

# Sen and Žižek on the Multiculturalist Approach to Non-Violence

Marlon Jesspher B. De Vera  
University of the Philippines-Diliman  
mbdevera2@up.edu.ph

## Abstract:

This paper analyzes areas of convergence in the works of Amartya Sen and Slavoj Žižek in their criticisms of the multiculturalist approach to non-violence. First, Žižek's characterization of the liberal discourse of guilt and fear is presented. Then, Sen's key ideas on multiculturalism, tolerance, and rational critique are explicated. Next, a synthesis of Sen and Žižek's notions of universality, freedom, and rationality, as well as of their critical conceptions of globalization and anti-globalization are discussed. Subsequently, Sen and Žižek's divergences on overcoming violence are examined. Lastly, from integrating Sen and Žižek's thoughts, key theses are provided on the paradoxical character of the multiculturalist approach to non-violence and on how despite their divergences, both Sen and Žižek propose radical systematic changes and an alternative approach to non-violence characterized by the universals of rationality and genuine freedom.

Keywords: Sen, Žižek, multiculturalism, non-violence, tolerance, globalization, rationality, freedom

## INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the critiques of Amartya Sen and Slavoj Žižek on the multiculturalist approach to non-violence, which is a mystification that pertains to the potential solution to the problem of violence.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this comparative approach of identifying,

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1 The concept of violence can be thought of as having both descriptive and normative associations – descriptive in the sense that violence, broadly construed, can be thought of as force of change and normative in the sense that violence can be thought of as violation of a standard or norm. What these two associated descriptive and normative notions have in common is that they pertain to a departure or deviation from a certain zero or base point. See

analyzing, and discussing this important mystification of violence is to present a conception of violence that is hopefully more nuanced and less mystified. Sen and Žižek make the same observation on how more and more, the multiculturalist approach has become the predominant approach to non-violence in contemporary liberal society. Both are likewise critical of the conventional formulation of multiculturalism and its limitations and thus deem multiculturalism as a mystification of the potential solution to the problem of violence.

The paper proceeds constructively and sequentially in discussing then synthesizing Sen and Žižek's critiques of the multiculturalist approach to non-violence. First, Žižek's characterization of the liberal discourse of guilt and fear is presented. Then, Sen's key ideas on multiculturalism, tolerance, and rational critique are explicated. Next, a synthesis of Sen and Žižek's notions of universality, freedom, and rationality, as well as of their critical conceptions of globalization and anti-globalization are discussed. Subsequently, Sen and Žižek's divergences on overcoming violence are examined. Lastly, from integrating Sen and Žižek's thoughts, key theses are provided on the paradoxical character of the multiculturalist approach to non-violence and on how despite their divergences, both Sen and Žižek propose radical systematic changes and an alternative approach to non-violence characterized by the universals of rationality and genuine freedom.

## The Liberal Discourse of Guilt and Fear

Based on Žižek's analysis, the depoliticized and culturalized discourse of tolerance is essentially a discourse of guilt and fear. Žižek points out that symptomatic to this is what he identifies as the fake liberal sense of urgency or liberal blackmail to "do something."<sup>2</sup> This argument usually takes this form or similar to it – "There are a lot of people suffering and starving in other parts of the world. We need to urgently do something about it and not focus too much on high theory and analysis." Of course, Žižek likewise recognizes that to a certain extent, we must participate in efforts to alleviate the current suffering

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Vittorio Bufacchi. "Two Concepts of Violence" *Political Studies Review* 3 (2005): 193-204.

2 Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), p. 6

of the afflicted people of the world, but nonetheless he asserts that such an attitude characterized by endless guilt and fear further mystifies the problem. On the other hand, Žižek advances the importance of high theory and analysis precisely in contemporary times, when the important problems such as violence are more and more mystified.

Žižek's criticism of the multiculturalist approach is focused on an examination of its paradoxical character. In a Hegelian analysis typical to Žižek, and drawing from influences from Freud and Lacan, he points out how the notion of tolerance for the other is usually at the same time accompanied by a fear against the overproximity of the same other.<sup>3</sup> In a fashion related to how Sen observes how paradoxically the flow of goods in the globalized market economy seems to be unrestricted only from developed countries to developing countries and not vice versa<sup>4</sup>, Žižek points out the same paradoxical character of contemporary multiculturalism in the sense that goods are free flowing but the flow of people is more and more restricted and thus it is as if new walls of exclusion are being created.<sup>5</sup> Because the primary discourse of the multiculturalist approach is essentially a discourse of guilt and fear, Žižek also observes the paradox of how the idea of freedom, which is championed by the multiculturalist discourse of tolerance, is transformed into a notion of freedom with responsibility. This notion is characterized by its manifestation in the endless demands of understanding the other and constantly being conscious of whether or not the other is being tolerated enough. Thus, the idea of freedom is transformed into its paradoxical form, which is the freedom of forced choice i.e. we are free as long as we make the right choices. Žižek expresses poignantly what would be the result of this paradox.

... a nightmarish prospect ... of a society immobilized by the concern for not hurting the other, no matter how cruel and superstitious this other is and in which individuals are engaged in regular rituals of "witnessing" their victimization.<sup>6</sup>

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3 Žižek, *Violence*, p. 58

4 Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), pp. 95-96

5 Žižek, *Violence*, p. 102

6 Žižek, *Violence*, pp. 129-130

## Multiculturalism, Tolerance, and Rational Critique

Sen's criticism of the multiculturalist approach, on the other hand, centers on his distinction between genuine multiculturalism and plural monoculturalism. Sen posits that the conventional contemporary multiculturalist attitude of celebrating cultural diversity for its own sake is actually plural monoculturalism and not genuine multiculturalism.<sup>7</sup> Sen likewise criticizes the claim that multiculturalism is what cultural freedom demands by first clarifying the distinction between cultural freedom, which should be characterized by reasoning and choice in evaluating alternative cultural options, as opposed to the celebration of every form of cultural inheritance. Sen asserts that freedom should ultimately be the most important element and cultural diversity is merely both a consequence of and an instrument towards cultural freedom (in the sense that it provides a diverse set of alternatives for choice). Thus, the celebration of cultural diversity must always be conditional to the advancement of freedom and thus, cultural liberty does not always necessarily lead to cultural diversity.<sup>8</sup>

Sen ultimately affirms and reaffirms the central role of reasoning and choice in identity-based thinking<sup>9</sup> which should have two stages of choice – first, is the choice on what identities to assume, which Sen admits could be heavily constrained by how other people perceive us, and second, the choice on what relative importance to put to each relevant identity in a specific situation of choice, wherein the considerable freedom of the subject could be found.<sup>10</sup> In criticism of communitarian theories, Sen likewise asserts that access to reasoning that will determine or influence choice need not necessarily be confined to one's own community. Rather, it can also be open to reasoning outside one's community and also to the heterogeneity of reasoning within the community itself, without discounting the reality that every form of reasoning needs to have an origin or starting point, which may or may

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7 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. 156

8 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, pp. 114-119, 150-151

9 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, pp. 4, 8, 19, 32

10 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. 39

not be confined within a person's community.<sup>11</sup> Sen ultimately asserts the universal indispensability of reason in an almost truistic manner – “reason has to be supreme, since even in disputing reason, we would have to give reasons.”<sup>12</sup>

Along the same line of argumentation, Kelly James Clark and Kevin Corcoran attempt to qualify the sort of tolerance that is morally worthwhile in their essay “Pluralism, Secularism, and Tolerance.”<sup>13</sup> Clark and Corcoran argue that the sort of tolerance that is morally worthwhile is characterized by being founded on a deep religious or moral conviction as well as on a comprehensive metaphysical or theistic idea of the self. In my view, stripping their argument of the propensity to invoke religious values and theism would not impoverish the argument's potential to provide an enriching perspective to the ongoing discussion on Sen's (and also Žižek's, as it shall be shown later) views on tolerance. This is because Clark's and Corcoran's invocation of religious values and theism are attempts to show and argue that a notion of tolerance that is morally worthy can be inclusive of reasoning and rationality from religious and theistic valuations. This is a modest proposition which I think is consistent with Sen's notion of rationality.

The argument of Clark and Corcoran clearly calls out the pivotal role of individual reasoning and rationality, particularly in the context of forming moral convictions and a robust sense of self, in the conception and eventual praxis of what they refer to as tolerance as virtue. In their essay, Clark and Corcoran are also centrally concerned with the problem of how to set the appropriate limits to tolerance in a society characterized by polarity and diversity. Their proposal is not to set a singular, categorical, and rigid limit as they believe such an approach would be an impedance to human flourishing. Instead, they propose the principle of harm, with harm presented as an opposite or a negation of the ideal of human flourishing, as the key principle to set limits on tolerance. In their view, the principle of harm must be constantly constructed and reconstructed through a dynamic process

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11 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, pp. 33-36

12 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. 161

13 Kelly James Clark and Kevin Corcoran. “Pluralism, Secularism, and Tolerance” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 3, no. 4 (2000): 627-639.

of public reasoning and consensus by finding intersections within a system of contradictory beliefs and practices. The task of such a dynamic process of public reasoning and consensus is to draw the boundaries for when harm is permissible or not. Thus, the argument of Clark and Corcoran, like the view of Sen, is in clear opposition to the advancement of tolerance for diversity, plurality, and multiculturalism for its own sake. Instead, the focus is shifted back to the ideal of human flourishing, which is both characterized and further promoted by freedom and reasoning. This is in a fashion that is very much in line with the Aristotelian line of reasoning that Sen follows when he likewise emphasizes human reasoning and freedom towards human flourishing.

An additional perspective on how the invocation of even religious beliefs can be consistent with Sen's view of rationality can be explicated from Aamir R. Mufti's essay "Critical Secularism: A Reintroduction for Perilous Times."<sup>14</sup> Mufti presents his reading of Edward Said to expound on the notion of critical secularism. Mufti asserts that critical secularism or, in an alternate lexicon, secular criticism is primarily founded on the principle of critical unbelief. One key point to emphasize however is that the principle of critical unbelief should be applied to both religious and secular beliefs. Thus, in line with Sen's view of rationality, both religious and secular beliefs and considerations can either be included or excluded from the process of rational deliberation and reasoning. In other words, there is no certain type of beliefs, whether religious or secular, which are *prima facie* privileged or discriminated against by the process of rational deliberation or reasoning. The judgement or choice is made after the process of critical reasoning, and not prior to it.

Along the same line of argumentation is Ian Ward's notion of democracy as a critique to secularism in his essay "Democracy after Secularism."<sup>15</sup> Ward configures this idea based on W.E.B. Du Bois' articulation in his *The Souls of Black Folk*, with secularism being the "thought" or the dominant view, and democracy being the "afterthought" of the critique of the dominant view. Ward first draws attention to a number of contemporary social and political phenomena,

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14 Aamir R. Mufti. "Critical Secularism: A Reintroduction for Perilous Times." *Boundary 2* 31, no. 2 (2004): 1-9.

15 Ian Ward. "Democracy after Secularism." *The Good Society* 19, no. 2 (2010): 30-36.

where religion, religious thought, and critical analyses of religious thought have played central roles in social and political discourses which correspond to the most compelling current social and political predicaments. He then juxtaposes this against the primary ideological origin of secularism, namely the invocation of the dualism between the secular (or the social and political) and the religious, and thus in effect privatizing religion. Ward then argues that secularism can be analysed as “a discourse of displacement that fixes citizens’ reasonable anxieties surrounding distrust, powerlessness and calamity on “religion.” Ward proceeds to posit that among the three levels where the ideology of secularism operates – polemic, analytical frame, and mode of governance – democracy can best serve as a critical perspective at the level of the analytical frame of secularism. It is at this level that the discursive modalities of democracy can analyze and critique the ideological edifices of secularism as a discourse of displacement. In such a way, a more comprehensive, holistic, and “less displacing” analytical elucidation of the current social and political predicaments would be possible.

### Sen and Žižek on Universality, Freedom, and Rationality

Both Sen and Žižek recognize the link between the limitations of the multiculturalist approach and the mystified particularist or culturalist notion of violence. Thus, the logical connection is easily seen to how they develop arguments towards the claim that the real solution to violence would need to have a universal character. Sen, in his *Identity and Violence* and elsewhere,<sup>16</sup> has consistently advanced freedom as a universal human ideal and aspiration and rationality as a universal human value. In his *Development as Freedom*, in the particular context of human development, Sen articulates two reasons why freedom should be advanced as the central goal of the process of human development - 1) the evaluative reason i.e. because strengthening the freedoms of people should be constitutively employed to measure whether or not there is progress in development, and 2) the effectiveness reason i.e.

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16 See for instance Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1999); Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009); and Amartya Sen, *Rationality and Freedom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2002)

because the freedoms of people are instrumental towards the totality of the agenda of development.<sup>17</sup>

It can be said that Sen's idealization of freedom has its roots in the libertarian tradition, which includes Robert Nozick's notion of minimal state wherein individual freedom takes absolute priority except in extremely catastrophic circumstances.<sup>18</sup> However, it can also be said that Sen's thought is not strictly libertarian in the sense that is consistent with his general philosophical project, Sen advances a more expansive reckoning of freedom to include not only the process aspect of freedom (which is the primary focus of libertarianism and liberalism) but also the opportunity aspect of freedom.<sup>19</sup> In line with the advancement of freedom as a universal human ideal and aspiration, Sen has employed basic empirical argumentation to discredit the claim that the valuing of freedom is essentially a Western idea.<sup>20</sup> Sen reiterates the same empirical argument in his *Identity and Violence* through a critique of Huntington's claim that the "sense of individualism and a tradition of individual rights and liberties" is a unique feature of Western civilization.<sup>21</sup> Sen likewise rebuts the contemporary claims that part of the reason for the difficulty of rebuilding post-intervention Iraq is that democracy does not suit Iraq. Instead, Sen argues that it is precisely the failure to assert genuine democracy that brings about the difficulties of rebuilding. Thus, it would be precisely through democracy that post-interventions Iraq can be rebuilt and become fit again.<sup>22</sup>

Sen's empirical argument cites examples of libertarian thinking from ancient Asia and Africa and also demonstrates how ideas which are conventionally labelled as Western (e.g. democracy) were heavily influenced by the flow of ideas from other parts of the world. For instance,

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17 Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 4

18 Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 26-28.

19 Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 17

20 See for the instance *Chapter 10: Culture and Human Rights* in Sen, *Development as Freedom*, pp. 227-248.

21 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. 49

22 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. 51



Sen cites Meyer Fortes' and Edward Evans-Pritchard's *African Political Systems* which claims that "the structure of an African state implies that Kings and chiefs rule by consent."<sup>23</sup> Sen also criticizes the idea that the origin of democracy can ultimately be traced to the ancient Greeks by showing how it was influenced by the flow of ideas from ancient Iranians, Indians, and Egyptians and not from some neighboring European countries, and by showing that the fundamentals of democratic thinking have been present across many other parts of the world throughout history. Ultimately, Sen defines democracy as public participation and reasoning, which he advances as a universalizable idea which could be constitutive of the real potential solution to the problem of violence.<sup>24</sup> Thus, it can be seen how Sen's analysis on identity and violence is fundamentally linked to his advancement of freedom and reasoning as universal ideals. Sen's definition of democracy as public participation and reasoning is consistent with Habermas' discourse theory which advances processes of discursive deliberation in the public sphere within conditions wherein robust communicative freedoms are promoted.<sup>25</sup> In this vision of Habermas' discourse theory, the central roles of human freedoms and reasoning is also well emphasized in the dynamic process of justifying, constructing, and realizing normative social and political ideas.

In his essay "Democracy as a Universal Value," Sen further reinforces his position of advancing democracy as a universal ideal and challenges the notion that democracy is essentially a Western idea and that, consequently, democratization is essentially Westernization.<sup>26</sup> In this essay, Sen boldly declares that he thinks that the rise of democracy is the most important development in human civilization in the twentieth century. He also reiterates that "[a] country does not have to be deemed fit for democracy; rather, it has to become fit through democracy." Sen also provides further criticism of the "Lee hypothesis" which posits that non-democratic political systems are more efficient in bringing

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23 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. 99

24 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, pp. 52-55

25 Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, 447-450.

26 Amartya Sen. "Democracy as a Universal Value" *Journal of Democracy* 10, no. 3 (1999): 3-17.

about economic progress, by citing comprehensive empirical studies which have established generally inconclusive results – some studies have found a weakly negative correlation between political rights and economic progress while others have concluded a strong positive correlation. Sen concludes further that evidence has shown that what promotes economic growth is a conducive economic climate rather than a non-democratic political system. He then reinforces the role of political and civil rights in a democratic system in preventing social and economic disasters such as famines. Sen asserts the observation that no major famines have ever occurred in societies with functioning democracies, and argues that this because of the force of the free press in a democracy to promote public discussions and clamor against potential famines and other disasters, which consequently drive governments to execute immediate mitigating and preventive actions. In this essay, Sen is consistent in defining democracy not primarily in terms of democratic procedures (e.g. popular elections) but in terms of its character of public participation in reasoned discussion, then advances this sort of democracy as a universal human value. Sen asserts that “universal consent is not required for something to be a universal value. Rather, the claim of a universal value is that people anywhere may have reason to see it as valuable.” Finally, Sen argues against ideas that democracy is essentially a Western idea by providing a comprehensive historical survey of the strong presence of democratic ideas in the ancient writings in various Asian societies.

Žižek, on the other hand, formulates his notion of the universal, in the context of the mystification of the multiculturalist approach to non-violence, as the negation of the particularist and culturalized character of liberal multiculturalist tolerance. Žižek invokes Freud and Lacan in characterizing the problematic notion of “loving thy neighbor” and the “incompatibility of the Neighbor with the very dimension of the universal.”

What resists universality is the properly inhuman dimension of the Neighbor... being loved makes me feel directly the gap between what I am as a determinate being and the unfathomable X in me which causes love.<sup>27</sup>

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27 Žižek, *Violence*, p. 56

This characterization expands the contrast between the individual as the site of the universal and culture as the site of the particular. Paradoxically, it is when the individual is perceived as a neighbor that is worthy of love, or in the case of the discourse of tolerance, its weaker form which is understanding, that the individual subject itself is dislocated from the universal. Thus, Žižek's critique of the discourse of tolerance in multiculturalism as a mystification of violence is also focused on a critique of the demand of multiculturalist tolerance to understand the other in order to properly tolerate him or her. Žižek likewise asserts that the paradoxical character of tolerance as both tolerance towards the other and intolerance against the other's overproximity is a reaction to the breaking down of the symbolic boundaries of civility that kept the other at a proper distance.<sup>28</sup> Thus, part of Žižek's alternative proposal on how to resist this paradoxical nature of tolerance is not through the promotion of more understanding of the other. Rather, Žižek's proposal is through the re-adaptation of new "codes of discretion" (Žižek borrowing from Peter Sloterdijk) that would enable people of different cultures to coexist in a non-intrusive and non-violent manner that is respectful of each other but without the unrealistic demand of having to truly understand each other, as prescribed by the discourse of tolerance which is ultimately mobilized by guilt and fear.<sup>29</sup>

Žižek affirms the contrast between the individual as universal and culture as particular in relation to a further split of the individual into the public and the private dimension.

The basic opposition here is that between the collective and the individual: culture is by definition collective and particular, parochial, exclusive of other cultures, while – next paradox – it is the individual who is universal, the site of universality, insofar as she extricates herself from and elevates herself above her particular culture. Since, however, every individual has to be somehow particularized, has to dwell into a particular lifeworld, the only way to resolve this deadlock is to split the individual into universal and particular, public and private...<sup>30</sup>

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28 Žižek, *Violence*, p. 58

29 Žižek, *Violence*, p. 59

30 Žižek, *Violence*, p. 141

Thus, following the same logical line, Žižek argues that the only plausible way of overcoming violence and its mystification in the realm of the discourse of multiculturalist tolerance is to totally universalize the individual. This entails the complete detachment of the individual from its particularization in culture, towards a state of being *kulturlos*, a Kantian or Cartesian subject. Only in such a way does the individual redeem its universality and become capable of what Kant refers to as the public use of reason, which is the “transnational universality of the exercise of one’s reason” as opposed to the private use of reason which is parochial and particular.<sup>31</sup> Thus, in a similar fashion as Sen, Žižek advances rationality as the genuine universal alternative against the mystification of multiculturalism. For instance, in resisting religious fundamentalism, perpetuated by the multiculturalist tolerant approach, Žižek proposes that all religions be subjected to serious rational critique, and in a manner that asserts rational identity-based thinking. Žižek even goes to the extent of claiming that atheism could be a properly European legacy that is worth fighting for.<sup>32</sup>

Unlike Sen, however, Žižek does not immediately assert the universality of freedom but rather starts with a critique of the liberal notion of free choice, which Žižek even identifies as a predominantly modern Western cultural conception. Žižek reiterates the limitations of liberalism by first invoking the standard Marxist critique of how liberalism is not a genuine universality in the sense that freedom of choice is nonetheless made within a particularist set of coordinates. However, Žižek also challenges this standard Marxist critique through the invocation of a supplemental Hegelian critique – that of the need to not only expose the particular in what presents itself as universal, but also to recognize the implicit universal in what could initially seem as primarily particular. In the case of liberalism, it is only within the genuine forms of autonomy and rationality that it advances, wherein liberalism itself can be sensitive to its own particularist limitations and expand itself to become effectively universal. It is in this negativity of being sensitive to its own inadequacy that liberalism could truly realize its emancipatory potential.<sup>33</sup>

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31 Žižek, *Violence*, pp. 142-143

32 Žižek, *Violence*, pp. 134-139

33 Žižek, *Violence*, pp. 144-157

Further, in his essay “A Plea for Leninist Intolerance,” Žižek links his critique of the contemporary liberal notion of free choice with his critique of the liberal notion of multiculturalist tolerance. Žižek asserts that one central feature of contemporary liberalism is an almost excessive permissiveness of free choice, and consequently an almost unlimited tolerance for individual free choice. However, Žižek qualifies this free choice as free only insofar as it does not disturb the hegemonic social and ideological status quo. What is presented as unconstrained capabilities of free choice and endless possibilities of the reinvention of identities and lifeworlds actually has an equally potent underside of taboos pertaining to the impossibility of effecting any radical change to the prevailing social and ideological balance. This analysis is related to Žižek’s explication of the apparent paradox of the possibilities and impossibilities in contemporary society. While nothing seems to be impossible in the realm of technological innovation and fluidity of personalities and pleasures, almost nothing seems to be possible or permissible in the area of real or systemic social, political, or economic change. Žižek cites as an example that on one hand, in the realm of individual sexual pleasures, the range of permissible possibilities seem endless. On the other hand, demands for even minimal reforms in taxation schemes seem to be immediately dismissed as impossible and taboo.

Žižek thus invokes Lenin’s straightforward distinction between formal and actual freedom. Formal freedom pertains to the freedom of choice within the coordinates of the hegemonic relations of power. Actual freedom on the other hand pertains to the genuine capability of effecting radical change to the social and ideological coordinates within which free choices can be made. Thus, the Leninist intolerance that Žižek pertains to in this essay is an intolerance against the merely formal freedom that is explosively glorified as true freedom in contemporary liberal society.<sup>34</sup> Žižek’s invocation of Lenin’s distinction between formal and actual freedoms can be said to have substantial parallels with Sen’s capability approach which emphasizes the cultivation of human beings’ capabilities to actually choose and live the lives they value and have reasons to value. Such a movement would necessitate an enhancement of the individual’s genuine control over important factors in his or her

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34 Slavoj Žižek, “A Plea for Leninist Intolerance” *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 542-566.

life and consequently, the social, political, economic, and ideological dynamics need to foster such enhancement of capabilities.

## On Globalization and Anti-Globalization

On a distinct but related note, Sen also presents a discussion on globalization and how it can be the mode of the universalization of rationality and freedom. Sen acknowledges the important role of the anti-globalization protest movement in sustaining healthy rational scrutiny of globalization. Sen also recognizes how in a paradoxical sense, “the so-called anti-globalization critique is the most globalized moral movement in the world today.” Sen takes this to be a good sign in such a way that the anti-globalization movement advances global discontent which could be a precursor or even an early manifestation of a concern for global identity and justice.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, Sen is critical of the reductionist arguments of the anti-globalization movement in opposing globalization on the grounds of the interpretation of how it is a “new Western curse.” Sen asserts that globalization is “neither new, nor necessarily Western, nor a curse” by again presenting empirical arguments on how the global flow of goods, technologies, and ideas have contributed immensely to the progress of human civilization throughout history, and how the most important ideas in the world, including that of freedom and democracy, cannot be properly referred to as exclusively or even predominantly Western.<sup>36</sup>

In a similar manner, Arturo Escobar in his essay ““Beyond the Third World: imperial globality, global coloniality and anti-globalization social movements” examines the seemingly paradoxical yet potentially emancipatory character of contemporary anti-globalization movements.<sup>37</sup> These new movements are founded on the politics of difference and are place-based in orientation, and are thus essentially anti-globalization. However, these movements also employ transnationalized political strategies in the formation and strengthening

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35 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, pp. 123-124

36 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, pp. 126

37 Arturo Escobar. “Beyond the Third World: imperial globality, global coloniality and anti-globalisation social movements” *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2004): 207-230.

of their movement networks across conventional boundaries of identity and are thus in a way promoting a sort of counter-hegemonic globalization. Escobar's analysis posits that these contemporary anti-globalization movements ultimately collectively oppose very specific forms of globalization embodied by two key contemporary processes – imperial globality and global coloniality. These two contemporary processes perpetuate the military, economic, and ideological hegemony of the current world powers and also aggravate the oppression and marginalization of subaltern groups.

Escobar also asserts that these contemporary anti-globalization movements recognize the necessity of critically considering the problem of globalization beyond modernity and beyond the idea of the Third World. This is the reason why they are employing the seemingly paradoxical political strategy of being both grounded on the politics of place, difference, and identity and yet transnational. Consistent with Sen's view, Escobar situates these contemporary anti-globalization movements within the locus of genuinely immanent critiques of globalization. On one hand, they are well-grounded on current realities and promote a sober and reasonable criticism of the problems of the contemporary globalized world order. On the other hand, and at the same time, they recognize potentialities for emancipation in the context of the same globalized world order. Thus, Escobar's analysis can be said to be in line with Sen's advancement of human freedom and flourishing as the ultimate ideals, and with Sen's recognition of the primary role of human rationality towards these ideals and in breaking the major barriers against these ideals. However, Escobar focuses on a specific modality of human rationality which is critique and focuses his analysis in the context of the predicaments of contemporary globalization and of contemporary anti-globalization movements as an immanent critical response and counterpoint to these predicaments.

Another enriching supplement to Sen's discussion on the potential of globalization to be the modality of universalizing the ideals of rationality and freedom is John Rawls' classic essay "The Law of Peoples."<sup>38</sup> In this essay, Rawls theorizes on how the liberal idea or the liberal conception of justice, which can be said to be characterized by the ideals of freedom and rationality, reasonably constructed within a

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38 John Rawls. "The Law of Peoples." *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (1993): 36-68.

well-ordered liberal society, can be extended to other societies through what he calls the law of peoples. Rawls posits that in extending the liberal conception of justice or the liberal idea to the law of peoples, the conceptions need to be more generalized and in a sense more limited in such a way that the fundamental principles do not include what Rawls calls the three egalitarian features. For Rawls, this is in order to accommodate the comprehensive doctrines not only of well-ordered liberal societies but also of well-ordered non-liberal societies or what he calls well-ordered hierarchical societies. In this essay, Rawls also recognizes the possibility that certain “outlaw regimes” would refuse to comply with the reasonable law of peoples constructed and established in and for well-ordered societies and moreover would pose real threats to well-ordered societies. In such cases of coercive non-compliance of “outlaw regimes” to the law of peoples, Rawls stipulates certain obligations of well-ordered societies - establish a *modus vivendi* with the “outlaw regimes”, initiate efforts to protect the welfare and integrity of their own people as well as the people of other well-ordered societies, initiate efforts to protect the welfare and rights of innocent people in general, negate any existing support for the “outlaw regimes”, and initiate efforts towards the eventual reasonable acceptance of the law of peoples by all.

Rawls’ reflections in “The Law of Peoples” are an enriching supplement to Sen’s exploration of the potential of globalization to advance freedom and rationality as universal human ideals. While Sen and Rawls would agree that the methodology of the extension and advancement of liberal ideals characterized by the ideals of freedom and rationality must be reasonable or rational, my reading is that Sen would go further to challenge the distinction between well-ordered liberal societies and well-ordered hierarchical societies. Instead of advancing a more limited conception of liberal ideas, Sen would argue for the rational advancement of the full set of liberal ideas as well as additional more comprehensive stipulations to take into account both the process and opportunity aspects of freedom. To Sen, such is the primacy and the potential of freedom and rationality as well as of democracy as public participation in rational discourse. Also, based on my reading, Sen would acknowledge the threats of outlaw regimes and would generally agree with Rawls’ proposed obligations of well-ordered societies in such instances. However, Sen would argue further that efforts to resolve the conflict must be enabled by a strong movement



of public reasoning and must primarily take into account the protection of the capabilities of the people involved to live the lives they value and have reasons to value, which is the central consideration in Sen's capability approach.<sup>39</sup>

## Divergences between Sen and Žižek on Overcoming Violence

Although it can be said that both Sen and Žižek are critical of the mystification of the multiculturalist approach to non-violence and that they likewise converge in their advancement of the universals of rationality and genuine freedom as constitutive of a plausible approach towards undermining violence, it is also important to note that they have important divergences in specifically characterizing how the true overcoming of violence will actually emerge.

Žižek, as a Marxist philosopher, remains a steadfast anti-capitalist despite his criticisms of conventional Marxism. Žižek is convinced that although it can be argued and it must be recognized that global capitalism has led to the general progress of humanity in multiple dimensions, capitalism will not be able to sustain itself perpetually. Moreover, contemporary subjective violence is ultimately rooted in the inherent, inevitable, objective violence in capitalism. However, the difficulty of theorizing about the end of capitalism lies in the recognition of how capitalism has effectively universalized itself, something which conventional Marxist analysis was not able to anticipate. Given this contemporary difficulty, as well as the undeniable failure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Communist project, Žižek points out that difficult as it is to imagine the end of capitalism, it is even more difficult to imagine what the plausible alternative could be. Nonetheless, Žižek likewise identifies what he calls new antagonisms or the “antagonisms of the commons” which confronts all people of the world regardless of class and ethnicity, and thus could lead to the emergence of a new global proletariat towards the overcoming of capitalism. Žižek provides four main examples of these “antagonisms of the commons.”

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39 Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 18, 58-87

There are four such antagonisms: the looming threat of an *ecological* catastrophe; the inappropriateness of the notion of *private property* in relation to so-called “intellectual property”; the socio-ethical implications of *new techno-specific developments* (especially in biogenetics); and, last but not the least, the creation of *new forms of apartheid*, new Walls and slums.<sup>40</sup>

Sen, on the other hand, is firmly convinced of the merits of the market economy and even deems the freedom of transaction in the market as one of the fundamental freedoms that human beings value and have reasons to value. It is necessary to qualify, however, that Sen also recognizes the limitations of capitalism and the market economy and its inherent disconnects with the universal human ideal and aspiration of freedom.

There is, ..., considerable evidence that global capitalism is typically much more concerned with markets than with, say, establishing democracy, or expanding public education, or enhancing social opportunities of the underdogs of society.<sup>41</sup>

Sen likewise expresses that in order to truly overcome violence, radical changes in capitalism must be made.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, Sen argues that there is no such thing as the market outcome, which means that markets do not abstractly work independently but rather, it is human institutions that ultimately determine how the market behaves.<sup>43</sup> Thus, in Sen's analysis, these radical changes to capitalism would come from breakthrough changes in international institutional policies that would undermine the negative commissions of capitalism, for instance, the global arms trade, the extremely prohibitive and inefficient trade terms that prevent exports from developing countries, and inequitable patent laws, and not in the abolition of the market economy itself.<sup>44</sup> Sen likewise argues that the most important problem that needs to be addressed in globalization is the problem of how to generate more fairness in a

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40 Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, then as Farce* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 91

41 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. 139

42 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. 141

43 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. 137

44 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. 140

globalized world.<sup>45</sup> Sen is optimistic that the search for global equity and fairness can be globalized, together with a diverse notion of identity.<sup>46</sup> Sen even ends his text by raising the optimistic question on the possibility of global democracy (again, in terms of a global politics of public reasoning, not necessarily in terms of the emergence of a democratic global state).<sup>47</sup>

Another important point of divergence between Sen and Žižek is on the role of violence itself in the overcoming of violence. While Sen's discussions generally presuppose an opposition against the instrumentalization of violence to fight violence, Žižek argues explicitly that emancipatory violence is necessary to truly overcome the subjective, objective, and symbolic violence of the contemporary world. This emancipatory violence could take the form of what Žižek calls divine violence (Žižek borrowing from Walter Benjamin), which is the sort of emancipatory violence that cannot be located within the realm of ethics.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, Žižek's notion of emancipatory violence is likewise expansive and does not necessarily always include physical violence. For instance, Žižek considers the individual's universalization (or departicularization) as an extremely violent process and recognizes the emancipatory potential of this violence.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, towards the end of his text, Žižek makes a somewhat peculiar proposition – that sometimes doing nothing is a more meaningfully violent act in the politics of emancipation as compared to doing something.

In a crude analogy, the social “nothing” (the stasis of a system, its mere reproduction without any changes) “costs more than something” (a change), that is, it demands a lot of energy, so that the first gesture to provoke a change in the system is to withdraw activity, to do nothing.<sup>50</sup>

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45 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, pp. 132-136

46 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. 148

47 Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. 184

48 Žižek, *Violence*, pp. 197-205

49 Žižek, *Violence*, p. 146-147

50 Žižek, *Violence*, p. 213

Žižek relates the emancipatory potential of the universalization or departicularization of the individual subject to the Cartesian notion of *cogito* in his essay “Descartes and the Post-Traumatic Subject.” For Žižek, each of the four antagonisms of the commons has the potential to bring about a radical trauma (or violent intrusion or impact on the psyche) to the contemporary subject. This trauma is in the form of a radicalization of Marx’s notion of proletarianization as the deprivation of the subject of his or her substance, to the radical point of absolute deprivation, such that the subject becomes pure subject without substance, tantamount to the Cartesian *cogito*. The antagonisms of ecology pose the threat of radically depriving the subject of the common substance of nature. The antagonisms of intellectual property likewise threaten the subject of the deprivation of the common intellectual substance. The antagonisms of biogenetics further pose the threat of radical trauma from the deprivation of the substance of the common genetic heritage. And lastly, the antagonisms of new forms of apartheid bring about new radical traumas on the ultimate deprivation of the substance of common humanity. Thus, the post-traumatic subject has the potential to become the universal Cartesian *cogito*, which can carry the universal emancipatory potential from the synthetic movements of the antagonisms of the commons.<sup>51</sup>

Some further clarification on Žižek’s position on the employment of violence to overcome violence can be found in his essay “A Plea for Ethical Violence.” In this essay, Žižek suggests that because the current hegemonic liberal discourse already perpetuates excessive political guilt and fear in the guise of practically unlimited permissiveness, it seems that the courageous assertion of what is truly ethical is already in itself violent. Žižek’s primary ethical concern in the particular context of this essay is the struggle for social justice and thus in effect seems to imply that the striving for justice in an unjust social edifice is necessarily already in itself violent.

In the discussions of this essay, Žižek makes a number of references to certain notions of love – the Judeo-Christian idea of love for the neighbor, the Buddhist concept of bodhisattva, Levinas’ characterizations of the infinite responsibility for the Other, and

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51 Slavoj Žižek, “Descartes and the Post-Traumatic Subject” *Filozofski vestnik* 29, no. 2 (2008): 9-29.

Che Guevara's assertion that revolutionary love is violent. In these discussions, Žižek suggests that the divine, and in effect the ethical or particularly justice, is in a sense subjugated to the phenomenon of real love, and the character of this love is violent. To clarify, this subjugation is not necessarily subordination, but rather an assertion of primacy of characterization. In other words, instead of saying the divine, the ethical, or the just is love, Žižek posits to instead say that love is divine, ethical, or just. For Žižek, the violence of this love is exemplified or illustrated in the Judeo-Christian notion of in a sense irrationally and selflessly loving the abyss of the neighbor, in the Buddhist idea of bodhisattva where nirvana is neglected to return to Earth and help other suffering beings towards salvation, in Levinas' conception of the infinite responsibility for the Other and subsequently turning towards the Third as the beginning of justice, and in the radical emancipatory love in the case of genuine revolution.<sup>52</sup> Thus, my reading is that Žižek's general notion of violence against violence is much more expansive and complex than what would merit immediate dismissal or condemnation as a celebration of violence. In his conception of violence against violence, Žižek seems to draw semantic roots from the basic meaning of the concept of violence as force or violation in a way that he means to say that a radical departure from the zero or base point of the status quo is already in itself violent. In addition, Žižek seems to always ultimately link the idea of violence against violence to the notions of love, ethical responsibility, and radical emancipation, which are notions that are intuitively associated with feelings of passion and intensity and thus likely to be linked to the concept of violence in the broad sense.

## CONCLUSION

From the lines of analysis, argumentation, and discussion presented in this paper, the following key theses can be put forward.

First, the mystification of the multiculturalist approach to non-violence is primarily manifested in the depoliticized and culturalized discourse of tolerance, which is ultimately mobilized by guilt and fear, which perpetuates rather than undermines violence.

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<sup>52</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "A Plea for Ethical Violence" *The Bible and Ethical Theory* 1, no. 1 (2004): 02-1-15.

Second, the fundamental paradoxical character of the multiculturalist discourse of tolerance is most manifested in how it is both tolerance for the other and intolerance against the overproximity of the other.

Third, both Sen and Žižek assert that the true approach to non-violence is a universal approach characterized by the universals of rationality and genuine freedom.

Next, although both Sen and Žižek acknowledge that in order to truly overcome violence, radical changes must be made to the current social system, they differ in their characterizations of what these radical changes could be. Žižek argues that capitalism needs to come to an end while Sen asserts that radical institutional changes need to be made without abolishing the market economy.

Lastly, Sen and Žižek likewise diverge in their ideas on the role of emancipatory violence in the overcoming of violence. Žižek explicitly argues that emancipatory violence (an expansive notion that does not always necessarily include physical violence) is necessary while Sen is generally silent on the matter although there is a recognizable presupposition in his discussions that violence should not be employed to fight violence.

In summary, in this paper, the approach of multiculturalist tolerance is criticized as a false alternative to violence. It is argued, following Sen's and Žižek's thought, that the potential solution to the problem of violence does not consist of the promotion of multiculturalist tolerance for its own sake, in a contemporary liberal manner that is ultimately motivated by perpetual guilt and fear towards the Other. Instead, what is presented as the true alternative to violence, and thus the genuine potential solution to the problem of violence is the universalization of the ideals of real freedom and rationality.

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