

FREEDOM AS CAPABILITY: AMARTYA SEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISCOURSE ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF FOR INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS

Syamsul Asri

Sekolah Pascasarjana Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta

Teknika Utara Street, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Email: sasri@ugm.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the possible conceptual contribution of Amartya Sen's book "Identity and Violence" (2007) to the discourse on the relationship between individual freedom and Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). Sen is widely recognized as a pioneer of human-centered and interdisciplinary development economics that emphasizes freedom as a fundamental prerequisite for development. Although he does not specifically discuss FoRB, Sen has extensively engaged with broader human rights discourse. He critically examines the relationship between freedom, capability, and agency on the one hand, and justice, identity, and social choice on the other. The richness and flexibility of Sen's framework enable human rights in general, and FoRB in particular, to be understood as a process of empowerment through capability building. Such an approach allows individuals to develop meaningful choices within their immediate social environments, where justice functions both as a prerequisite for and an objective of human-centered development. To demonstrate the relevance of Sen's ideas to the individual dimension of FoRB, this article concludes by examining the FoRB of tribal and indigenous religious communities as a comparative field through which Sen's conception of individual freedom in "Identity and Violence" can be critically engaged.

Keywords: *Amartya Sen, Freedom as capability, freedom of religion and belief, tribal and indigenous religions*

INTRODUCTION

Freedom of religion and belief (FoRB), in this article, is approached philosophically as a study of citizenship, in which citizens can flourish only when they are empowered as independent and complex social agents within their respective religions and beliefs (Badurdeen et al., 2026). FoRB affirms the fundamental freedom to think, feel, and experience religiosity as an authentic process through which individuals discover and develop themselves (Marshall, 2004). It also upholds the freedom to express religiosity socially, although such expression may be subject to carefully defined limitations. This perspective parallels Amartya Sen's conception of freedom and social choice. While distancing himself from rational choice theory, which he considers

insufficiently sensitive to the complexity of human identity, Sen develops a theory of social choice based on the assumption that individuals are embedded within complex social relationships. For Sen, freedom therefore always involves living with and empowering others (Sen, 2015). From this, it appears that freedom of religion and belief aligns with Sen's social choice.

Although Sen accepts freedom of choice and action as the basis of individual agency, he firmly rejects the assumption that individuals exist as isolated agents. For Sen, the freedom to think, speak, and act is inherently social, shaped by complex social relations that precede the individual. At the same time, these relations are continuously transformed by individuals who are empowered through them. Freedom, therefore, is understood as the capability to choose, act, and participate

within social life (Sen, 2015). In this sense, freedom constitutes a process of capability building nurtured through social relations for individual development. In turn, individuals continuously reshape the social spaces and relationships in which they are rooted.

Particularly relevant to the discourse of FoRB is *Identity and Violence* by Amartya Sen. A central argument in this 2007 work is that social identity is never monolithic in relation to individual freedom. Sen argues that individual identity is fundamentally relational and multidimensional. For him, reducing individuals to a single category of identity, whether religion, race, class, citizenship, sexual orientation, hobbies, or any other marker, is both intellectually misleading and socially dangerous (Sen, 2015).

According to Sen, each individual represents a complex constellation of social relationships. A person may simultaneously be a Muslim woman, a MotoGP enthusiast, a cat lover, an advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, an environmental activist, an ice cream enthusiast, a stamp collector, a historian of science, and a reader of Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Human identity, therefore, is inherently diverse and layered.

Freedom, in Sen's view, is neither solitary nor a form of empowerment aimed at dismantling the social world. In line with social theories such as Hubert Hermans' dialogical self-theory, which similarly emphasizes that identity is always plural, hybrid, and dynamic (Hermans, 2014), Sen understands freedom as the individual's capacity to develop within, critique, and transform the diverse social relations and spaces that shape human life (Sen, 2021). Freedom of religion and belief is no exception. Although Sen never explicitly analyzes FoRB, he consistently engages with human rights discourse as part of a broader project of transformative human development (Benham Rennick, 2013; Grugel and Hammett, 2016; Sen, 2011).

Freedom of Religion or Belief

(FoRB) fundamentally advocates the freedom of all individuals to believe, think, feel, and explore their religiosity (Ferrari et al., 2021). FoRB also guarantees the right to express religiosity publicly and socially, although certain limitations may be necessary to prevent violations of the rights of others.

This article aims to elaborate on the potential contribution of *Identity and Violence* by Amartya Sen to discussions concerning the position and relationship of individual freedom within FoRB discourse. By situating religious freedom and belief as an integral part of broader processes of individual and social self-development, this article seeks to address two central questions: what conception of individual freedom is articulated in *Identity and Violence*, and how can this conception deepen discussions on the relationship between individual freedom and FoRB within contemporary discursive practice, particularly in the context of indigenous religions and spiritualities? Engaging FoRB through the context of indigenous religions is important not only for highlighting the richness of Sen's framework of freedom as capability, but also for further developing FoRB as a dynamic and evolving discursive practice (Cesari, 2025).

Literature Review

The freedom of religion and belief (FoRB) of indigenous religious adherents is often portrayed in the literature as being shaped by continuous suffering, marginalization, and dispossession imposed by both the state and the predatory structures of global capitalism. Much of the existing scholarship tends to position indigenous peoples primarily as passive victims of historical and structural conditions. For Petri and Klocek (2025), adherents of indigenous religions and spiritualities exist within persistent conditions of structural and cultural injustice. These injustices are produced through interconnected systems of actors

and practices that systematically appropriate indigenous lands, displace communities, and marginalize them socially and politically. Such conditions often make the struggle for human rights in general, and FoRB in particular, difficult to articulate and sustain.

This tendency to portray adherents of indigenous religions and spiritualities primarily as passive recipients of justice is also reflected in the work of Hewitt, Jacobs, and Moon (2025). Although their discussion focuses on the relationship between the Canadian state and Indigenous peoples in Canada, their conclusions reflect a broader global tendency to frame FoRB within liberal-democratic frameworks that position the state as the primary duty bearer responsible for protecting rights and punishing rights violators. Within this framework, the state appears to occupy a dominant position in human rights discourse, leaving limited space for understanding indigenous religious communities as active agents capable of shaping and negotiating their own religious freedoms.

Even when the everyday agency of adherents of indigenous religions and spiritualities is acknowledged in the literature, such agency is often treated merely as an epiphenomenon valued primarily for its usefulness to state agendas, market capitalism, or broader projects of social cohesion. In this perspective, the freedom of religion and belief (FoRB) of indigenous peoples is understood mainly in terms of its contribution to larger political and social objectives. This tendency can be observed in the works of Ruckstuhl et al. (2023), Daniel et al. (2022), and Fatem et al. (2023). These studies not only express sympathy toward adherents of indigenous religions, particularly in their role as protectors of forests, rivers, and local ecosystems, but also implicitly assume that the legitimacy of indigenous FoRB depends on its capacity to contribute positively to the state, capitalist

development, or broader social integration. As a result, the foundational worldviews underlying the state, the market, and society itself often remain insufficiently questioned.

In response to this tendency, this article adopts an approach similar to that articulated by Robin Wall Kimmerer in her discussion of indigenous environmental ethics (Kimmerer, 2020). This article argues that adherents of indigenous religions and spiritualities should not be understood merely as passive victims dependent upon the state, the capitalist market, or dominant society as the sole sources of recognition and protection. Nor should the value of their FoRB rest solely on whether it is perceived as culturally unique or socially useful. Rather, following Kimmerer, this article seeks to position the FoRB of indigenous religious adherents as a complex arena of individual and communal capability building, shaped through dynamic processes of identity formation that move simultaneously toward cohesion and plurality, both with and beyond the structures of the state, the market, and wider society.

Conceptual Framework

This article employs two interrelated clusters of conceptual frameworks. The first cluster compares the concept of freedom within the literature on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) (Ferrari et al., 2021), with Amartya Sen's conception of freedom as articulated in *Identity and Violence* (Sen, 2015). The second cluster examines the dynamic interplay between existing conceptions of indigenous religions (Hewitt et al., 2025; Ruckstuhl et al., 2023) and the ways in which these conceptions contribute to a more nuanced understanding of FoRB when interpreted through the first conceptual framework.

As a conceptual elaboration on the relationship between critical citizenship and the lived subjectivities of adherents of

indigenous religions, this article seeks to contribute to FoRB discourse by emphasizing the plurality of forms and sources of individual and communal identity. An important implication of this position is that strategies for restorative and transformative justice aimed at protecting and strengthening the rights and capabilities of indigenous religious communities are not solely dependent upon the nation-state. Rather, such strategies are embedded within complex social relations in which the state constitutes only one among many possible arenas of agency, recognition, and empowerment.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study primarily employs a qualitative research approach to examine the absence of capability-centered agency among adherents of indigenous religions and spiritualities within broader discursive practices on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in existing scholarship. A systematic literature review is used to identify and collect relevant data (Jesson, Matheson, and Lacey, 2011; Nightingale, 2009), including discussions on Amartya Sen's conception of individual freedom, the insufficient elaboration of FoRB concerning the rights and freedoms of adherents of indigenous religions, and the limitations of current academic literature in recognizing indigenous religious adherents as fully autonomous subjects. To interrogate and analyze the collected data, this study employs Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework (Fairclough, 2010).

DISCUSSION

Freedom in Identity and Violence

Freedom, for Amartya Sen, as articulated in *Identity and Violence*, refers to an individual's capacity to think, speak, and act within complex social spaces and relationships, without being confined to a

single horizon of identity or self-identification. In this work, Sen is primarily concerned with the persistence of violence arising from the rigid consolidation of identities. His central argument is that violence often emerges from attempts to reduce individuals to a single defining identity, whether based on religion, ethnicity, race, or other categories (Sen, 2015). For example, within this identitarian logic, Baco is understood only as Muslim and not Christian, while Sola is understood only as Christian and not Muslim. Such reductive categorizations can easily be mobilized by demagogues to dehumanize those perceived as fundamentally different.

For Sen, however, this logic is both intellectually flawed and socially dangerous. In everyday life, Baco and Sola may share numerous identities simultaneously: they may both be men, football supporters, animal rights activists, or swimming enthusiasts. They may also share countless other identities formed through the complex social relationships that shape their lives and are, in turn, reshaped by them.

In this context, freedom is precisely the capability to resist all attempts to confine individuals within a single identity framework. Such freedom is possible because every person is embedded from the outset within a complex network of overlapping social identities and relationships. Individuals are therefore free to recognize themselves as belonging to multiple identities simultaneously across different spaces and contexts. Depending on changing social circumstances and personal needs, individuals may also redefine or prioritize different aspects of their identities over time. For Sen, preserving this plurality of identities is both a prerequisite for and an outcome of human development (Rees, 2011; Sen, 2011).

Furthermore, within Amartya Sen's conceptual framework, individual development and growth are always

understood through their positive and constructive relationship with the social world. Freedom is neither the freedom to exist in isolation nor the freedom to destroy social relations, because it is precisely these social relations that make individual freedom possible. Society nurtures and sustains the existence of individuals. At the same time, individuals who develop through their freedom to say “no” to identitarian coercion continuously reshape the social world around them. This dialectical relationship challenges assumptions that portray individuals as solitary and self-contained agents (Sen, 2015).

In this perspective, the individual is neither a detached subject without social context nor a monolithic being confined within a single horizon of identity. For Sen, such a condition is impossible because society itself exists through the complex and diverse relationships among individuals (Sen, 2015). The social ceases to be genuinely social when these relational complexities are reduced or eliminated.

From this perspective, Sen’s strong criticism of reductionist understandings of *Identity and Violence* becomes more comprehensible. Violence committed by individuals or groups against others emerges when people are denied the freedom to inhabit multiple identities simultaneously within the same social space and historical moment. Such violence reflects the repression of human freedom through the imposition of singular and monolithic identities. An individual who is unable to say “no” to this form of identitarian coercion enters into a distorted and restrictive relationship with the social world.

More precisely, the individual becomes temporarily detached from the social world. The consequence of this detachment is violence: others cease to be perceived as fellow human beings and instead come to appear as entirely alien. The similarities that once connected the

self to others gradually disappear. Such a condition produces anxiety, and individuals may seek reassurance by attempting to restore their relationship with the social. However, according to Amartya Sen, demagogues of monolithic identity politics often exploit this condition as an opportunity for identity consolidation. When individuals who have become detached from broader social complexity gather within narrowly defined identity groups, they may falsely believe that their connection to the social world has been restored. In reality, this restoration is illusory because the social fundamentally consists of complex relationships with diversity, including the diversity of persons, identities, and social contexts. This false identification with the social is then redirected toward hostility against those perceived as different, based on the assumption that these “others” threaten the integrity of the imagined community embraced by anxious individuals.

Within Sen’s analysis of *Identity and Violence*, “the other” therefore carries an ambivalent meaning. On the one hand, “the other” refers to fellow human beings with whom individuals can always discover shared identities and common grounds, whether as citizens, neighbors, or simply fellow inhabitants of the Earth. On the other hand, shared identity may also become a justification for violence against those perceived as radically different. Violence emerges when individuals or groups come to believe that difference itself threatens the integrity of the community they seek to defend (Sen, 2015).

This complexity arises from the fact that the social world is inherently complex; it simultaneously unites and differentiates individuals in countless visible and subtle ways. For Amartya Sen, however, social differentiation should never become a justification for violence. Rather, individuals should recognize that difference is a necessary condition for the

richness of social relations, which in turn sustains individual freedom and capability (Sen, 2015). Violence is therefore reprehensible because it represents a desperate and irresponsible attempt to impose uniformity, a condition in which individuals cease to be genuinely free and capable.

Another important aspect of Sen's argument concerning individuals and freedom is his persistent understanding of individuals as social actors empowered through their relationships with others. Individuals are not viewed merely as rights holders vulnerable to violations. Instead, because human beings always exist in relation to others, they possess not only rights but also responsibilities, namely the capability and willingness to respond to others in a civilized and ethical manner (Sen, 2015).

From this perspective, the phrase "social responsibility" becomes somewhat redundant because responsibility is inherently social. The social world demands responses that go beyond primitive reflexes or antagonistic reactions. Individuals become capable of responding to others in civilized ways precisely because such conduct constitutes the fundamental basis of social life itself (Boer, 2024).

Sen concludes his argument in *Identity and Violence* by reaffirming that freedom ultimately begins and ends in the human mind (Sen, 2015). Both individuals and society must therefore cultivate conditions that enable the growth of freedom in thought, speech, and action. This objective cannot be achieved by reducing individuals to a single identity. Rather, it requires creating space for individuals to recognize, negotiate, and embrace multiple identities that can coexist without descending into violence.

Sen's Contribution to the Discourse on Freedom in FoRB

In this article, the epistemological contribution of *Identity and Violence* to

the discourse on individual freedom within FoRB can be identified by examining the similarities and differences between FoRB's conception of individual freedom and the conception elaborated by Amartya Sen in *Identity and Violence*. There is a significant conceptual alignment between FoRB's understanding of individual freedom and Sen's interpretation of freedom. Nevertheless, important differences remain between the two frameworks. These differences do not necessarily produce contradiction, but they do reflect distinct philosophical emphases regarding the meaning and position of individual freedom.

First, both FoRB and Sen place the individual at the center of their conceptual concerns. However, Sen understands the individual primarily as a social agent who is continuously embedded within constructive social relationships through ongoing processes of social choice. In contrast, FoRB, particularly through the doctrine of *forum externum*, often approaches the individual as a vulnerable rights-bearing subject whose freedoms are continually exposed to potential violations by others (Ferrari et al., 2021).

For Sen, vulnerability should not merely be understood as a condition requiring protection. Rather, vulnerability constitutes the starting point from which individuals develop capability, agency, and responsibility within social life (Sen, 2015). At the same time, it is important to recognize that FoRB historically emerged as one of the earliest forms of human rights discourse aimed at bridging the relationship between the individual and the community (Kelly, 2026). Religious belief inevitably involves dimensions of life that individuals consider meaningful and valuable, dimensions that are naturally shared with those closest to them. In this sense, religiosity is never entirely private. The formation and development of religious communities often arise precisely because deeply valued beliefs and practices are communicated, shared, and

collectively sustained within social relationships.

This distinction forms one of the foundations for differentiating between the *forum internum* and the *forum externum* within FoRB. The *forum internum*, understood as the inner realm of belief and conscience, receives absolute protection. However, such absolute protection is not extended to the *forum externum* because religiosity, from its very inception, transcends the private individual sphere and becomes part of broader social relations. It is precisely within these social relations that FoRB recognizes the possibility of limitations and negotiations regarding rights protection.

A second aspect in which Amartya Sen's argument contributes to FoRB discourse concerns the position of religion within individual identity. FoRB tends to interpret religion and belief as primary and non-negotiable dimensions of identity. By contrast, Sen understands religion and religiosity as only one among countless identities that individuals may construct, negotiate, and prioritize through their ongoing engagement with the social world. Art, science, politics, gender, hobbies, and music all constitute domains through which individuals can develop their capabilities and, in doing so, transform society.

From Sen's perspective, FoRB discourse may risk treating religiosity as the central or even dominant foundation of identity available to individuals. Such a tendency, according to Sen's broader argumentative framework, can become problematic because it reduces the complexity and plurality of human identity. For Sen, individuals are always constituted through multiple and overlapping identities that emerge from their dynamic relationships with diverse social contexts. Reducing individuals primarily to religious identity risks obscuring this relational and multidimensional character of human existence.

Another crucial aspect of Amartya Sen's conception of individual freedom that contributes to FoRB discourse is his emphasis on the individual as a citizen (Sen, 2015). Sen's understanding of citizenship presupposes a dynamic relationship between individuals and the broader social world, including but not limited to the state. Once again, Sen consistently rejects conceptions that reduce human beings and their social relations to a single and monolithic identity framework. In this regard, he argues that individuals cannot be understood merely as subjects whose existence is defined solely through their relationship with the state. Such a reductionist view ignores the complexity of human social life.

For Sen, individuals are citizens in a broader and more relational sense. Citizenship reflects the complex network of social relations that sustains and shapes individual existence. Interestingly, the Indonesian term for "citizen," *warga*, derives from Sanskrit and refers to membership within an organic social relationship. One derivative of this term is *keluarga* (family), which similarly denotes relational belonging. This linguistic insight resonates with Sen's broader argument that individuals are embedded within diverse and interconnected social relationships. Consequently, reducing individuals to a singular relationship with the state is not only inadequate but also potentially dangerous.

An individual's identity, formed through complex and overlapping social relations, constitutes the foundation upon which claims to freedom emerge. The social relations that shape individuals, and are simultaneously reshaped by them, provide the relational choices through which individuals freely think, act, and negotiate their identities within specific contexts. For Sen, such freedom is not only an end of development in itself but also a means of achieving further freedom and capability building. Freedom enables

individuals to respond creatively to the multiple identities and social networks that inform their social choices. Sen therefore consistently emphasizes the freedom to possess, negotiate, and transform identities as one of the most fundamental conditions for the development of human capability, including the capability to live as adherents of a particular religion and as citizens within a plural social world.

Freedom of Indigenous Religions: Between FoRB and Sen's *Identity and Violence*.

At this point, it is useful to examine the freedom of indigenous religious communities as an example of how *Identity and Violence* can contribute to the discourse on individual freedom within FoRB. Adherents of indigenous religions are embedded within complex social relations that both shape and sustain their existence (Maarif, 2018). These social relations encompass not only relationships among members of indigenous religious communities, but also their relationships with land, rivers, forests, sacred sites, and other elements of their lived environment. Such a complex network of relations positions adherents of indigenous religions as empowered social agents capable of thinking and acting freely in pursuit of forms of progress defined within their own indigenous worldviews.

In *Identity and Violence*, Amartya Sen offers a conceptual framework of individual freedom that can deepen the understanding of individual freedom within FoRB discourse. Individual freedom is undeniably central to FoRB and functions as one of its most fundamental normative principles. When this principle is violated, FoRB discourse identifies such acts as violations of the right to religion and belief. As discussed in the previous section, Sen understands the individual as always embedded within complex social relations that generate a multiplicity of identities and social affiliations.

Freedom and progress, for adherents of indigenous religions, can encompass many different meanings. Nevertheless, two key characteristics define these concepts. First, freedom and progress are fundamentally communal in nature. Adherents of indigenous religions are not “liberal” individuals detached from social and ecological contexts, capable of moving freely without meaningful attachment to land, forests, rivers, or community. On the contrary, they exist within enduring and constructive relationships with both their social and natural environments. Separating adherents of indigenous religions from these complex social and ecological networks would result not only in material displacement but also in the loss of orientation, belonging, and meaning.

Second, for adherents of indigenous religions, freedom and progress are closely connected to practices of preservation and sustainability. Traditions are maintained not because they are immune to criticism, but because criticism itself becomes meaningful only within the context of tradition (Ricoeur, 2016). Likewise, traditions remain alive precisely because they are capable of responding creatively to criticism and change. From this perspective, adherents of indigenous religions should not be understood merely as vulnerable subjects whose rights require protection from external actors, whether the state or broader social institutions. Rather, they possess agency and capability because they are embedded within ongoing processes of preserving, negotiating, and transforming the traditions that sustain their communal existence.

When the discursive practice of FoRB encounters the communal character of indigenous religious life, it finds a conceptual terrain that is already familiar. Historically, FoRB emerged as a form of human rights discourse that sought to bridge individual rights and communal rights (Ferrari et al., 2021). The distinction

between the *forum internum* and the *forum externum*, once again, reflects FoRB's recognition that religiosity possesses an inherently communal dimension. Furthermore, although FoRB often approaches individuals and communities as potential victims of violations of religious freedom, it consistently advocates against violations directed both at indigenous religious communities collectively and at individual adherents whose FoRB may be restricted by fellow community members or by the community as a whole.

Nevertheless, FoRB discourse can still be developed further to more deeply understand and advocate for the individual and communal freedoms of adherents of indigenous religions. From the perspective of Amartya Sen, indigenous religious adherents should not merely be understood as vulnerable citizens waiting for state intervention, protection, or restoration of violated rights. Rather, they are citizens who already possess agency, capability, and social resources. Precisely because adherents of indigenous religions are embedded within complex social networks and multiple identities, they possess the capacity to mobilize social, cultural, and communal resources to protect not only their religious identity but also the broader dimensions of their collective existence from violence and marginalization.

Where does this capability originate? It emerges from the multiple and intertwined forms of self-identification possessed by adherents of indigenous religions. The process begins by identifying which social relations have been violated, whether the violation concerns religious identity itself, as commonly emphasized within FoRB discourse, or other dimensions such as customary land, sacred forests, rivers, or ancestral territories. From there, communities mobilize social resources through complex social choices to contain, resist, or overcome violence. Within this process, enduring traditions are critically

reinterpreted, while critique itself is reabsorbed into the living continuity of tradition. The restoration of dignity then takes place through the reaffirmation of violated identities alongside the celebration of other interconnected identities, sometimes through traditional festivals connected to rivers and forests, rituals involving ancestral spirits, or other communal practices.

Interestingly, the identity of adherents of indigenous religions may also enrich Amartya Sen's conception of freedom as articulated in *Identity and Violence*. In this work, Sen generally understands identity as something that individuals may negotiate and redefine depending on changing social contexts. An individual, for example, may simultaneously occupy different identities in different contexts, such as being a lecturer in one setting and a member of a motorcycle community in another. However, adherents of indigenous religions often experience identity differently. Their identity is not merely a flexible selection among multiple affiliations, but rather the totality of the relationships through which they live and exist. Adherents of indigenous religions are empowered not primarily because they can shift identities across contexts, but because they exist simultaneously within dense and inseparable social, cultural, spiritual, and ecological relationships: relationships with fellow community members, ancestral lands, mountains, sacred sites, forests, rivers, and spirits. For many adherents of indigenous religions, separating oneself, even temporarily, from these interconnected relations is almost unimaginable because these relationships constitute the very foundation of existence, identity, and capability.

It appears, and this may constitute a reflective extension of Amartya Sen's framework, that Sen had not fully considered the possibility that individuals might inhabit a condition in which complex and multiple identities are

experienced simultaneously across all spaces, times, and contexts. The argumentative structure of *Identity and Violence* largely reflects societies shaped by ongoing urbanization, mobility, and multiple forms of social development. In this context, Sen tends to understand identity as relational yet flexible across changing social situations. However, he appears not to have fully addressed the experience of adherents of indigenous religions as subjects who understand themselves through a simultaneous and inseparable identification with the totality of their social, ecological, and spiritual relations. Certainly, individuals who practice embodied and localized spiritualities may possess fewer social affiliations quantitatively than individuals living within highly urbanized societies. Nevertheless, this quantitative difference does not diminish their capacity for self-development, collective empowerment, or social transformation. On the contrary, their capability emerges precisely through the depth and continuity of their relationships with their communities and environments.

The difference between these two forms of subjectivity becomes especially visible in the mechanisms through which individuals respond to violence. For urban individuals, the capacity to resist violence often lies in the flexibility to move from one externally imposed identity toward numerous alternative identities. Through these alternative identifications, individuals can reinterpret, challenge, and resist reductive forms of categorization. By contrast, adherents of indigenous religions who embrace embodied and localized spiritualities experience their identities as simultaneously interconnected across all dimensions of life. Violence directed against them is therefore experienced not merely as violence against an individual religious identity, but also as violence against their community, land, rivers, forests, sacred spaces, and ancestors. Consequently, the resources for resisting

violence and restoring dignity also emerge from the totality of these interconnected social relations. Within this framework, the state remains important as one possible source of protection and recognition. However, despite the dynamic socio-political relationship between indigenous religious communities and the state, the state constitutes only one among many curative and restorative resources available to adherents of indigenous religions.

Another important issue worth discussing concerns the status and identification of individuals as adherents of indigenous religions. Processes of identity formation and self-identification are inseparable from relations of citizenship, within which the state is often positioned as the central authority and the ultimate provider of curative resources for preventing and remedying violations of FoRB experienced by citizens.

Amartya Sen, however, understands citizenship as only one among many possible forms of social belonging. Consequently, the state becomes merely one of several curative mechanisms and resources available for resisting and overcoming violence (Miletzki and Broten, 2017). Applied to adherents of indigenous religions, Sen's argument suggests that the status, identity, and self-identification attached to individuals through the discourse of citizenship should not be regarded as final or unquestionable identities.

Indeed, individuals categorized as adherents of indigenous religions remain free to negotiate, reinterpret, or even avoid such labels. Admittedly, this process may be difficult, if not impossible, in particular contexts. Nevertheless, semantically as well as socio-politically and economically, the category "indigenous religion" remains relatively recent and has not always been critically interrogated by the individuals and communities to whom it is applied.

From this perspective, FoRB itself must also be critically examined as an identitarian and discursive project. If

FoRB operates in a disciplinary manner by imposing a singular identity horizon, such as “indigenous religion”, upon certain individuals and communities, while simultaneously restricting their freedom to negotiate alternative forms of self-identification within their complex social worlds, then FoRB risks reproducing a new form of symbolic violence under the banner of resisting earlier forms of oppression.

The capability of adherents of indigenous religions to live, negotiate, and articulate complex identities therefore challenges us to reconsider the position of FoRB within broader and more pluralistic understandings of citizenship, human rights, capabilities, and ecological rights. Such plurality is rooted not merely in the autonomy of isolated individuals, but more fundamentally in the decisive significance of relational existence itself.

CLOSING

The discussion above leads to three concluding observations regarding the relationship between Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and Amartya Sen’s conception of individual freedom. First, there are significant similarities between FoRB and *Identity and Violence* by Amartya Sen in their understanding of individual freedom. Both place individual freedom at the center of their normative concerns and regard it as something that must be protected, supported, and cultivated. Within FoRB, freedom in the *forum internum* receives absolute protection under all circumstances. This absolute protection becomes more negotiated within the *forum externum*, since religious expression may be subject to limitations. Nevertheless, such limitations are intended to function as carefully regulated restrictions designed to prevent violations of FoRB itself in the name of protecting public order or social harmony. For Sen, individual freedom constitutes both the prerequisite and the

objective of development. Freedom, understood as capability, refers to the empowerment and capacity of individuals to think and act. Without such capability, individuals become vulnerable to violence and domination.

Second, despite these similarities, FoRB and Sen differ in subtle yet fundamental ways in their interpretation of individual freedom. FoRB tends to approach individuals primarily as vulnerable rights-bearing subjects whose freedoms are continually exposed to possible violations. Even when individuals are understood as members of communities, FoRB discourse often continues to frame them as relatively autonomous individuals requiring protection and restoration of dignity through legal and institutional mechanisms, particularly those provided by the state and broader society. By contrast, Sen does not regard individuals as isolated or powerless subjects lacking the capacity to respond to violence. Rather, individuals are always embedded within complex social relations that provide them with diverse resources and capabilities. Through these multiple relationships, individuals remain capable of mobilizing social, cultural, communal, and political resources, including state institutions, to preserve and restore their freedom.

Third, reflection on the freedom of adherents of indigenous religions demonstrates the potential contribution of Sen’s framework to FoRB discourse on individual freedom. In this context, FoRB represents only one among many curative resources available to individuals and communities seeking to preserve their freedom and dignity. However, FoRB discourse must also critically reexamine itself if it wishes to remain consistent with its broader human rights commitments. There is a risk that FoRB may unintentionally impose a singular horizon of identity, namely religiosity within the framework of citizenship, upon individuals and communities whose identities are

inherently plural, relational, and inseparable from broader ecological and social networks. In responding to this challenge, FoRB discourse may need to more fully acknowledge both the plurality of human identities and the relational character of ecosocial existence.

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