration (MBA) students into a field context. Through this program, students were tasked to view the relationships between business, government policy, social structures, communities, and individuals, especially the most marginalized communities and individuals. These MBA students are already working as lower and middle managers in corporations and are doing their degrees part-time alongside their full-time jobs. They interviewed farmers in three communities of the Upper Pulangi, and through different sessions and workshops, reflected on the experiences of these farmers in relation to their own understanding of the workings of business, as well as the government's national development plan for Mindanao, and whether these really benefit the people in the margins.[502]

In interviews I conducted together with Stéphane Leyens and Charlotte Vyt in February 2020, students who had gone through the field course in 2019 and 2018 generally articulated that the course helped them gain a deeper understanding of the interrelation between their individual lives, the environment and the lives of distant others, and some identified concrete changes that they have decided to take as individuals (such as starting a business focused on

[502] Environmental Science for Social Change, "Business students learn why the margins persist in a growing economy," 30 December 2019, https://lucid.essc.org.ph/archives/308; also see Environmental Science for Social Change, "Why the Margins Persist in a Growing Economy," 24 October 2019, YouTube Video, 9:52, https://youtu.be/d9TY1uUe3q4?si=gjIBjXmMMKqa_X0j.

producing environmentally sustainable products for athletes) as a response. The experience also cultivated in them feelings of solidarity with the different farmers they encountered, despite their differences in life circumstances. However, the sustainability of these individual changes, and of the program as a whole, has yet to be explored, as the implementation of the program was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic for three years now, and it remains unclear if it will eventually resume.

2.1.2 Holding corporations accountable to their own avowed values

One of the examples of unjust structures that Iris Marion Young reflected upon in *Responsibility for Justice*, as mentioned in Chapter 4 of this work, was the global fashion industry and its reliance on unjust labor practices to produce garments. She also cited the anti-sweatshop movement that sprung up in US college campuses as an example of taking active responsibility for structural injustice. It seems fitting, then, to return to the global fashion industry to examine how ideology critique and consciousness raising can occur for businesses.

Since the Rana Plaza disaster of 2013[503]—the collapse of a multi-story building housing multiple garments factories in Dhaka, Bangladesh, all contracted to supply garments to major global fashion brands, which led to the death of over 1,100 workers—the global fashion industry's labor and sourcing practices have been under continued scrutiny. The decade after the factory's collapse has seen revelations not only of unjust labor practices, but the massive negative environmental impact of garments production,[504] and fashion brands have responded by making commitments to ethical and sustainable production. These commitments have included signing international accords to ensure workers' welfare and safety[505] and committing to environmental sustainability standards to produce more sustainable clothing.[506]

In addition, non-government organizations, people's movements, activists, and ordinary citizens have stepped up to hold companies accountable to their own values and commitments. For example, citizens' inquiries into the evidence to back sustainability claims of the fashion retailer H&M (which advertises several "sustainable fashion" brands) have led

[503] BBC, "Bangladesh factory collapse toll passes 1,000," 10 May 2013, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-22476774.

[504] Renee Cho, "Why Fashion Needs to Be More Sustainable," Columbia Climate School, 10 June 2021, https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2021/06/10/why-fashion-needs-to-be-more-sustainable/.

[505] Fashion Revolution, "Rana Plaza 10 years on: A decade of progress," April 2023, https://www.fashionrevolution.org/rana-plaza-10-years-on-a-decade-of-progress/.

[506] Fashion Revolution, "Fashion Transparency Index 2023," https://www.fashionrevolution.org/about/transparency/, accessed 31 October 2023.

to accusations of greenwashing[507] and a class action lawsuit.[508] Organizations such as Remake Our World and Fashion Revolution conduct annual reports to monitor fashion brands' transparency and accountability, and whether their avowed values match up with their actual actions.[509] These organizations also work with large networks of organizations, labor unions, journalists, and even social media influencers to conduct campaigns targeting not only corporations, but also government regulators and legislators, as well as regular consumers of fashion.[510]

I think an exploration of how the movements and organizations behind holding fashion brands accountable would give us good case studies of ideology critique and consciousness raising in relation to business, especially to examine how these can be sustainable over time. These movements and organizations have been continuously in action for a decade or more now, and perhaps these can give us insights into sustainability and the possibility of changing the reasons to value at the heart of business and making these changes in value enduring and stable. I am particularly struck by an image, right at the top of the front page of Remake Our World's website, which seems to capture the spirit of capabilitarian critique: the image is of a group of six women of different ethnicities, all wearing plain white t-shirts that read: "Wear Your Values." Perhaps changing business's reasons to value, at least in the business of fashion, is indeed possible.

2.2 On participatory development projects and structural injustice

This brings us to the first question I raised, which is concerned with (in a sense) the work of values—that is, the work of non-government organizations, people's organizations, and other non-state social/human development actors, and whether these can be considered spaces for ideology critique and consciousness raising. For my purposes, I want to focus more specifically on the work these groups do in relation to participatory development projects, which have become one of the most popular and widespread frameworks for development projects globally, and whether participatory development projects are spaces for ideology critique and consciousness raising.

Practitioners of the capability approach, most notably Sabina Alkire, have argued that participatory methods are the means of operationalizing Sen's concepts of public debate and

[507] "Greenwashing in marketing refers to companies presenting product or service information in a way that makes consumers believe it is environmentally friendly." Jane Marsh, "Explainer: What is Greenwashing in Marketing?" 23 February 2022, https://earth.org/what-is-greenwashing-in-marketing/.

[508] Tiffany Ferris, et al., "Guidance for 'sustainable' claims after dismissal of H&M 'greenwashing' class action," Reuters, 2 June 2023, https://www.reuters.com/legal/legalindustry/guidance-sustainable-claims-after-dismissal-hm-greenwashing-class-action-2023-06-02/.

[509] See Remake Our World, "Fashion Accountability Report 2022," https://remake.world/2022-remake-fashion-accountability-report/; and Fashion Revolution, "Fashion Transparency Index 2023," https://www.fashionrevolution.org/about/transparency/, accessed 31 October 2023.

[510] See Fashion Revolution, "Key Organisations," https://www.fashionrevolution.org/key-organisations/, accessed 31 October 2023.

democratic participation in development applications. Alkire outlines the transitive, constructive, and intransitive benefits of these participatory methods and concludes that participatory development approaches are compatible particularly with the CA's emphasis on autonomy and freedom.[511] Of particular interest to me is her discussion of the constructive effects of participatory methods, which she describes as *value formation*. Drawing from Sen's description of how democratic participation allows for *collective discussion of new information* and *a critical reflection of values*, which helps the formation of values and priorities of a society, Alkire asserts that participatory development methods fit this bill, beyond the more formalized and institutionalized democratic processes of the state that Sen focuses on.[512]

Sen's and Alkire's accounts of participatory methods have much congruence with Haslanger's account of ideology critique and consciousness raising. They give us an initial answer to the question: yes, the work of non-state development actors like activists, researchers, and non-government organizations are a site of ideology critique and consciousness raising. Or at least, in the best circumstances, they can be—circumstances where all participants in the development project have voices in the process, and there is genuine exchange and communication that occurs. Perhaps this is what explains what I witnessed through the course of the LUCID Project. As the research project continued through each year, and as I would return to the Upper Pulangi, I would notice anecdotally how the number of farmers farming more than just GM corn seemed to increase each time I visited communities. I also noticed that farmers seemed to be more open to sharing their thoughts and opinions the more familiar they became with me and with the other members of the LUCID Project, more willing to share their strategies and ways of coping with the difficulties they experienced. The different participatory activities that were part of the LUCID Project—interviews, surveys, games, farm visits—seemed to create spaces in which people were willing and able to freely discuss their values and learn about each other's positions and ideas.

However, while there have been successes in using participatory methods, there also have been situations and development projects where participatory processes are used or manipulated, or situations in which there is no genuine exchange and communication of new ideas and critical reflection on values. In some cases, participatory methods are used to give a project a veneer of legitimacy, but the project nonetheless pushes a development agenda that was already pre-established prior to the participatory processes, or worse, these are manipulated to impose the agendas of elites, or simply replicate pre-existing social structures and hierarchies.[513] These situations and concerns broadly echo some political theorists'

[511] Alkire, *Valuing Freedoms,* 125-153.

[512] Alkire, *Valuing Freedoms,* 133-137.

[513] These limitations and issues with participatory methods are collected in Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari, eds., *Participation: The New Tyranny?* (London: Zed Books, 2001). For a perspective drawing from field experiences, Andrea Cornwall and Garret Pratt, "The use and abuse of participatory rural appraisal: Reflections from practice," *Agriculture and Human Values* 28 no.2 (2011): 263-272, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-010-9262-1.

concerns about "post-democracy," which is described as "a normatively problematic development of vested interests and economic elites hollowing out the processes of democratic decision-making while preserving its formal shell."[514]

Andrea Cornwall attributes these issues and limitations that emerge with participatory development projects to a limited view of what participation consists of, asserting that participation is often framed as a technology or methodology that is easily applicable in any given situation, as if citizen empowerment is "achieved by waving a magic participation wand, convening a participatory workshop or applying a few PRA tools and hey presto, there is empowerment!"[515] She asserts that often it is this way of understanding participation that leads to the problems outlined above. She notes that it is important to think of participatory development projects as inherently contextualized in diverse societies, communities, and histories, and to be responsive to these differences. As she writes, "The histories of community engagement with external agencies—whether the state, religious authorities or NGOs – in different places are complex and diverse; understanding these dynamics calls for an approach that regards participation as an inherently political process rather than a technique."[516]

This can itself become an area for further research. I think it would be particularly interesting and helpful to explore and inquire into the background conditions that allow participatory methods to be venues for consciousness raising and contrasting these with the background conditions that do not. The Philippines, in particular, because of its rich history of civil society organizations and applications of participatory methods (of development, liberatory education, community organizing, and consciousness raising)[517] would be a fruitful place to focus future research. As seen in popular discourse and scholarly work during the last six years, from the presidential term of Rodrigo Duterte to the election of Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. (the son of the former dictator), there is an increasing dissatisfaction with existing participatory processes and programs—whether those that involve the state directly or those initiated in civil society—as well as new emergent models of participation.[518]

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[514] Felix Butzlaff, "Between empowerment and abuse: citizen participation beyond the post-democratic turn," *Democratization* 27 no.3 (2020): 478, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1707809.

[515] Andrea Cornwall, "Unpacking 'Participation': models, meanings and practices," *Community Development Journal* 43 no.3 (July 2008): 278, https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsn010.

[516] Cornwall, "Unpacking Participation," 281.

[517] Participation in democratic processes and development projects, especially from marginalized sectors, is an important aspect of Article II of the 1987 Philippine Constitution.

[518] On the dissatisfaction with participatory models, see: Nicole Curato, "Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: Penal Populism and Duterte's Rise to Power," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 35 no. 3 (December 2016): 91–109. https://doi.org/10.1177/186810341603500305; Wataru Kusaka, *Moral Politics in the Philippines: Inequality, Democracy and the Urban Poor* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017); Agustin Martin G. Rodriguez, "Voices from the Margins: Widening the Cracks in the Development Discourse," *Philippine Sociological Review* 63 (2015): 85–110, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24717161. On emergent models of participation, see: Cherish Aileen Aguilar Brillon and Gerard Martin Suarez, "The Passion of Fans: How Fandom can Encourage Active Participation and Fight Disinformation," *Rappler.com*, 30 June 2022,

2.3 Reflecting on the positionality of the researcher

These issues and limitations identified with participatory research methods are also a second arena in which a capabilitarian critique of structure can be useful, particularly when used to interrogate the ideology or ideologies (that are often assumed or unvoiced) of the various actors that engage in these participatory processes. A capabilitarian critique of structure is one way of identifying pre-existing social structures and relationships that a development worker is unaware of, and which could potentially have a negative impact on the success of a participatory project—they can become aware, for instance, of the impact of local politics and social hierarchies on people's willingness to participate or work together.

My own experiences with field research and with observing and using participatory research methods in the LUCID Project was illuminating in this regard. Working in a muti-disciplinary research group, made up of a mix of academic researchers, community development workers, and development researchers working with a non-government organization, was an experience of learning about the explicit and implicit and unvoiced assumptions of the people I worked with, to be discussing the same research but to have different implicit reasons for conducting the research. This sometimes led to minor misunderstandings because people assumed that we all shared the same reasons and agenda for the research, when there were different reasons to value underlying each person's agenda—while the non-government organization wanted the project to have an output that would be useful for the farmers and perhaps even influence local and national government policy, some of the academic researchers were less concerned about this. I also found it difficult to navigate how to share these observations to my colleagues in the project, mainly for the reasons of being unfamiliar with each other's academic practices and the power relationships within respective academic and practical disciplines.

The experience of recruiting respondents for my own interviews within the LUCID Project was even more illuminating because I ended up having to learn to navigate the local community politics of the Upper Pulangi. The community development worker who oversaw recruiting people for interviews had found it easy to recruit farmers to interview but was having difficulty recruiting traders. He had finally secured an appointment with one big trader, but we missed the appointment time due to a long wait at a military checkpoint. When we arrived late at her business premises, she eyed us skeptically and declined to be interviewed because we had missed the appointed time, and she was busy at that moment. While I understood her reason for declining—we had been, after all, an hour late to our appointment—I wondered about her skeptical look, which seemed to me to indicate a degree of suspicion or lack of trust for community development workers. I am not sure what to attribute this mistrust to—though there has been a tendency by the government to "red-tag" some non-government

https://www.rappler.com/life-and-style/arts-culture/passion-of-fans-how-fandom-can-encourage-active-participation-fight-disinformation/.

organizations[519] since 2016, the specific organization I worked with has not been subjected to this—but I took this as an indication that I would have to recruit traders not through the organization. Given my understanding of rural communities in the Philippines, particularly how generally local economic elites would have relations with the local Roman Catholic parish, I had the idea of asking the local parish priest (who, luckily, I had met previously as a student in university) for help with recruitment. This proved to be a fruitful decision—within an hour, the priest had recruited two people for me to interview.

This experience taught me the importance of both recognizing on my own positionality as a researcher, and of having an understanding of the social relations and cultural norms of the locality in which I am conducting my research—levels of awareness that I was able to have only through constantly subjecting my own preconceptions and self-knowledge to reflection and critique, being sensitive to my status as an outsider and how I am received by the people I encounter in the localities. As I briefly touched on in Chapter 1, though I am Filipino and though I speak the local languages of the Upper Pulangi (and can be considered in one sense an insider), I am nonetheless a privileged outsider—because I am from the capital city, because I was educated in an elite Philippine university, because I am a researcher funded by a foreign government funder—and I needed this level of awareness of my privilege to mitigate potential barriers to communication and misunderstanding, and to mitigate as well my own fear that my research is extractive in nature—that my research will not have a tangible benefit in return for the people and communities who have provided me with data. This process of self-reflection and self-critique, I venture, is itself a form of ideology critique—more specifically, a critique of my own ideological background and context.

Furthermore, this process of self-reflection and self-critique has implications for researchers who work in participatory research. It intersects with questions of how researchers can come into participatory research and mitigate the possibility of manipulation, questions of the role of researchers play in these types of projects, and questions of how participatory research can be more democratized and genuinely participative. Returning to my experience of working as a researcher in the research project, it sometimes seemed like the lead researchers' expertise (or perhaps, their status as experts in their fields) gave them a level of authority that was not always compatible with the participants' culture of deference to authority, and I would wonder how to mitigate this kind of deference. Ideology critique of a researcher's position within research project may help in figuring out these questions. This is, however, yet another topic that deserves its own space.

[519] "Red-tagging" is a colloquial term in the Philippines to describe the act of alleging that individuals or groups are secretly part of the long-running communist insurgency in the Philippines and are thus not to be trusted. See Tanyalak Thongyoojaroen, "Red-Tagging in the Philippines: A License to Kill," 10 April 2023, Human Rights Foundation, https://hrf.org/red-tagging-in-the-philippines-a-license-to-kill/; Amnesty International Philippines, "Red-Tagging," https://www.amnesty.org.ph/campaigns/anti-terrorism-and-hr/red-tagging/, accessed 2 November 2023.

3. An ending and a beginning

With these final questions, I have opened at least three new possible paths for exploring and developing my conception of a capabilitarian critique of structural injustice—but these new paths are beginnings of new projects, for myself or for others. These beginnings as well mark the ending of this project, which began with an attempt to grapple with, and understand better, structural injustice, in relation to the capability approach, and its applications particularly in development projects. I hope that the people working in the capability approach and in development projects find value in this thesis.

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