

## Rethinking Democracy of Participation and the Desire to Not Appear

### 1. Introduction

In Nancy Fraser's *Reframing Justice in a Globalizing World*, she argues that struggles and claims for social justice are experiencing a transformation with the process of globalization, which she depicts as an overcoming of the Westphalian notion of nation states. In addition to her own theory of two dimensions of justice: economic justice, which can be achieved by redistribution, and cultural justice, by recognition, Fraser articulates the need to add a third dimension of justice, namely the political justice, characterized by the lack of representation. Fraser defines political justice as what "furnishes the stage on which struggles over distribution and recognition are played out" (Fraser, 75). The two levels on which we should scrutinize political justice is the "who" question, who are included and by what standard, and the "how" question, how are they represented and in what procedure. She goes on to analyze the three levels of misrepresentation, and reaches the conclusion that a successful politics of representation needs to "democratize the process of frame-setting" (Fraser, 80). With a plural and open-to-debate "all-affected principle", the political justice of representation shall require a democratic dialogue, between all affected parties and between theorists and demos.

The same notion of conversation based on universal intelligibility can be found in Seyla Benhabib, too. In her *Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*, Benhabib examines different notions of multiculturalism. She argues against the mosaic multiculturalism which considers different cultures as coexisting while remaining within firm borders, and insists that multiculturalism should be understood as socially constructed in a discursive way, meaning

that the narrative efforts from external observer standpoint are vital to all cultural identities. Along with Juergen Habermas, she proposes the discursive model of democracy, in which “all who would be affected by their consequences can be participants in a practical discourse” (Benhabib, 11). Instead of applying a universal representation for every individual, the discursive model allows every participant to bring in their singularity and their narrative of identities. Like Fraser, Benhabib also locates her discussion of democracy in the context of globalization, and therefore suggests that different jurisdictional model should be employed as long as they meet three principles to be compatible with “a universal deliberative democracy model”: egalitarian reciprocity, voluntary self-ascription, and freedom of exit and association (Benhabib, 19).

By examining Fraser’s and Benhabib’s notion of participation and democracy that is based on the universality of participation, I shall argue that this theory of justice in the framework of discursive and participatory democracy, especially, in the context of globalization and multiculturalism, is problematic. The intrinsic benefit, people’s capacity, and people’s desire of appearing in the public realm as a political agent, by person or by voice, is a strong assumption in this model that is not sufficiently reflected on. The advocacy for participation and democracy covers the origin of democracy and public representation as a political notion deeply rooted in Western history and ancient tradition. As Pierre Bourdieu argues, the new liberal discourse hides the particular origin of itself. I want to suggest that the valorization of participation seems inadequate to give an account to the potential disempowerment in appearing, the necessary attunement of the demos for them to appear, and the inherent wish to not appear or to disappear.

## 2. The Assumption on Appearing

Fraser's *Reframing Justice in a Globalizing World* reworks her notion of justice in her previous work. To Fraser, justice concerns the parity of participation, i.e. "justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life" (Fraser, 73). The lack of opportunity to participate in the economic realm leads to distributive injustice, and it requires the efforts of redistribution; the lack of opportunity to participate in the institutional cultural realm leads to inequality, and it calls for recognition. These are the two levels on which Fraser suggests us to understand justice in her previous work.

With the increasing impact of globalization and more and more trans-national border activities, events, initiatives, and issues are taking place, Fraser comes up with a necessary third level, i.e. a political one, where injustice takes the form of lack of representation. Fraser defines the political as what "furnishes the stage on which struggles over distribution and recognition are played out" and what "tells us who is included in, and who excluded from, the circle of those entitled to a just distribution and reciprocal recognition"(Fraser, 75). On the political level of justice, instead of whether every member gets their fair share of participation, what is open to contestation is the standard and institution by which their eligibility to any struggle of participation is determined. In the globalizing economic and political framework, and in some countries where immigration is challenging the old-dated understanding of equality among nationals, who is affected or concerned in a specific issue and who, therefore, has a right to claim may be very difficult to determine, and here is where Fraser defines the proper realm of the political.

Lack of representation is the form of political injustice, and it can be further divided into three levels: a) ordinary-political misrepresentation can be found in many critiques to

representative democracy and electoral systems, it concerns the misrepresentation within a system or community; b) misframing is when “the community’s boundaries are drawn in such a way as to wrongly exclude some people from the chance to participate at all in its authorized contests over justice”, people who are wrongly excluded are deprived of the right to put any claim for their rights (Fraser, 76) ; and c) the process by which groups and communities are framed. As a response to injustice on the two former levels, Fraser suggests that the “process of frame-setting” needs to be democratized (Fraser, 80). In addition to the question of the “who” of justice, the contested area extends to the “how” to determine the “who” of justice. The possible way to democratize the process of framing is, suggested by Fraser, by “all-affected principle”, meaning that the framing process in an institution or group has to do with the political agency of all those who are or are to be affected by it.

Benhabib puts emphasis on participation and deliberative democracy and can be read as a complementary aspect of Fraser’s notion of justice in a globalization and multiculturalism context. Fraser brings into question the process of frame setting and including and excluding; Benhabib considers about the process of forming and exiting from a community or identity group. She argues that, contrary to essentialist beliefs, cultural identity and group unity comes into being “through various external discursive interventions” (Benhabib, 5). A cultural unity only appears as a unity for an external observer and in the observer’s account of defining and describing it. Since the formation of a cultural identity is a discursive effort, the equality we want to bring among various cultural identities can only come into being through the effort of discursive democracy. Following Juergen Habermas, Benhabib suggests that the only valid normative system would be one in which “all who would be affected by their consequences can

be participants in a practical discourse through which the norms are adopted,” and in such discourse, “norms of universal respect and egalitarian reciprocity already undergird practices of discursive argumentation” (Benhabib, 11). The all-affected principle is employed here in the notion of interactive universalism; all who are affected by consequence should have a right in the conversation, or more precisely, with an emphasis on discourse, “all moral beings capable of sentience, speech, and action are potential moral conversation partners” (Benhabib, 14).

Public realm is a realm of discourse, Benhabib argues, because individual only appears as narrative of the self; for public realm to be the space where individuals can bring in their life experiences and demands for public life, it can only be a forum for discourse and narratives. Benhabib notes: “we become aware of who we are by learning to become conversation partners in these narratives. ... our agency consists in our capacity to weave out of those narratives our individual life stories, which make sense for us as unique selves” (Benhabib, 15). Based on a discursive understanding of individual and culture identity, Benhabib defines her approach to multiculturalism as one that views group identity as discursive and dynamic and one that attempts to bring up a discursive and deliberative interactive model into the negotiation across multicultural divides.

Fraser and Benhabib approach democracy, multiculturalism and globalization very differently: Fraser puts more emphasis on what is categorized as participatory notion of democracy, i.e. one that defines democracy by the extent of its participants and advocates more involvement of citizens in the decision-making; Benhabib relates more to the discursive notion of democracy, i.e. one that argues that mere voting and majority rules are not enough, and democracy needs authentic conversation and deliberation as the content of the conversation.

These two notions are by no means mutually exclusive or incompatible; rather, they may be better seen as mutually complementary. Apart from being mutually complementary, these two notions of Fraser and Benhabib have more in common. I would like to argue that they have a very similar assumption about participation, or, from a slightly different aspect, what I would like to call appearing.

Firstly, a common assumption is the valorization of appearing. Appearing is considered as something good and worth doing in itself. To appear is a very basic action for anything further to be achieved: to get into conversation, to make claims and demands, to realize the identity unity, etc; it is, therefore, desirable and favorable to everyone, individual and group, as long as there is human agency, it is in their interests, and even their moral and social obligation to appear. I want to suggest that appearing is not always in everyone's interest or favor: it can be dangerous, disempowering, and thus undesirable for many.

Secondly, both of them assume that appearing is a direct and even inherent capacity of people. For sure, I am not suggesting that it is their argument that public and political appearing is available to everyone, because it is precisely their concerns why appearing is not available to many under-represented groups and individuals in societies. What I want to question is whether appearing is something we are deprived of, rather than something we have to attune ourselves into. Appearing in a discursive public realm requires the attunement of the people, the common language and the mutual intelligibility, and it is not something we always know how to do and are not allowed to do in certain social and political circumstances.

Thirdly, undergirding the two former assumptions, another assumption is people's primordial wish to appear. My first point questions whether appearing is good and safe for many people, and my second point attempts to undermine the universal capacity to appear of people;

however even these points are made based on the assumption that is not reflected upon yet: people do want to appear, we might be threatened or disempowered, or we might need to attune ourselves to do this. My third undermining effort will be questioning whether people do have this primordial wish to appear. Along with Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalytical approach to group psychology, I want to suggest that maybe a desire to not appear, or even to disappear, is equiprimordial with, if not more favorable to our unconscious than the desire to appear .

### 3. Disempowerment in Appearing

The first assumption about appearing is that appearing itself is inherently beneficial and the valorization of appearing, which would seem inadequate to give an account of the potential disempowerment and endangerment in appearing. To Benhabib, to appear in narration is necessary for any identity construction, and thus for entering the political realm at all; to Fraser, “representation is always already inherent in all claims for redistribution and recognition” (Fraser, 78). To appear is considered to be the fundamental step in political action, and thus in the struggle to any power and rights. However, this notion may overlook the aspect of disempowerment and endangerment that is also contained in the action of appearing in many occasions.

Firstly, to appear means to be visible for others, therefore to appear is always to appear as an object that is vulnerable and open to judgment. It is different to stand up as an anonymous member of an identifiable group than to stand out as a visible individual, and the former strategy is easier for an individual to choose in many circumstances. To appear is not only make visible one’s political agency and moral subjectivity; the inherent objectification in the action of

appearing to others, on the contrary, may lead to the disempowerment of the appearing subject. It means to me that I am now appearing among the objects in other's world that is integrated by other's subjectivity, thus to lose the battle for subjectivity. Offering oneself as an object for other's look is to a certain extent to give other's subjectivity the chance to act upon oneself, and therefore an action of possible disempowerment.

Secondly, to appear, for many individual and groups, also means to be singled out and to be specialized, and therefore to be categorized and even stereotyped. Franz Fanon, in his *Black Skin White Masks*, talks about the experience of a black man in white-dominated France: "Look! A Negro!... Here I am an object among other objects" (Fanon, 89). In addition to this objectification, a black man in white-dominated France is not only being looked at, but also determined by this look set upon him. As long as his being black has been singled out as something worth noticing, a certain character or nature associating with blackness is also determined for him. As Fanon puts it, "I am overdetermined from the outside. I am a slave not to the 'ideas' others have of me, but to my appearance" (Fanon, 95). And after this categorization, a certain manner is employed as a standard reaction to this specificity; in this case, white people employ a certain language, "pidgin", when speaking to black people to show their sensitivity of the specificity of black people, and Fanon argues that "to speak pidgin means: 'You, stay where you are'" (Fanon, 17). Individuality and specificity in appearing is precisely undesirable here, since to appear as an individual or a certain group with a collective identity to the "normal" or "general", dominate, public gaze means to be stuck in a certain social, cultural, or political position and to be put into place in a hierarchical structure.

Thirdly, one's appearing will be virtually dangerous to oneself and outrageous for others, if her specificity is already defined with stigmatization and as target of violation. There is various

social institution of stigmatization that makes certain appearing a degrading and threatening experience, thus effectively prohibits these appearing. In Judith Butler's *Passing, Queering: Nella Larsen's Psychoanalytic Challenge*, she examines the public appearing of black women in the context of sexualization of race and racialization of gender. In a culture that sexualizes black women and prohibits their sexuality at the same time, to appear as black woman in the public, i.e. white-dominated realm is "an endangering public exposure" (Butler, 132). Black women's appearing to the public defined by white, male gaze means being eroticized, and to not appear in public or to not appear as a black woman in public is, therefore, the only way to protect oneself from being structurally eroticized as "belonging to the jungle" (Butler, 132). In Nella Larsen's novel, the female character chooses to disguise her racial identity and to pass as white; for her, to appear in the legitimate publicity, to accessible sexual freedom, and with her resistance to biased racial limitation necessarily entails to not appear as black and to hide part of her personal experience and individual specificity. Once her racial specificity is revealed or her camouflage is suspicious, her appearing becomes immediately impossible, stigmatized and dangerous. Butler employs the psychoanalytical terminology and describes this institute as a socially constructed super-ego that constantly compares the ego with the ego ideal, and the appearing of the ego is the super-ego's exposure of the ego: "if those ideals are to some large degree socially instituted and maintained, then this watching agency is the means by which social norms sear the psyche, expose it to a condemnation" (Butler, 135).

Furthermore, individuals sometimes choose not to appear as individuals but as an anonymous member of a group in order that the group identity and the collective claim can stand out, and no special person may take the attention away from the group. In many cases, to appear as an individual with their own life experience is only one of the alternatives, and therefore not

necessary for, making claims and demands in the public realm. The above discussion of the possible danger and negative outcomes of appearing shows that appearing is not neutral or non-contextualized, that it can mean objectification, specialization, and stigmatization in various social, cultural and political context, intertwined with race, gender, and other social institutions. In many cases, appearing may be a disempowering and endangering situation for the individual or group, and this factor needs to be taken into consideration when we talk about appearing in the public or participation in the public realm.

#### 4. Westernization and Attunement in Appearing

The second assumption I want to examine in both Fraser's and Benhabib's account of appearing is that appearing is an inherent capacity of people, meaning that people can appear if they want to and if they are allowed to, without having to be trained or adjusted. When Fraser talks about the implicit exclusion in a community, she asks us to consider "do the community's decision rules accord equal voice in public deliberations and fair representation in public decision-making to all members?" (Fraser, 75) Benhabib puts more emphasis on speech and discourse; she says that her notion of interactive universalism "accepts that all moral beings capable of sentience, speech, and action are potential moral conversation partners" (Benhabib, 14). However, this notion is problematic to me in that appearing in a conversation requires certain mutual intelligibility, which should by no means be taken for granted. The language itself and the presumption intrinsic to it can make a difference when different political agents start a conversation, and the liberalist notion of conversation and discursive democracy itself is not as universal as it claims to be.

Firstly, conversation and deliberation require a certain language. It can mean that for a conversation to make sense to all participants, they have to talk in the same language, for example, the English language, or there must be interpreters among them; it can also mean that a certain style of language, for example, the writing language, shall be employed by all participants for the conversation to go on; most importantly, it means that a certain discourse, a certain set of concepts and ideas that are understandable or at least of similar meaning to all participants shall be adopted. If there are various individual and/or collective participants in a conversation, and their languages, styles or discourses do not provide the mutual intelligibility at hand, some will have to adopt those of the other so that the conversation can ever happen. For many, it means to pick up a language, in the broadest sense of the word, that they are not native to; and for the minorities, it usually means that they need to pick up the language of the majority, who are privileged to have their language as the predominant one. In this sense, a whole set of power relations are already at work even before we can address each other in a conversation, and all these power and domination at work might in some situations make any conversation radically impossible.

Secondly, a deeper mutual intelligibility relies on not only the shared language and discourse, but also requires a certain shared presumption. In order to appear in a dialogue or conversation one initiates or is invited to join, one needs to share to some extent of the pre-theoretical presumption that undergirds the interactive effort. For sure, both Fraser and Benhabib have in their articulations opened up a space where concepts and ideas can be challenged and discussed; Fraser suggests that the all-affected principle is “open to a plurality of reasonable interpretations” (Fraser, 83fn), and Benhabib argues for “a legal pluralism that would countenance a coexistence of jurisdictional systems for different cultural and religious traditions”

(Benhabib, 19). However, there is a common set of values as background undergirding the space of discussion and diversity they open up. Fraser proposes the “all-affected principle” based on the beliefs that a collection of people who will be affected by a political action are entitled to make decisions about this political action in question as “fellow subjects of justice”, that democratic legislation in which they “[set] the ground rules that govern their social interaction” is the rightful way to construct political institutions (Fraser, 82). Benhabib proposes three principles which can guarantee that the “universalist deliberative democracy model” is compatible with various social and cultural norms: “egalitarian reciprocity”, “voluntary self-ascription”, and “freedom of exit and association” (Benhabib, 19). The underlying presumption here is one deeply rooted in a Western tradition of democracy and participation that derives itself to the Ancient Greek model of democracy in a *polis*. Without reflection on its origin and critique of its possibly imaginary universality and immediate connection to rationality, this presumption that valorizes participation, appearing, and contribution in the public realm and political life, which are also derivative from this tradition, are taken for granted to be neutral, universal, and good in itself.

Along with Chantal Mouffe, I find this ideological assumption in a proposal of universal politics problematic. In “*On the Political*”, Mouffe gives a critique to this liberal notion of discursive democracy, and Juergen Habermas as one of the most sophisticated defenders of it. She argues that the notion of dialogical democracy relies on the imagination of political realms as the politics ‘of competing interests within a neutral terrain or the discursive formation of a democratic consensus’ (Mouffe, 52). For Mouffe, Habermas’ dialogical model of democracy is problematic in the implicit Westernization that is necessary in the global institutionalization of democracy. The notion of human rights which is deeply rooted in Western culture is considered

to be the only rational answer to modernity, and a legal order organized according to its principle is the only possible way to coordinate human co-existence (Mouffe, 84-89). It fails to acknowledge the certain extent of incompatibility between different cultures, traditions, groups, interested parties, etc. Following Mouffe's critique, I find Fraser's notion of representation implying the same imagination of a homogenous and transparent space to appear, to be represented; but this notion and the participatory democratic model is Westernized, and as Mouffe argues, it should be acknowledged that it does not give an account to the certain incompatibility, or even adversariality, between different cultures.

Thirdly, the liberal presumption that is predominant in the notion of discursive and participatory democracy does not only assume its own universality; as Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant suggests, it is precisely produced to cover its particular origin and to provide an imaginary universality. Arguing that the neoliberal conceptualization of globalization is "a screen discourse", Bourdieu and Wacquant problematize the presumption and discourse which assume globalization and multiculturalism are universal phenomenon and can be observed as a fact. To Bourdieu and Wacquant, instead of "a universal common sense", these terms should rather be seen as a camouflage of cultural imperialism, and "in many cases, they do nothing but express, in a truncated and unrecognizable form, the complex and contested realities of a particular historical society" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 3). To cover its particularities from the outset, its universality has been taken for granted, "*over* which there is no argument" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2). The neoliberal terms of globalization and multiculturalism is at the same time dominant and disguising its domination to appear to be natural, so is the neoliberal ideal of participatory democracy.

## 5. Desire to Not Appear or to Disappear

The first part of this critique to politics of appearing has to do with the many conditions in which to appearing is not beneficial or desirable to the political agent; the second level the Westernized notion of appearing and participation and necessary attunement in it. Neither of these questions the assumption that appearing itself is something people desire to do, except that many people in many occasions are not able to achieve it. In this third part, I shall refer to psychoanalysis and argue that the desire to not appear or to disappear, that is, the desire to be in a group with other people and to give up one's "unique self", may be as psychologically fundamental as the desire to appear.

To be certain, neither Benhabib nor Fraser overlooks the desire to have a group identity or a cultural identity. Benhabib develops the understanding of identity as social construction and argues that the social and personal process of identification happens in conversation and narrative efforts. She proposes that identity should be understood in a dynamic sense, meaning that a person identifies herself with a group "by learning to become conversation partners in these narratives," and that "our agency consists in our capacity to weave out of those narratives our individual life stories, which make sense for us as unique selves," and a group identifies itself in a society by making claims and demands in public sphere (Benhabib, 15). In this account, it seems as firstly unique agent, we seek a linguistic appearance, in order to acquire better identification and representations. This understanding leads to Benhabib's notion of the voluntary self-ascription as one factor of identity politics, meaning that one should be given the freedom to give an account of one's own life story without any necessary identity bandings by birth, as well as the freedom to enter or exit any group identity.

Fraser gives a similar account of a desire to appear. To her, representation is fundamental to further political demands and economic demands: “[t]he political in this sense furnishes the stage on which struggles over distribution and recognition are played out” (Fraser, 75).

Representation has to do with social belongings, because it gets to decide whom to include into and whom to exclude from the representation of a certain social group. In the public decision making procedure, it is critical to assure “equal voice in public deliberations and fair representation in public decision-making to all members” (Fraser, 75).

Both Benhabib and Fraser see identity and social belonging as a way to appear or a place to appear, thus we seek identification and representation to better appear in the public sphere; for Freud, on the contrary, the seeking for a group identity is precisely the execution of the desire to not appear. To Freud, it is a human instinct to join the horde and not to be left aside or against the horde. “The primitive form of human society was that of a horde ruled over despotically by a powerful male” (Freud, 69). In a collective where a superior leader endows its members with equality – Freud classifies modern churches, schools, armies, etc. into this kind of collectives – the psychology of the group members are typical: “the dwindling of the conscious individual personality, the focusing of thoughts and feelings into a common direction”, in a word, the loss of individual ego (Freud, 69). The group members “have put one and the same object in the place of their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego”, and this process of replacing and identification with one other is the psychoanalytic explanation of group identity (Freud, 61). Acting like a primal father, the leader thus acquires extreme authority by being the ego ideal of all the group members. Following Le Bon’s description, Freud notes that in such a group, the group members’ “distinctiveness vanishes. The racial unconscious emerges; what is heterogeneous is submerged in what is homogeneous” (Freud, 9).

In conclusion, psychoanalysis acknowledges that there is an instinctual inclination for human to not only seek social belongings, but also to identify themselves with one another in the group, and thus to give up part of their individual ego to become an adequate and equal member in the group, where the right to be distinguished and superior is ascribed solely to the leader. If we take this fundamental desire into consideration, the model of social belonging and group identity as a way or a place to appear, a representation of the self, and a stage to make claims and demands in public sphere seems inadequate to explain why people may desire not to appear – as an noticeable individual – or even to disappear – to be absorbed into a group.

## 6. Conclusion

Both Benhabib and Fraser are very much aware that they are dealing with the political problem of justice and representation in the context of globalization and multiculturalism. However, it eludes from their attention that the model of participatory democracy and deliberative democracy that they try to apply to the problem is one that is deeply rooted in Western culture per se. The understanding of democracy as appearing in the public sphere with deliberation and entering into public debate is hardly adequate to give an account for the possible disempowerment, or even endangerment in appearing, the necessary attunement, and thus the possible hierarchical institution in appearing, and finally, the psychical instinct to seek social belonging and not to appear as an individual at all.

As a supplement to the previous critique, I would like to briefly describe the hardship I find in applying this model to other cultures. In ancient Chinese culture and many other Asian cultures, hermits and seclusion are very much respected. In ancient Chinese philosophy and

history, people who can restrain themselves from the common people's desire to engage in public life are paid the highest homage to. Public life and political affairs are considered inconsistent and wearing; one should therefore be wise enough to not burden their spirit with these. This tradition has a very different understanding of people's talent and its usefulness for the society from the Western understanding: instead of the responsibility of contribution to the society, gifted people, especially those who are distinguished in wisdom and philosophical insight, should stay away from publicity so that their spirit would not be burdened, and the common people may go on with their common concerns without being disturbed. In these cultures where the tradition of seclusion and hermits is still preserved, and where people still hold much respect to modesty and humility, the action of standing out and expressing one's opinion, especially in public, is very likely to be considered as arrogant, pompous, and/or characteristic of a foreign culture, and to promote a model of participation and conversation in these cultures may encounter resistance from these tradition. If we do hold this notion of participatory democracy as a feasible one in the current situation marked by globalization and multiculturalism, I would like to suggest that we broaden our understanding of appearing, and take into our consideration all these reasons why appearing is not as desirable as we claim or imagine.

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