

Adapted but not preferred: Human capabilities and wellbeing in oppressive environments

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Abstract

The capabilities approach draws attention to freedom, conceived of as the extent to which individuals have the capability to choose between different functionings (different things they would like to do or be). Oppressive environments limit the availability of options, or in capabilities language: they act to reduce the available combinations of functionings which individuals are free to select between. External constraints are, we argue, only one of the ways in which oppressive environments limit capabilities. Over time, oppressive environments may constrain the ability of individuals to take up options which are apparently available to them. Internal capabilities – the abilities developed over time which allow individuals to take advantage of the opportunities available to them – are shaped by the environment, and continued oppression often shapes or hinders their development such that they act as a constraint on people's ability to live the life they have reason to value. Adapted preferences, when individuals accept their oppression as normal, not viewing their circumstances as egregious infringements on their freedom, have received attention in the literature, especially in relation to women's self-assessed well-being. Individuals adapting to their oppressive environments is, however, only part of the story. The foundational work of Frantz Fanon, Paulo Freire and Steve Biko, followed by other global south academics, outlines how oppressive environments take their toll on people, in ways other than adapted preferences. Dehumanizing treatment, over time, dehumanizes. In contrast to adaptive preferences, they argue that many people living in oppressive environments are angry at the treatment they receive, but that they feel powerless (at least as individuals) to fight back against such treatment. This anger and sense of powerlessness can lead to apathy and, for some, self-destructive or anti-social behaviour. In South Africa we have wealth of data on wellbeing, but we have not adequately captured the myriad internalized effects of living in oppressive environments, and how these limit freedom. We do not know who is most affected and how these effects are limiting their ability to live the life they have reason to value. Without this knowledge, it is unsurprising that we do not have interventions, which we argue are warranted, to support people to overcome the consequences of prolonged exposure to dehumanizing treatment.

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Introduction

We begin with the fictional, but in South Africa, typical, story of Miriam: Miriam is 19 years old and pregnant, waiting outside the clinic for her first antenatal visit. She is happy to be pregnant, and while the baby may be unplanned, it is not unwanted. She loves her partner, even if she knows that marriage is unlikely as they cannot afford it now. Miriam has been waiting since 5am. You must arrive early because the queue builds up and the nurses will see only so many people. Miriam is waiting longer than expected today because it is the clinic manager's birthday and she has decided to delay opening for an hour so that she can have a birthday tea with her colleagues. The delay in opening is painful, and will make Miriam even later for work, but she, and the other women, keep quiet. This is just the way it is. Treatment like this is familiar to Miriam. At school the teacher would simply not turn up for a few days. She and her friends would hang around the school for a while and then return home and pass the afternoon watching TV. She struggled academically and was encouraged by the head teacher to drop out – the school is judged on its pass rate and it's best to get the struggling students out before final exams. She works now as a domestic worker for a white family in a wealthy suburb to the north of the city. She lives in an informal settlement in the west and takes two taxis each way. The commute is long, but it is not the time that worries her most. She often faces sexual harassment along the way. Worse still, when she gets dropped at the taxi stop at the end of the day, it is dark and the walk through the settlement frightens her, and she knows that her shack door is little defence against intruders, so even arriving home offers little security. And if the police are called, they may or may not show up. The clinic opens and she finally sees a nurse for her examination and her lecture on how stupid she was to get pregnant, and is then told she must return next week because they are out of stock of supplements.

Miriam knows what a good life looks like. She sees it every working day. She could easily list the aspects of her life which need improving if she is to have greater freedom to do and be what she has reason to value. She has not adapted to her circumstances to the extent that she sees the life she is living as satisfactory.

Miriam's freedom to do and be has been constrained. Her options were limited at every life stage. Expanding the options available and an improved environment would help Miriam. Access to a post-school training programme and improved security would be obvious capabilities enhancements. But has she made the most out of the options available to her? She went to high school and did not have to drop out. There is a clinic in her community, there may even be a system for reporting poor service. In addition to asking how external constraints could be eased i.e. how she could be provided with more opportunities, there

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are important questions regarding how she could be supported to take more advantage of the options available to her, and of options which may become available to her. We argue that this requires an appreciation of how her environment has taken a toll on her, shaping the way in which she makes decisions. After so many years of mistreatment, many of the constraints on her freedom are now internal.

Internalized oppression has been discussed in the capabilities literature, but, we argue, its treatment is incomplete. The literature has focused on adaptive preferences, which we are only part of the story. Scholarship from oppressive southern contexts has long pointed to other ways in which oppression is internalized. We outline how incorporating this scholarship into the capabilities approach will provide a fuller, and more relevant, picture of the limits to freedom in oppressive environments.

Adaptive preferences refer to situations where rights violations and/or poor treatment are not seen as such by the individuals who experience them. Oppressed people can come to believe that this is their lot in life, they cannot expect more. This is not to say that they enjoy their deprivation, but rather that there is a 'quiet acceptance'. People may even report high levels of life satisfaction despite objectively harsh circumstances – as an example of the extreme, Sen points to the possibility of a happy slave (Sen, 2001). Sen, Nussbaum and many other capabilities scholars have highlighted the importance of adaptive preferences (c.f. Sen, 1995; 2001; Nussbaum, 2001; 2003; Clark, 2005a; 2005b). They argue that they are a cause for caution when interpreting subjective wellbeing measures. Nussbaum's focus on women, so often victims of oppression, draws her deeper into the issue. Domestic violence, the repeated denial of access to education and other basic services, unequal childcare and so forth, are all so common and persistent, that they can become accepted, even by those who suffer because of them. Not to mention that they are defended as normal and just by those who benefit from them (Nussbaum, 2001). Nussbaum goes on to argue that in an environment which starts to protect the most important capabilities (the central capabilities which she has spent many years outlining), previously adapted preferences may change, adapting to this improved environment. Indeed, that a taste of these improved capabilities will lead to a desire for more. She also leaves room for interventions directly seeking to change adaptive preferences. The example in 'Woman and Human Development' of the powerful impact on women of seeing videos of women like them taking on their challenges was cited, in part, because of the consequences it had for the viewers' perceptions of themselves and their environment (Nussbaum, 2001).

Adaptive preferences provide an explanation for why people accept poor treatment, even when it appears that they could avoid it – women staying in abusive situations, for example. But, we argue, it is also possible that people accept poor treatment, even in the absence of external constraints, for reasons other than adaptive preferences. Missing these reasons may lead to those wishing to intervene missing opportunities to enhance freedom.

The inclusion of the word preferences in the adaptive preferences term has the potential to cause confusion. Sen long ago pointed to the dangers of the rotating definitions of preferences in economics (1977). He argued against the habit of those trying to defend revealed preference theory of switching their definition of preferences back and forth, depending on which definition best suited their argument at the time. At times, they would

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argue that the preferred option referred to the chosen option (with no comment on if that option was the most self-interested option). Then they would apply a more common definition and say that the preferred option is the one which the chooser stands to gain most from (with no mention of if they would always choose it). If you use only one of the definitions, it is possible to choose an option which is not in your self-interest, but by rotating definitions, you can assume all choices are self-interested. We need to be clear when discussing adaptive preferences if we are defining them as changes in what the individual thinks is best for themselves, or changes in what you choose to do, regardless of what they think best for themselves. The two are not the same. If we favour the former definition, then the choices made under adaptive preferences reflect what the individual wants to do (given the changes to their preferences). We, however, would like to leave open the possibility that in oppressive environments, some individuals opt not to take an available option, not because they do not want to, but because they don't feel they can.

Nussbaum's differentiation between basic, internal and combined capabilities is useful here. Basic capabilities refer to the 'innate equipment of individuals that is the necessary basis for developing the more advanced capabilities' (Nussbaum, 2001: p84). Internal capabilities are 'developed states of the person herself... sufficient conditions for the exercise of the requisite function... mature conditions of readiness' (2001: p84). Nussbaum argues that the key feature of internal capabilities is that they require the support from the 'surrounding environment' to develop². For internal capabilities, such as the internal capability to exercise political choice, to be realized, it must be combined with 'suitable external conditions' (2001: p85). It then becomes a combined capability. In this formulation, we see how a focus on current external environments, and not combined capabilities which consider the necessity of internal capabilities, can be misleading. The external environment may be conducive to political choice, but without the internal capability to take advantage of that, the option is not really there.

If we take adaptive preference only to reflect what people do and not what they think of as best, they include both Marx's false consciousness, where individuals see nothing wrong with their oppressive environment, and the consequences of dehumanizing environments on decision making, where people are angry, but feel powerless to respond. Although, if they really are powerless, then there is no adaptation. If, however, they feel powerless because they have internalized their oppression, then there is adaptation. It is this latter form of adaptation, arising from the consequences of sustained dehumanizing treatment on internal capabilities, which we argue requires greater attention.

Many scholars in the global south have, for some time, considered the way in which oppressive environments lead to changes within the oppressed that leave them

² Nussbaum argues that the importance of the surrounding environment for the development of internal capabilities is also a way of differentiating them from basic capabilities. This is an over simplification and does not reflect what we know about child development. Even sight, hearing and language require the support of the surrounding environment. The difference is that they require only the support of the immediate environment, typically shaped by the mother, rather than the larger family and social environment, which play a bigger role in determining internal capabilities.

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simultaneously angry and apathetic. The anger stemming from the dehumanizing treatment, the apathy (or even self-destructive behaviour) stemming from the sense of powerlessness. Drawing on this scholarship we can better understand how freedom is constrained in oppressive environments. We can then find better ways in which to measure the extent to which these consequences are experienced. By doing so, we can draw attention to a contributor to unfreedom which receives too little attention from policy makers.

A focus on the role of oppression in hindering or distorting the development of internal capabilities also draws attention to the risks associated with identifying basic/core sets of capabilities specifically for those living in extreme poverty. Development thinking in general often runs the risk of falling into Maslovian type thinking, i.e. the primacy of certain needs, particularly the physiological needs. This is based, implicitly or explicitly, on a misguided understanding of human needs. To achieve even the most 'basic' of outcomes, such as staying alive, often requires 'higher order' inputs, such as positive relationships with others. In theory, the capabilities focus on both choice and outcomes protects it from this error. Even if the focus is on a basic capability, it must be possible for it to be achieved, so the door is open to any of the required inputs. In practice, however, there is the risk of conceptualizing the extremely poor in animalistic terms by focusing on a core set of basic capabilities, without the express acknowledgement of what it takes to realize them. Nussbaum's list of a set of central capabilities, and the associated discussion of thresholds, does a better job of protecting against inadvertently casting the oppressed in animalistic terms. The list is not ordered, the question is then not which capability is more important for the most oppressed, but rather what threshold of each is required.

Miriam returns home from work the following week. There is a community meeting to discuss service delivery in her area. She decides to attend. People discuss their treatment at the clinic, the failure of their children's school teachers to show up for work, the poor state of their housing, their fear of crime and how they see no way they will get to live lives anything like those of the rich people they work for. As always, they are angry, but together they feel strong. But crowds, particularly angry crowds, are not renowned for their rational thought. That night they burn down the clinic. Miriam will have to travel further for her next antenatal clinic visit.

South Africa: An oppressive environment

That the colonial and Apartheid periods were oppressive is indisputable. To say that post-Apartheid South Africa remains, at least for many, oppressive, requires justification.

Prilleltensky and Gonick (1996) define oppression as 'a series of asymmetric power relations between individuals, genders, classes, communities, nations, and states. Such asymmetric power relations lead to conditions of misery, inequality, exploitation, marginalization, and social injustices.'

South African society remains characterized by high levels of racism, sexism and class based discrimination. Access to housing and basic services is uneven. Education and healthcare

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vary tremendously in terms of quality. Income and wealth inequality, both between and within race groups, remains extraordinarily high.

A wealthy white elite have managed to maintain and increase their wealth. Post 1994 they have been joined by a small, and mainly male, black elite. Both benefit from the current circumstances and act to protect their position. Corruption is rife, with poorer, less powerful members of society suffering as a result. Those involved in large and small scale acts of corruption have an interest in maintaining their opportunities to loot, and act to protect them.

Then there is the day-to-day racism, sexism and classism which shape people's lives. Poor treatment at work, in interactions with government departments, in accessing government services are common. Extremes of sexual violence and racist attacks represent only the tip of the iceberg.

Internalized oppression

'He is dominated but not domesticated. He is made to feel inferior, but not convinced of his inferiority.' – Frantz Fanon

'Reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the inevitable position. Deep inside his anger mounts at the accumulating insult, but he vents it in the wrong direction – on his fellow man in the township, on the property of black people.' – Steve Biko

'However, the oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risk it requires.' – Paulo Freire

Fanon (1961) was writing about colonialism, Biko (1978) about the Apartheid state and Freire (1970) about the economically oppressed in 1960s Brazil. All, however, remain relevant in 2017 South Africa. Decolonization remains an important concern. Apartheid may have ended over 20 years ago, but racial disparities remain extreme. The distribution of wealth in South Africa is at least as unequal as 1960s Brazil, with a small elite controlling a vast proportion of the economy, leaving the majority in poverty.

While the foundational work of these and other thinkers (Cabral (1974), Cone (1970) and Memmi (1967) etc.) remains relevant, it is essential that we consider how our understanding of the internalization of oppression and the ways in which it can be addressed has evolved (Prilleltensky and Gonick, 1996). There is a wealth of scholarship in the global south on this topic, and scholarship related to communities living in oppressive environments in the north, including a substantial body of literature on oppression and African-American women. The literature has increasingly drawn greater attention to the oppression of women, often ignored in earlier work, and how this intersects with race and class – see Thomas Sankara, Bell Hooks and Audre Lorde for examples). The themes of internalized oppression are strongly represented in post-colonial studies and decolonial thinking – see for example, *Decolonizing the Mind* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986). More recent work examines how the environment has, and has not, improved with changes in

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political systems and economic growth (c.f. Gibson, 2011; Prilleltensky and Gonick, 1996). In South Africa, for example, while economic inequality between race groups remains, inequality within groups has increased dramatically. While historically the system was purposefully designed to discriminate against black South Africans, it no longer is, yet discrimination remains common.

A defining theme in this body of work is that oppressive environments limit freedom through external and internal constraints. The external constraints are well known and the focus of advocacy and intervention. The internal constraints, however, appear to receive less attention, possibly because focusing on them can be interpreted as blaming the oppressed for their own suffering. But from Fanon onwards, the argument is strongly made that to ignore the internalization of oppression is a serious error. They all argue that living in oppressive environments takes its toll, leading to apathy, if not self-hatred and self-destructive behaviours. That this internalization of oppression is a barrier to the liberation of the oppressed. They all argue that removing the external constraints will not free the oppressed, unless they are able to free themselves from the mindset created by oppression. Perhaps Bob Marley, paraphrasing Marcus Garvey, said (sang) it best: 'Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds!'

Our principle point is to agree with Fanon and co that to ignore the internalization of oppression is a serious error. Further, we argue that the capabilities approach is well suited to a consideration of this internalization, as it shares a focus on freedom/liberation. The argument for the compatibility of this literature with the capabilities approach is strengthened by Nussbaum's work on the oppression of woman. Her work has already provided us with the framework of basic, internal and combined capabilities, which can be used to incorporate the insights from this literature. In capabilities language, Fanon and co argue that the development of internal capabilities is hindered or distorted by sustained oppression. As a result, while removing external constraints is often a necessary condition for capabilities enhancement, it may not be sufficient. This insight points to the importance of understanding the extent to which internal capabilities are hindered among oppressed individuals, how many individuals this happens to and what can be done to reverse these consequences and avoid them in the future.

Before moving on to questions of measurement and response, it is worth noting that there are further consequences to sustained oppression not covered in this literature. Fanon and co focused on the psychological consequences, but there are also biological consequences. Oppressive environments, particularly if experienced in early life, can hinder the development of even basic capabilities, which in turn act to hinder internal and combined capabilities. Recent insights from neuro-science and epi-genetics have shown how the rapid brain development which occurs early in life (particularly during the first 1,000 days) is shaped by environmental influences (c.f. Fox et al, 2010; Richter et al, 2017; Bick, 2017). Un-responsive caregiving, lack of appropriate nutrition and stressful environments, among other things, have been shown to hinder brain development, leading to a host of long-term consequences. While this paper focuses on the psychological consequences of oppressive environments on internal capabilities, we wanted to flag this impact on basic capabilities as another area for consideration. Moreover, it is increasingly difficult to separate out the psychological from the biological. Numerous studies have shown that your perceived social

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position can directly affect your health, typically through increased activation of the stress system (Marmot, 2005).

Measuring the consequences of internalized oppression

In South Africa, we have a rich history of measuring the wellbeing of residents. We have relatively good data on income and associated income poverty. We have data on subjective wellbeing stretching back many years. There have been several attempts to measure poverty using multi-dimensional frames. Moreover, there have been efforts to apply the capabilities approach (Clark and Qizilbash, 2005).

These approaches have repeatedly highlighted the high levels of both poverty and inequality. They have pointed to the racialized and gendered distribution of resources and opportunities. They have provided evidence of adaptive preferences, in the sense that those living in harsh circumstances at times report relatively high levels of overall life satisfaction. If, however, we look for the indicators of internalized oppression suggested by Fanon and co – anger, apathy, frustration, low self-worth, a sense of helplessness etc. The picture is less complete.

The characterisation of poverty is a topic that has garnered the attention of academics, policy makers and journalists in South Africa since the beginning of the 20th century. The practice of researching poverty in the country, therefore, has a lengthy and highly diverse history. A description of poverty in income terms, as a quantity capable of a measurement that is both scientific and objective was, for many years, attractive from a developmental perspective in appealing to donors, government administrations and the broader public. In recent years, however, a multidimensional approach to the measurement of poverty that includes subjective criteria has become popular (for a detailed review of this history, see Davie, 2017). South Africa also has a rich history of subjective wellbeing research. The South African Quality of Life (SAQoL) study has, for example, monitored subjective wellbeing for over three decades using standardised survey instruments which asked people if they were satisfied with their lives as a whole (for a discussion of the SAQoL study, see Møller, 2007a).

The SAQoL trends study captured post-election euphoria in the month following the first democratic election in April 1994 when all South Africans, black and white, reported life satisfaction and happiness at levels found in established democracies. However, election euphoria faded rapidly and the trendline for indicators of personal well-being has been fairly flat since (Møller 2007b; 2013). In the contemporary period, many South Africans report being dissatisfied with their lives (also see Møller and Roberts, 2014). The overall SAQoL results indicate that members of the Black African population report much lower levels of well-being than other race groups, supporting the findings of previous research. This finding has been partially explained by the close correlation between economic position and subjective wellbeing in the country (for a review of the research on this correlation in developing countries, see Howell and Howell, 2008). Scholars have sought to test (and better understand) the subgroup variations noted in the SAQoL study using other survey instruments (see, for example, Bookwalter and Dalenberg 2004; Neff 2006; Davids and Gaibie 2011; Ebrahim, Botha, and Snowball 2013). These quantitative studies of subjective

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wellbeing have confirmed the findings of the SAQoL and demonstrate considerable subgroup discrepancies in South African society based on class and race group.

Research on emotional states in South Africa has focused on disordered and distressed states. Like many countries in the global south, most of this work was based on small sample medical research. However, nationally representative data is available following the fielding of the nationally representative South African Stress and Health Survey (SASH). Carried out in 2003/2004 (as part of the World Health Organization World Mental Health Survey Initiative), the SASH tracked different forms of psychological disorders related to depression, self-esteem, anxiety and aggression (for a discussion of the survey, see Williams et al. 2004). SASH data has given researchers unique insight into the frequency and extent of frustration, anxiety, depression and worry in the country. For example, academics have shown the corrosive effects of discrimination on mental states in South Africa (Williams et al. 2008; Jackson et al. 2010). However, they have focused on identifying forms of disorders rather than negative emotional states.

Life cycle researchers have been particularly interested in exploring the psychological responses to anger, apathy, frustration, self-worth, helplessness and hopelessness in South Africa. Studies on youth have explored how individuals remain resilient in the face of negative conditions such as the death of loved ones, poverty and unemployment as well as gender and racial injustices (for a review, see Theron, 2010; van Rensburg, Theron, and Rothmann, 2015). Negative home dynamics such as disinheritance, financial hardships, undisclosed paternal identity, substance abuse and child abuse often informed qualitative research on negative emotional states such as anger, apathy and frustration (also see Swartz 2007). Studies of the psychosocial challenges associated with HIV/AIDS and emotional responses to loneliness have also attracted attention. This area of research has been particularly interested in the elderly (see, for instance, Roos 2013; Sidloyi 2016).

One of the best ways to study hopelessness is to consider individuals' hopes and fears about the future. An interesting current area of subjective wellbeing research in South Africa has been on hopes and future expectations. Researchers have found that members of the country's Black African majority tended to be particularly hopeful about the future (see, for instance, Boyce and Harris 2013). About the character of these hopes, work by Møller (2016) shows that aspirations for a better general economic and employment situation tend to top the list (also see Møller and Roberts 2017). Compared to others in Sub-Saharan Africa, the country has one of the longest and most comprehensive histories of quantitative research on hope and wellbeing on the continent (for a review of the relevant wellbeing research in Africa, see Roberts et al. 2015). Nonetheless, existing quantitative measurements of hope and optimism are not contextually sensitive to the oppressive systems of modern South Africa society.

This brief review highlights the wealth of data on poverty in South Africa. This includes data on subjective wellbeing and on anger, anxiety and depression. While these data provide many insights into the nature of poverty in South Africa, they do not adequately address our concern with the debilitating effect of oppression which arises through its consequences for the formation and maintenance of internal capabilities. The studies of mental and emotional health do help to provide part of the picture, but they tend to focus on disorders,

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not lower levels of anger and resentment which might well still influence capabilities. Such studies do consider the consequences of discrimination, but pay less attention to the sustained oppression which arises through poor living conditions and poor treatment in day-to-day interactions. Moreover, the data are not adequate to test the Fanon type hypotheses, that dehumanizing treatment dehumanizes and that being dehumanized influences your actions – your ability and freedom to choose a life you have reason to value.

The authors are currently preparing a module of questions for inclusion in the South African Social Attitudinal Survey (SASAS) with a view to capturing at least a few possible indicators of internalized oppression. These questions will focus on perceived treatment in various settings (home, interactions with government services, labour market etc.) and how this makes people feel. We will also ask questions related to perceived personal capacity to respond to poor treatment, and self-efficacy in general. Together with the core socio-demographic questions already captured by SASAS and measures of perceived discrimination, this will allow us to investigate the prevalence of felt anger, apathy and powerlessness in the face of poor treatment, and how this patterns with socio-economic status, gender and race.

Quantitative measures will, however, only provide some of the required information. The list of anger, apathy and self-destructive behaviours is drawn from the works of Fanon and co. While the environment in South Africa today may share important features with the environments written about by these authors, their work must be revisited. This calls for both conceptual and qualitative efforts – to build a better understanding of the extent to which the environment remains oppressive, how people respond to that oppression, and how the negative internalized consequences can be reversed. This may involve new work, but will also require revisiting existing work, with a view to identifying the process and consequences of internalized oppression. For example, Swartz (2007) in her work with township youth, identified an awareness of the oppression of Apartheid, but a reluctance among youth to acknowledge the influence this may have on their prospects, because this would be to acknowledge a hindrance that they do not wish to accept. Efforts are needed to understand this different response to the environment and the extent to which it is a helpful way of overcoming oppressive environments, or if it is another layer of harmful internalization.

Failure to measure, failure to respond?

Since South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994 considerable effort has been made to improve the financial wellbeing of citizens and the availability of basic services. From social grants to access to healthcare and schooling to street lights, pavements and household electricity, improvements have been made. Progress in these areas is monitored and successes are trumpeted.

We are not suggesting that monitoring these areas is sufficient to prompt action. There are numerous indicators which are monitored and which we have failed to improve upon substantially. Inequality remains extremely high, as does poverty, sexual violence and the housing backlog, the quality of education, to name a few. But we are at least aware of the scale of the problem in these areas and efforts are underway to address these shortcomings, or at least to advocate for efforts to address them.

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Our monitoring of the internalization of oppression provides, as discussed above, an incomplete picture. Without knowing the frequency with which oppression leads to anger, apathy or self-destructive behaviours, it is hard to know how urgent the response to such internalization should be. Moreover, without a sense of who is most affected and why, we have no information on how to target interventions.

To appreciate the importance of measuring and further investigating the impact of oppression on internal capabilities, we must appreciate the way in which social policies develop. Social policy is a product of the political and historical context. Part of that context is the dominant conceptualization of wellbeing/welfare and the perceived role of the state in maintaining and improving residents' wellbeing. Social policy is, as a result, highly variable across countries. Moreover, shifts in social policy typically require shifts in the understanding of wellbeing and/or the determination of the state's role. The capabilities approach is a fine example of an effort to shift the conceptualization of wellbeing, to shift the nature of social policy.

A central feature of the historical and political context in former colonies, such as South Africa, is the influence of the former colonial power. The inherited approach to social policy may or may not fit well with the local environment. The social policy of the colonial power would have developed in response to the challenges of their context. As far as these challenges are shared, there is not necessarily a cause for concern. However, there may be times when social policies may not respond to challenges to wellbeing which are specific to the local context, or at least not shared with the colonial power.

The consequences of internalized oppression are arguable an area where the inherited systems may not be well equipped to respond. The internalization of oppression has certainly been a feature of industrialized countries. Marx is the most well-known writer on this issue. However, while the oppression in South Africa and other post-colonial states may share many features with that experienced historically in industrialized countries, it also has distinctive features shaped by the colonial and apartheid history.

What is required is a careful examination of the nature and scale of internalized oppression in South Africa, followed by a consideration of social policy in light of this examination. We can then ask how can social policy be used to mitigate the damaging effects of colonialism, apartheid and continued oppression. Without such thinking in South Africa, and other similar contexts, we are left with a social policy which does not respond to all the specific challenges of the South African environments – even if it deals relatively well with some of the challenges shared with the UK (child support and pensions for example). We miss the opportunity to use policy as a transformative mechanism (Mkandawire, 2007). To develop a more complete social policy we need to identify where there might be specific challenges, and be open to the use of multiple instruments to address those challenges (Adésinà, 2015). Steve Biko has pointed us in the direction of one such challenge. We need to refine our conceptualization of wellbeing in line with that challenge. This can be achieved within the capabilities approach. But without measuring the frequency and consequences of internalized oppression, we are unlikely to be able to shift policy.

A cautionary note on capabilities and extreme poverty

The application of the capability approach in contexts of extreme poverty has often been argued to necessitate/require/justify(?) a focus on a small set of what are sometimes called basic capabilities (different from the basic capabilities proposed by Nussbaum and discussed earlier) (Clark, 2005a). These may include capabilities related to nutrition, health and education etc.

Such an approach need not be problematic, if combined with a full conception of human flourishing. If, however, this approach is combined with a simplistic and misguided Maslovian conceptualization, it is problematic. Maslow (1943) suggested that there is a hierarchy of needs, starting at the lowest level with physiological needs and working up towards self-actualization. We do not have the space here to go into the evidence which suggests that this view is misguided. Suffice to say that we now know that higher order needs (higher in Maslow's conceptualization) must be met, at least in part, for even survival to occur. The clearest example of this is the high mortality rates in orphanages which provide all the material needs of children, but not the love and attention they crave and require.

The literature which we have sought to draw into the capabilities approach expresses a similar point. Even in materially deprived situations, you cannot ignore the psychological consequences of dehumanizing treatment. Subjected to prolonged dehumanizing treatment, many will die inside, becoming as Biko said, 'an obliging shell', others will literally die.

To foster and protect basic capabilities requires that the desired functioning (nutrition, health, education outcome) is possible. Understood alongside a full conception of human flourishing, it will point to the need to foster and protect a range of capabilities, at least for their instrumental value in realizing the basic capabilities of interest. If, however, understood alongside a simplistic Maslovian conceptualization of human need, it could lead to misguided policy advice, which would fail to protect even the limited set of capabilities of interest. For example, if included in the basic capabilities list was the capability to enjoy good health, and you considered only healthcare, you may fail even to foster good health. Good health requires social support. The basic capabilities approach to evaluations in relation to extreme poverty then is not problematic, only so long as you allow for the inclusion of a range of other capabilities (social support, humane treatment, affiliation etc). This would suggest that Nussbaum's approach of focusing on thresholds across a more comprehensive set of central capabilities may be more appropriate, and less prone to misuse.

Discussion

The capabilities approach outlines an argument for placing freedom to choose at the centre of the development agenda. A wealth of global south scholarship outlines how oppression, particularly sustained oppression, affects the way in which people make choices – often hindering their agency or pushing them towards negative behaviours. Combining these two bodies of work highlights the importance of acting to actively enhance internal capabilities for those living in sustained oppression, as a critical step towards greater freedom. This requires us to investigate the nature and extent of oppression and its consequences for

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internal capabilities. We have focused on South Africa, oppressive environments are common, but where we have little data on the extent to which individuals internalize this oppression.

The combination of the insights of Fanon, Freire, Biko and the like into the capabilities approach is facilitated by the work of feminist scholars. Nussbaum's interest in the adaptive preference of women in oppressive situations led to the development of a framework which allows for the easy incorporation of a consideration of other forms of oppression. The idea of basic, internal and combined capabilities can be used to incorporate both physical and psychological consequences of a range of types of oppression. We have focused here on the argument of Fanon and co, that sustained oppression of the type that occurs in South Africa takes its toll psychologically, by leaving many (not all) angry, yet apathetic if not self-destructive. This, we have argued, is akin to saying that oppressive environments can hinder the development of internal capabilities, thus limiting combined capabilities, even when external constraints are ameliorated.

In oppressive environments internalized capabilities require special attention. It is not enough to remove the oppression, you must consider how to undo the internalized consequences of that oppression. A useful concept for understanding this demand is that of corrosive functioning. Corrosive functioning is a functioning which affects the ability to achieve other functionings, and so limits capabilities (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007). The consequences of oppression discussed here are clearly of a corrosive nature. Breaking down people's faith in themselves, in their belief that they can fight back against their oppression, not only leads to negative feelings, but prevents the realization of desired functioning which would otherwise be available.

The corrosive nature of internalized oppression requires interventions which support people to overcome the harm. It may not be enough to improve the environment: active efforts to reverse the harm may be required if people are to take advantage of an improved environment. Fanon, Freire and Biko were all clear that the journey to recovery is a personal one, but that individuals may require the support and involvement of others to make that journey. For capabilities to be enhanced, approaches to supporting that journey must be found.

In South Africa, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) has a long history of intervening to overcome the internalization of oppression. The lessons from these efforts, if combined with new insights into the gendered and class based discrimination which intersects with racial discrimination, could lead us to intervention designs for a new, yet still oppressive, environment. Given the corrosive nature of internalized oppression, successful interventions would help reduce not only the anger, apathy and self-destructive behaviour, but lead to greater freedom as individuals take better advantage of the opportunities available to them. This includes political opportunities to push for greater freedom.

While Biko is lauded, his insights have yet to lead to social policy specifically designed to address South Africa's own brand of oppression. Interventions led by those from BCM have tended to be small in scale. This is probably a result of government's failure to take on this task. With this in mind, we have argued that measurement of the extent of this

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internalization, and further investigation into its consequences and possible mitigation are critical. We need to better understand the issue and have data on the scale of the problem, if we are to have interventions of appropriate scale.

Observers often endow oppressed people with super human strength. Black women in particular are admired in this way. In the face of the HIV epidemic grandmothers suffered the loss of their children but strove to take care of their grandchildren. Responses of 'I don't know how they manage' and 'I could never do what they do daily' were common. Well intentioned as this admiration is, it is fundamentally racist, sexist and/or classist. Adversity is hard for everyone, it hurts, but people keep going, because that is what we are designed to do. Faced with adversity, the well-intentioned observer would carry on just the same, but to think of themselves in that situation is to open the door to the acknowledgement of the pain which goes with carrying on. People get through, but not unharmed. False consciousness may provide relief for some, social opiates such as religion may provide relief for others, but for many the result is quiet anger. The happy slave may smile and laugh with the master, but at night he dreams of killing him.

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