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Beyond the ivory tower:
Amartya Sen's development theories in Bob Marley's reggae, or the other way around?

Abstract:

This article claims that political philosophy ideas can evolve simultaneously in academia (articles and books) and in the arts (music). The case of Amartya Sen and Bob Marley illustrates this. The article describes the political philosophy of Amartya Sen as it relates to freedom and economic development, and also in the songs of Bob Marley, which deliver similar ideas. The paper focuses specifically on positive freedom and the idea of progress. I claim that the early personal stories of these two figures represent a path dependence that explains: (1) their political philosophy expressed in books and articles in the case of Sen, and in songs, in the case of Marley; and (2) why their ideas converge.

Keyword: Amartya Sen, Bob Marley, cultural economics, reggae music.

I teach the Music and Life of Bob Marley class. I've been obsessed with Bob Marley for 18 years. I have a master's degree in jazz piano, and Bill Evans and Thelonious Monk were the main reasons I decided to become a musician. But as someone who also loves groove music, all these light bulbs went off when I heard Marley. It's kind of unfortunate that his image has been oversimplified and commoditized. It's "Let's go down on vacation to Jamaica and everything gonna be alright." But when you get into his music, it's among the deepest social protest music on the face of the earth. That gets overlooked a lot.
Matt Jenson
Assistant Professor
Berklee College of Music

Trying to talk about Bob Marley is like trying to take a sip from the ocean.
Ethiopian Orthodox archbishop[1]

Amartya Sen occupies a unique position among modern economists. He is an outstanding economic theorist, a world authority on social choice and welfare economics. He is a leading figure in development economics, carrying out pathbreaking work on appraising the effectiveness of investment in poor countries and, more recently, on famine. At the same time, he takes a broad view of the subject and has done much to widen the perspective of economists.
A. B. Atkinson
The New York Review of Books

Beyond the ivory tower:

Amartya Sen's development theories in Bob Marley's reggae, or the other way around?

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Geographic background

Some streets in Accra, the capital of Ghana, are full of bars, small crafts and food shops, street vendors, and local and foreign visitors. Although this is particularly pronounced in the Osu neighborhood, where expatriates hang out, the scene is typical of Accra regardless of the day of

[1] Cited in Stephens (1999).

the week or the time of the day; it can be 11 am, or 11 pm, or almost any hour during the day. Usually a constant flow of people fills the streets of this African urban atmosphere. Most of the small shops have their own stereos and speakers, usually turned on loudly. Ghanaian music, hip-hop, and other traditional and modern rhythms intersperse themselves in the air waves, forming such a diverse mosaic of sounds that it is difficult for the pedestrian to clearly distinguish a single song. One evening I walked into an open space at the end of the cluster of stores by Ring road; it was dark, the only illumination came from the moon, the headlights of the cars that were passing by, and the flashy and colorful series of small Christmas-type lights placed in an improvised bar-counter; there were white plastic chairs and tables located below several trees. This was a more sophisticated bar, in the sense that it has its own space. The environment was pleasant, even two or three brown street dogs where hanging out under the trees and the tables of the bar. Some people were at the tables, drinking beer. A few minutes passed by and my senses were immersed by a pleasing slow beat. It was the beat of reggae music. It was the beat of Bob Marley´s *Redemption Song*, which is very popular in Accra. Soon, one after another Marley's songs were played, all to my delight.

In Accra, reggae is also part of the public scene in households in middle and low-income neighborhoods. I frequently walk through one of these neighborhoods when going from Ashesi University, where I have a visiting professorship, to the grocery store. The neighborhood is organized as a two-story single-room housing compound lining either side of the road. The buildings have seen better days. The walls and the doors have not been painted or maintained for what it seems a long time. Mainly families of retired and actual workers of the national military and the police occupy the compound. It seems that families of five members or more occupy each of the several small single rooms. Private life is almost nonexistent: ladies cook in the open

space on simulated kitchens where dishes and all sorts of utensils sit crowded some on top of the other; kids take showers on the sides of the street; kids and adult males usually urinate openly and publicly in the drainages. Adult men iron their clothes on wooden tables on the sidewalks; old cars, that never stripped their "taxi" sign, are now permanently parked on the street serving as closets. A collage of colorful clothes drying under the sun is a permanent characteristic of this urban landscape. It is not rare to see a group of semi-naked children sitting on wooden benches under a tree taking classes on religion and other subjects. Nevertheless, there is electricity and one can usually see fans running on the roofs.

Invariably, there is one constant element almost every time I walk through: in one of the rooms, not always the same one, Bob Marley's reggae music is being played. The sound is amusing; it is not loud as it is in the streets and bars of Osu. The music is actually relaxing and it serves as a backdrop for daily household activities; There is almost always more than one person listening. The sound of reggae provides an enjoyable atmosphere, and the lyrics deliver a kind of relaxing and organizing message to what otherwise seems to me a chaotic environment. Reggae music in this context delivers comfort and it might create some sense of collective empowerment (as suggested by Yudice 2001: 60) that in some instances provide a gist of dignity.

On one occasion, as it usually happens when I listen to Jamaican reggae, my heart and my mind separated, so to speak. My body started to move slowly, from left to right, and my fingers started drumming my legs. My mind, on the other hand, linked Marley's lyrics to the political philosophy of one of my favorite economists: Amartya Sen. I realized that there were important similarities between Sen´s ideas and Marley´s message. Since then I wanted to put those similarities on paper. This article is my first attempt. This paper is also a simple excuse to link the ideas of the two figures whose work I admire very much.

A brief background on Ghana

Before explaining these similarities, I would like to say something about Ghana; the place that made me think more profoundly about the political philosophy of reggae music. Ghana was the first country to gain independence in Africa in 1967. At the time of independence, Ghana raised high expectations of economic development and growth. Some experts even thought at the time that Ghana would develop economically even faster than Korea and other countries in East Asia.[2] Corruption and competition for power, among many other historical and geographic reasons, impeded the realization of such expectations (Meredith, 2006). With the exception of some sporadic conflicts in the northern part of the territory – the Boku region, generally, Ghana remains a very peaceful country. This is relatively rare in Western Africa, where until very recently several countries were still involved in some kind of civil war (Liberia and Sierra Leona, for example), and others are currently involved (Ivory Coast, and Chad, for example) although Burkina Faso and Mali have been as peaceful as Ghana. The prospects for growth in Ghana remain optimistic, but move slowly. The recent discovery of oil offers a possibility for investment, employment, and growth (as demonstrated by the case of Botswana). But of course the threat of the resource curse and/or the Dutch Disease are always present. The recourse curse means that the revenues from oil exports might be stolen by politicians, or wasted within a process of political competition either within the government or between the government and private interest groups. The Dutch Disease means that other sectors of the economy in Ghana (but not the oil sectors) might loss competitiveness in the international market due to an appreciation of the real exchange rate caused mainly by the entrance of dollars (or Euros) from oil sales; this might also cause an increase in prices. Due measures should be put in place to

[2] See a discussion on this issue in Collier (2007).

guarantee an efficient management of funds (such as strict mechanisms to check revenues management) and to avoid the exchange rate appreciation (such as building savings in the form of foreign exchange reserves).

Ghana is ethnically diverse and economic development has primarily favored the coastal region, where urban centers such as Accra, Tema, Cape Coast, and Takoradi are located. The northern part of the country remains relatively economically isolated. In the north, agriculture has a lot of potential but remains stagnated due to limited transportation infrastructure. In Accra, however, the last two years have witnessed an economic boom especially in the financial and construction sectors. Tourism is usually an important source of income for the government, and also for the multiple restaurants, hotels, craft makers, and intermediaries that sell on the streets.

Reggae music in Ghana has had an important influence. There is a Rastafarian community, which usually overlaps with artisans, and craft makers and sellers in Accra. Reggae also attracts visitors to Ghana. Kokrobite beach in the outskirts of Accra is one example. Even Rita Marley, Bob Marley's widow, has a house and a recording company in the Aburi region, close to the Ghanaian capital.

This paper claims that *some* Bob Marley reggae lyrics deliver a philosophy that is quite similar to Amartya Sen's political philosophy. The implication is that a type of philosophy that is quite important for the management of public affairs, such as Sen's, is simultaneously delivered to the public through the lyrics of some reggae songs. As a consequence, one can claim that influential ideas find their way to different sectors of society (academics and philosophers, and listener to popular music, in this case) through different channels. A more imaginative argument is that simultaneous *emergence* of ideas can happen around the same time in philosophy and in popular art. I organize the paper as follows: I present a brief analysis of where I think Amartya

Sen's political thought and Bob Marley's converge. Then I present a more in depth narrative of their philosophies. Following, I include examples in which some of Marley's songs resemble ideas that Sen has expressed in books or articles. Finally, I explore why both figures tend to coincide philosophically, and after this I conclude.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF MARLEY'S AND SEN'S WORK

Amartya Sen and a brief description of his philosophy[3]

Amartya Sen has received more than 100 honorary degrees around the globe, and his philosophy serves as the main background for the United Nations Human Development Index. He won the Nobel Prize in economics in 1998 for his "contributions to welfare economics."[4] Amartya Sen was born in Bengal in 1933, he is a citizen of India, and has hold positions at Harvard and Cambridge.

Sen is mainly known for his contributions to what economists call "social choice theory," which analyses decisions that individuals make collectively (as members of a group or citizens of a country), the decision-making mechanisms used, and their outcomes. The field grew substantially due to a seminal contribution by the Nobel Laureate Kenneth J. Arrow. One of Arrow's most influential ideas is that there is not a single mechanism that can aggregate individual ranked preference into a community ranked preference outcome, and at the same time comply with five conditions (unrestricted domain, non-imposition, non-dictatorship, Pareto efficiency, and independence of irrelevant alternatives). This idea is known in the economics literature as the *Arrow's Impossibility Theorem* (1951; see also Atkinson (1987) for an explanation). Arrow's idea had a highly influential effect on political and economic theory at the

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[3] A very elucidating, clear and interesting interview with Amartya Sen, at University of Berkeley, can be fund in *You Tube* here: [http://youtube.com/watch?v=3muzELM1_uw], access on June 28, 2008.
[4] Official announcement by the Nobel Committee available at [http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economics/laureates/1998/] accessed on June 27, 2008.

time, and it is still influential today. Several scholars such as James Buchanan, influenced by Arrow, suggested that the idea of a collectivity is empty; he thinks that concepts such as *social welfare* and *welfare economics* are empty as well (Buchanan, 1954). Since Arrow showed that no aggregation of preference was possible, as a corollary, it was not possible to consider the abstract idea of the collectivity either. My description of the evolution of the field is a simplification of the intense and deep debates that has produced several hundreds of academic articles since the 1950s (Sen has recently estimated that the number of books and articles on formal – technical, social choice theory exceeds a thousand (Atkinson 1987)); there are however other important reasons why Buchannan criticized welfare economics, such as its potential negative effect on individual rights (which constitute the bases of the libertarian philosophy) and the difficulties of adding individual welfare into a social welfare function. Amartya Sen's work tries to revive welfare economics, so to speak. Broadly considered Sen claims that although there are problems with collective decision making it is still possible to talk about *a society* and that collective choice is not only possible but also it can accomplish extremely important results (Sen 2002). Sen's classic example is how the disappearance of famines in India was related to the existence of a democratic regime after the colonial domination (1990; 1990b). Famines in India or Bangladesh happened even when the total supply of food was high, or at peak levels; this lead Sen to conclude that democracy, a responsible role of the media, basic entitlements (employment and a reasonable wage), periodic elections, and active opposition parties can contribute to reduce famines (1990b). Sen clearly argues that the elimination of famines in India has been largely the result of public intervention in a systematic way (1990b).[5]

[5] However, Sen attributes the Chinese famine of 1958 – 1961 to disastrous government policies under non-democratic conditions (1990b).

Sen also influenced economic theory when he argued that the incorporation of ethics in traditional economic analysis was necessary; doing that required a modification of the basic assumption behind economics – the so called "self-interest principle" (1991; 1982).

Sen's work extends itself amply to several areas: gender (1990b; 1990c; 2003), female education (1991b; 1991c), inequality (1992), poverty (1983; see also Atkinson, 1987 for a description), famines (1990; 1990b see also Atkinson, 1987 for a description), the idea of progress (1993), identity (2006a; 2006b; 2002), and human rights (2004), among many others.

The Nobel committee clearly summarizes Sen's work as follows:[6]

> His contributions range from purely axiomatic theory, over definitions of welfare indices, to empirical studies of famine. They are unified by a general interest in distributional issues and a particular interest in the most impoverished members of society. Sen has clarified the conditions which permit aggregation of individual preferences into collective decisions, as well as the conditions which permit rules for social choice to be consistent with a sphere of individuals rights. He has also analyzed the importance of available information about different individuals' welfare in collective decision-making. Thereby he has improved the theoretical foundations for comparing different distributions of welfare in society and define new, more satisfactory poverty indexes. In empirical studies, Sen's applications of his theoretical approach have enhanced our understanding of the economic mechanisms underlying starvation and poverty.[7]

Bob Marley and a brief description of his philosophy

Bob Marley is arguably the most popular singer in the world. His songs are being played in the most numerous and diverse locations around the world: from a seacoast in the Golf of Guinea, West Africa, to a luxurious nightclub in Tokyo; Matt Jenson (2003), a professor of music at Berklee College of Music, put it in different words: "[h]is image can be found on SUV bumpers in the richest of communities in the US as well as on gun butts of guerrilla rebels in Central America" (although no conflicts in Central America remain today) (Mick Jagger and

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[6] See also Atkinson (1987) for an informative review of Sen's work.
[7] From the Nobel Prize website, available here [http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economics/laureates/1998/ecoback98.pdf] accessed on June 27, 2008.

Diana Ross are said to have milled about trying to get and invitation to come on stage with Bob in one of his concerts in California (*The Beat Magazine*, undated)). Roger Steffens (cited in Stephens 1999: 148) also refers to Marley's popularity: "[. . .] Travelers sight Marley's name and image in the most remote corners of the earth, on everything from stained glass to shoelaces, 'from Peru to Poland, Tokyo to Timbuktu, the top of the Himalayas to the bottom of the Grand Canyon.'" His music however is particularly appealing among the relatively poor, which is a characteristic some scholar have attributed to reggae music in general, and Afro-reggae in particular. Yudice (2001: 57) claims: "Afro-reggae has extended this consciousness-raising activity to concrete civic action in health, AIDS awareness, human rights, and education."

Marley´s reggae is a very diverse genre; lyrically, it has a strong component of economic and political philosophy, although it also includes several other themes, such as love, family and friendship concerns, and other more secular topics, so to speak. Spirituality is also common in reggae songs. As Huss claims: "[t]he hardcore and the sweet, the secular and the spiritual, constantly inform and trade off each other in Bob Marley and reggae (Huss 187, 2000); and within the secular and spiritual, love, of course, is also essential in his music (Dawes (1999: 138), cited in Huss (2000: 190)), as it is illustrated in the songs *I don't want to wait in vain for your love* or *Turn your lights down low*; *No women, no cry* might also fit in this category.

Historically, Jamaican reggae musicians started to reach the international audience in the early 1970s (Huss 181, 2000). McGinty indicates that worldwide attention came with the release of the album *Catch a Fire,* recorded in 1973 by Bob Marley and the Wailers on the Island label. This led to their first extended tour of The United Kingdom and The United States. In the following years there were several wide ranging tours, the last one beginning in Gabon, Africa, in 1980 and ending in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1981 [his last concert]. A high point was

Marley´s appearance at the Independence celebration in Zimbabwe in 1980 [Marley himself fund the concert]. One of his aims during this tour was to reach the Afro-American market, and to promote this, Marley staged a four-day show in Harlem´s Apollo Theatre. His efforts to establish reggae in the music industry were successful; it is reported that his record sales totaled over 200 million dollars (McGinty, 1988: 253).

At the time [Reggae] positioned itself in society in a unique, sometimes revolutionary, sometimes reactionary way; but no sense can be made of its social role without an accurate idea of its internal history as another pop music (Kimberley (1980), cited in Huss 2000: 190). When one thinks in reggae, Rastafarianism also comes to mind. Marcus Garvey started the movement in the early 20th century [1930s] in New York; his basic motivation was to reestablish proud for black culture and people, and to promote socioeconomic progress among them (Marley, 2005: 45). For many people Rastafarianism served as a linked to Africa, as a mechanism that provided a sense of roots and origin. Garvey believed that an African king would liberate black people from their colonial situation, and he and his followers came to believe that Haile Selassie [the Ethiopian emperor] (whose original name was Ras Tafari) was that person (Marley 1995: 45). Reggae is usually associated with Rastafarianism, although they have different origins.[8] Indeed, O´Gorman claims that Reggae does not derive from Rastafarianism, the two existed in parallel until the late sixties, when they converged and "adopted one another," with reggae becoming a rostrum for the dissemination of Rastafarian beliefs held by the leading artists. In short,

[8] Walters (cited in Douglass, 1986) defines Rastafarianism as: "those colors, words, phrases, objects, places, and persons that have been adopted by Rastafarians as meaningful in relation to Selassies´s divinity" (p. 18). These symbolic items include dreadlocks, the colors (red, gold, and green) and the image (a lion) of the Ethiopian flag, Ital (or natural) food, Rasta language, and the use of ganja or marijuana (p. 48). Rastafarians share many elements of language with the patois of the Jamaican masses and are in position to verbalize concerns common to the lower class. In addition, the movement's religious symbols resemble those of various fundamentalist Protestant religious of Jamaica that also rely heavily on Bible imagery (Douglas, 1986).

Rastafarian owes more to reggae than reggae owes to Rastafarianism (1986: 161). As Huss indicates "the love song is as important to the formation of the reggae ethos as Rastafarianism, poverty or a strong anti-colonial inclination [are also important] (cited in Huss 2000: 191)." The Rastafarian-spiritual element has been regarded as essential to the understanding of Jamaican reggae in general, and Marley´s reggae in particular, as Amoaku (1979: 18) claims:

> In Jamaica one cannot understand reggae without first understanding the socio-religious and political Rastafarian movement. The last great wellspring of reggae is Rastafarian music. The Rastafarians are members of Jamaica´s spiritual nationality – millenarian in outlook, esoteric and fundamentalist in temperament, worshipers of Haile Selassie as the living God, the predominant cultural force in Jamaica for the past thirty years.

As Stephens claims Marley create a *new culture* (a communicative culture which transcends racial, national, and temporal borders) in the sense that he helped push a multiracial "imagined community" towards the horizon of what Nelson Mandela has called a "nonracial democracy" (1999: 1-3). McGinty (1988: 253) argues "[B]y the time of his death in 1981 at the age of 36, he [Marley] had promoted reggae over much of the world. Further he had written a number of significant compositions whose lyrics often championed freedom and human rights, a contributing factor to the popularity of both reggae and of Bob Marley, himself."

Where do Sen and Marley's messages converge?

Bob Marley's music is so diverse and varied that one could make a case for different fields of study, such as public choice, anarchy, communism, and a wide range of political positions regarding human rights (in his song *Get up - Stand up*, for example), discrimination (in his song *Slogans*, for example), among many others. He even talked about regional integration (the case of Africa) and Pan-Africanism in his song *Africa Unite*, *Get up - Sand up* (with Peter Tosh), and the album *Survival*. He talked about anti-colonialism, and slavery and its history, in

his song *Buffalo Soldier*,[9] (see for example Walters (1996) for the importance of history in reggae music).[10] Indeed, his message is so diverse that it matches Sen's equally diverse spectrum of intellectual interests. I will focus on Marley's conception of freedom and his idea of progress as they relate to Sen's conceptualizations.

The concept of freedom

Sen´s *Development and Freedom* (2000), for example, delivers a message that is very similar to Marley´s *Redemption Song.* One does not need to be economists or political scientists to have access to Sen´s philosophy; one can access some main aspects of the philosophy by listening to some Marley´s songs. This is important because popular artists deliver a simplified message to an ample audience, while intellectuals address only a limited public. The chorus of *Redemption song* describes this song as a "song of freedom." The second verse starts as follows:

Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery;
None but ourselves can free our minds.

What does "mental slavery" mean in this context? If we assume that Marley is inviting the listener to open his mind to new ideas, to new ways of looking at the world, this means that he is asking people not to get trapped, or to trapped themselves, in a particular worldview. In other words, it seems that for Marley mental emancipation means intellectual freedom, which might well include freedom from ideological ties. Marley´s invitation is autonomous of how

[9] There was a Buffalo Soldier in the heart of America,
Stolen from Africa, brought to America,
Fighting on arrival, fighting for survival.

If you know your history,
Then you would know where you coming from,
Then you wouldn't have to ask me,
Who the 'eck do I think I am.

[10] Jamaica is the most populous and the longest of the British Islands, it was also a distribution center for slaves; and estimated one million of them were brought there (Amoaku, 1979).

likely it is for people to become totally free thinkers.[11] Marley delivers the same message in his song *Could you be loved* when he says:

> Dont let them fool ya,
> Or even try to school ya! oh, no!
> Weve got a mind of our own [. . .]

In this song it is not clear whom Marley is referring to by *them* but the message might be addressing the poor, black people, or the socially deprived. In any case, "[w]eve got a mind of our own" refers again to the human capacity to think freely, to be skeptical, and to exercise some kind of individual action, *say something!*, as he urges in this song.

For Amartya Sen "development" means freedom, which includes freedom to choose a way of life that the individual considers meaningful, this necessarily implies that basic economic needs are already satisfied. The main message of Sen´s philosophy is that income should not be considered an end in itself, but a means to reach a functional life in society. In fact, Sen finds that income is not necessarily correlated with indicators of wellbeing, such as life expectancy, self-respect, or satisfaction of self-chosen goals for example. Higher income does not necessarily translate into freedom to lead adequate lives (1990b).[12] This difference is quite important, as Sen illustrates:

> [T]he social arrangements for public health in the United States are more deficient than those of many other countries that are much poorer, and this deficiency especially affects particular groups, such as blacks. The United States may be the second richest country in the world in per capita gross national product, but the average life expectancy at birth of the US population is lower than that of a dozen other countries, with the US tying for the thirteenth position with half a dozen other nations (see Table 1 of the *World Development Report 1989* of the World Bank) (1990b).

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[11] Douglass North (1990) suggests that human beings behave under certain "mental models," which can be modified or replaced but cannot be abandoned completely.

[12] For example, a person who is not particularly poor in income, but who has to spend much of that income on kidney dialysis, can be taken to be suffering from poverty precisely because of the limited freedom that he or she has to achieve valuable ways of functioning (Sen, 1990b).

> Men have less chance of reaching the age of forty or beyond in the black neighborhood of Harlem in New York, than they have in famished Bangladesh (McCord and Freeman, 1990, cited in Sen, 1990b). This is so despite the fact that as far as per capita income is concerned, the Harlem residents are much richer than the Bangladeshis (1990b).
>
> Rapid economic development may go hand in hand with worsening relative mortality of women (1990c).
>
> On this issue Hacking (1996) picks up another example:
>
> The Costa Rican GNP per head is one-twelfth that of the US, but Costa Ricans live just as long as Americans. Because they have effective policies for basic education, communal health services, and medical care, they live far longer, on average, than the citizens of Brazil, Gabon, or South Africa, which have a much larger GNP per person.

Sen claims that an individual is functional (has developed as a person) when he or she performs tasks that are valued by others, she sees herself not only as an active participant of the group but also as a voice who can help improve the organization and objectives of the group. Freedom from ideologies is also an important component of Sen´s concept of development. Sen´s concept of development assumes that certain economic needs of the individual are already satisfied. Only when the needs of shelter, food, and clothing are satisfied the individual has the freedom to choose. This suggests that there is a certain threshold under which income is essential from freedom, but its importance diminishes as income increases.

According to Sen (1988) freedom plays an important role to assess wellbeing – particularly *positive freedom* or freedom to choose (Sen, 1990b). Bob Marley´s song, *Zimbabwe*, emphasis the idea of freedom of choice as human right:

Every man gotta right to decide his own destiny,
And in this judgment there is no partiality.
So arm in arms, with arms, we'll fight this little struggle,
'Cause that's the only way we can overcome our little trouble.

This suggests that the right a man has to decide his own destiny is an absolute truth for Marley; for him this judgment cannot be partial, bias, or subjective. The “right to decide” in the song *Zimbabwe*, differs from the “libertarian” view of freedom; Marley see colonialism, poverty,

and discrimination, as obstacles for a person to fully realize himself as an individual. A libertarian on the other hand, rarely considers poverty as independent, but as dependent variable. For them poverty is a consequence of a large and interventionist state or the result of lack of a plain legal field; in some occasions libertarians see poverty as the natural state of human affairs. A libertarian would also consider discrimination as a reasonable revelation of preferences and tasted; and he would pragmatically consider that societies would be better off if individuals in developing areas forget about colonialism and start over, so to speak; talking and worrying about colonialism, compensation, etc., would delay economic improvement.

Bob Marley considers discrimination as a cause of war and violence. His idea suggests that as long as there are inequalities either racial or economic, war and conflict will prevail. In his song *War* (which reproduces a speech by Haile Salassie given in Jamaica in 1966) Marley´s claim:

Until the philosophy which hold one race
Superior and another inferior
Is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned
Everywhere is war, me say war

That until there are no longer first class
And second class citizens of any nation
Until the colour of a man's skin
Is of no more significance than the colour of his eyes
Me say war

Broadly speaking Marley's message is indeed more in accordance with Amartya Sen and Jon Rawls's philosophies than it is with Robert Nozick philosophy, for example.[13] Marley suggests that inequality has negative effects: conflict, violence and war. In *Inequality*

[13] Robert Nozick's theory of justice is quite different but equally appeals to historical information. For him, it is not the distribution of income that matters but the *process* by which it is brought about, people being "entitled" to resources that were justly acquired or that were transferred to them according to a just process, even if this means they will be immensely rich and that their riches may be of no benefit to the poor (Atkinson, 1987).

reexamined, Sen (2007) advances the idea that countries – or societies – that forget about the poor, will suffer the negative consequences of famines and death. Sen´s definition of inequality applies particularly to the concept of *human development*, not to other aspects such as culture and identity. Sen defends diversity and cultural pluralism as he makes it clear in recent books: *The argumentative Indian* (2005) and *Identity and violence* (2007).

Positive freedom and commitment

In his song, *Positive vibration*, Marley proposes:

If you get down and quarrel everyday
You're saying prayers to the devil, I say
Why not help one another on the way
Make it much easier

"[H]elp one another on the way" is clearly and invitation to develop a moral commitment to think about others, but mainly to engage in concrete actions. It seems that for Marley it is extremely difficult to accept and indulge inaction, especially when people around experience real pain, suffering, or poverty. Marley expresses this concern in his song *Survival:*

How can you be sitting there
Telling me that you care -
That you care?
When every time I look around,
The people suffer in the suffering
In everyway, in everywhere.

We're the survivors, yes: the Black survivors!
I tell you what: some people got everything;
Some people got nothing;
Some people got hopes and dreams;
Some people got ways and means.

And also in his son *So much trouble in the word*:

You see men sailing on their ego trips
Blast off on their spaceships
Million miles from reality
No care for you, no care for me

So much trouble in the world now [repeat]
All you've got to do is give a little
Give a little, give a little
One more time ye-a-h! ye-ah!

Moral commitment to do things and help others is central to Amartya Sen's philosophy. This does not mean that Sen stands outside the borders of economics, quite the opposite, Amartya Sen follows a tradition that Adam Smith (the founder of the science of economics) started as university professor of moral philosophy. What made clear for Sen the moral need of commitment came out when he witnessed severe famines in Bengal and the hard and impressive bloody consequences of the conflicts between Hindus and Muslims that Sen also witnessed in his childhood. This experience made Sen consider seriously the concept of *positive freedom* – defined as what an individual can accomplish taking advantage of her own capabilities ["capabilities" in this context means individual capacities and the set of possibilities (functionalities, as Sen calls them) from which a person can choose (1990b; 1992)]. Positive freedom is associated with the idea that a person should be able to lead the life that he or she would choose (Sen, 1990b). Positive freedom is central to Sen conception of fairness, as Hacking (1996) claims Sen's "[. . .] idea of fairness is to equalize (and minimize) the extent to which human beings fall short of their potential achievements." Positive freedom is different than *negative freedom*, which has been prioritized by "libertarian" thinkers (such as Hayek, 1990):[14] when a person's inability to achieve something is due to the fact that he or she is prevented from doing it by the restraints imposed by someone else, or by the government (Sen, 1990b).[15] To illustrate, illiteracy is unfreedom—not just the lack of freedom to read, but also the curtailment of all the other freedoms that are conditional on communication requiring reading and writing

[14] Although Hayek does not rejects completely the role of the state in society.
[15] For an illustrative comparison between Sen's philosophy and a libertarian philosophy se Hacking (1996).

(1990b). For Sen an adequate view of freedom would have to be both positive and negative, since both are important (1990b).[16] Sen's conception of freedom as social commitment (the addition of positive and negative) firmly rejects and collapses with utilitarianism, libertarianism, wealth maximization, Pareto optimality (1990b), and revealed-preferences approach (Atkinson 1987). To summarize, for Sen social commitment to individual freedom must involve attaching importance to enhancing the capabilities that different people actually have; which can be quite similar to Marley's invitation to action and his message of "helping one another on the way."

The idea of progress

There is also another realm in which Marley and Sen has similar preoccupations: their uneasiness with Darwin's view of progress. Sen (1993) criticizes Darwin's idea of progress mainly based on human reproduction. Sen claims that there are other considerations that matter for this discussion; for example, Darwin's idea taken to the extreme might lead to a sort of anarchy which in the case of the environment might lead to take dangerous risks by dismissing environment protection measures. Sen argues that Darwin's idea in the case of the social interactions among humans does not take into account the environmental context and the temporal circumstances that might change; the characteristics that are needed to fit in one type of environment might be different from those needed in another environment; this problematizes the simple notion of fitness given that currently individuals cross environmental borders easily. Although it might be true that currently individuals (their genes) who are versatile and fit better different environments might survive in the long term; this however might not explain ethical commitments that frequently guide human behavior beyond pure survival reasons. In the song *Could you be loved* Marley criticizes Darwin's idea, but he implies that that idea has been

[16] Sen (1997) explains the relationship between human capital and human capability.

imposed by individuals who possessed some kind of power, political or economical, although this is ambiguous:

Dont let them change ya, oh! -
Or even rearrange ya! oh, no!
Weve got a life to live.
They say: only - only -
Only the fittest of the fittest shall survive -
Stay alive! eh!

Why do Sen's and Marley's messages converge?

If some musical messages by popular singers and philosophical ideas by eminent theoreticians tend to converge, it is reasonable to ask why. What are (were) the motivations of Bob Marley´s and Amartya Sen? It could be argued that Bob Marley's message of human rights and justice might not be legitimate, and that it came from a marketing strategy and the desire to sell albums.[17] However, if one accepts the message of both figures as legitimate, that their ideas in their songs and books, respectively, reflect their preferences, then one can think that there are similar background characteristics in the worldviews of these towering figures, and this explains why their ideas reach noticeable convergence. In the case of Marley, who grew up without his biological father (Stephens, 1999), probably his preoccupation with themes of justice, poverty and human rights came from his own background, having grown up in Trench Town, a relatively poor neighborhood of Kingston.[18] His songs were his memories (Gilmore, 2005). Indeed, Marley would get the inspiration for many of his songs from places and experiences when growing up in Trench Town (Marley, 2005), such as the son *Chances are* written by the time Bob Marley and his wife, Rita, moved to the village where Marley was born, Nine Miles, in the country side of Jamaica. Marley also worked as welder in Jamaica, after that he worked in the parts department

[17] For example, Jones attributes Bob Marley´s success to the business acumen of the directors of Island and Virgin Records and the media coverage of the reggae maestro´s carrier (Jones 1988, cited in Abo (1990: 146)).
[18] Huss (2000: 191), however, criticized this view.

in a Chrysler factory in Delaware, and then as a room cleaner in a hotel also in Delaware (Marley, 2005: 53).

A similar background can be found in Amartya Sen's early life in India. Although Sen grew up in a middle class family he witnessed some of the most difficult economic situations in the Indian sub-continent, such as the famines of the 1940s, when he was around 9 years old. Sen's autobiography clearly describes this situation:

> I was at Presidency College during 1951 to 1953. The memory of the Bengal famine of 1943, in which between two and three million people had died, and which I had watched from Santiniketan, was still quite fresh in my mind. I had been struck by its thoroughly class-dependent character. (I knew of no one in my school or among my friends and relations whose family had experienced the slightest problem during the entire famine; it was not a famine that afflicted even the lower middle classes - only people much further down the economic ladder, such as landless rural labourers.) Calcutta itself, despite its immensely rich intellectual and cultural life, provided many constant reminders of the proximity of unbearable economic misery, and not even an elite college could ignore its continuous and close presence.[19]

There was another event that shaped Sen's view of the world in his early childhood, the effects of the conflicts between Hindus and Muslims (Sen, 1990):

> My other experience of horror was of a rather different kind. This happened when I was even younger—about eight, I believe. I was at that time in Dhaka – then the second largest town in Bengal and now the capital city of Bangladesh. Some communal violence between Hindus and Muslims suddenly erupted, with insane killings of members of each community by thugs in the other community. Though the city was communally mixed, there was a concentration of Muslims in some regions and of Hindus in others. I came from a Hindu family and we lived in a largely Hindu middle-class area of Dhaka.
>
> One afternoon, a man came through the gate screaming pitifully and bleeding profusely. He had been knifed in the back. He was a Muslim daily laborer, and his name, he said, was Kader Mian. He had come to deliver a load of wood to a neighboring house – for a tiny reward. As he was being taken to the hospital by my father, he went on repeating that his wife had told him not to go into a hostile area during the communal riots. But he had to go out in search of work because

[19] Available at the official website of the Nobel Academy: [www.nobel.se.] Accessed on May 25, 2008.

> his family had nothing to eat. The penalty of that economic *unfreedom* turned out to be death; he died later on in the hospital [italics added].

Sen himself acknowledges that these painful memories have some relevance to the central points of his views on liberty and commitment (Sen, 1990b). One can see that Sen's concern with the idea of positive freedom has to do with Kadr Mian's death (1990b).

Although one can not generalize, witnessing poverty or experiencing it creates a sort of intellectual path dependence that manifests itself in adulthood in ones own work, being it songs in the case of Marley, or articles and books in the case of Sen. One's work contribute to define a sort of personal identity, this means that Marley's lyrics and Sen's books and articles represent the embodiment of a personal philosophy, or a way to justify inner and deeper personal believes rooted in the personal history. The personal history develops in what Duglass North calls "mental models." In both cases there is a kind of identification, a sort of empathy, with the economically disadvantaged. When one thinks in Amartya Sen or in Bob Marley, the concern for basic human right and development as well as a legitimate desire to improve the human social conditions come to mind. Both value *freedom* in a very similar way: for Marley freedom means deciding ones destiny; similarly for Sen's freedom means to have the capabilities and skills to have choices which makes one economically and ideologically independent – if such a state is possible. There is however one difference among them: the way they consider individuals can improve their social conditions. On the one hand, Marley calls for a personal liberation, so to speak. He suggests that a human being has the capacity to think critically, to decide personally her own destiny; in other words Marley believes that human beings can develop and put in practice self-reliance and self-confidence, as his songs *Zimbabwe, Redemption song,* or *Get up – Stand up* illustrate. On the other hand, Sen believes that societies can and should engage in a collective action to improve the conditions of the poorest. Although one could say that Sen's

might adopt this position for its consequences – namely that societies that do not care for the poorest will confront negative outcomes; he suggests that without some sort of support from society (embodied as safety nets for example) the least advantage will not move forward. Implicit in Sen's thought is the idea of *poverty traps,* initially examined by the Swedish economist and Nobel Laureate Gunnar Myrdal (1968;). Implicit in Marley's message is the idea of individual sufficiency put forward by classical liberal thinkers, and even modern libertarian thinkers, such as Robert Nozick (1974). In this *particular* spectrum of intellectual possibilities – individual versus collective action to promote human rights and socio-economic improvement, Marley is closer to Robert Nozick (1974) – since Marley does not mention the State as a means to increase freedom, but Sen is closer to Jon Rawls (1972). Although there are substantial differences between Rawls and Sen (for example Rawl's "principle of justice" or "difference principle" is based on the distribution of "primary goods," Sen however claims that primary goods do not necessarily translate into "means of freedom.") one of the benefits of Sen's approach is that it can include the evaluation of inequalities related to gender, class, disability, and location (1990b).

There is one aspect however in which I argue Sen and Marley coincide strongly: their critique to the neoclassical concept of rationality; meaning the idea of self interest and individual optimization behavior as the driving forces behind human actions. In this matter both thinkers differ from Nozick's libertarianism. Sen for example argues that human beings not always act to pursue their narrow self interest, in his classic article "Rational fools," Sen (1982; Atkinson, 1987) claims that *moral commitment* plays also a very important role in human behavior (in a different piece he shows that the libertarian ideal is impossible to reach (1970)); indeed, Sen's philosophy is closer to Adam Smith's *Theory of moral sentiments* than it is to Smith's *The*

wealth of nations. Bob Marley's Rastafarian philosophy differs from neoclassical conception of rationality as well. Rastafarian philosophy regarding material accumulation and goal prosecution in a way resembles the idea of *satisficing* as characterized in Herbert Simon's work on bounded rationality. Although behavior is changing (for reasons that go beyond the scope if this article) Rastafarians seems to pursue the satisfaction of basic material needs and act as if they were setting stopping points regarding personal satisfaction. They are not maximizing because they manifest a sense of coolness, a sort of mystic, which can be clearly seen among orthodox Buddhism (although behavior is also changing), or in the traditional hunter gather societies described by anthropologists such as Marshal Sahlins (1968; see also Marroquin Gramajo, 2008).

Finally and sadly both faced cancer, Marley died and Sen survived; as Hacking (1996) claims Sen might have survived due to a overdoses or radiation, which "might explain Sen's caution about absolute certainty, a skepticism about current wisdom, and, perhaps, an inveterate optimism about problems that others believe to be intractable."

DISCUSSION

Both figures deliver a message that could be regarded as universal; Amartya Sen's ideas have been adopted by the United Nations and provide the theoretical leverage for the Millennium Development Goals. Marley on the other hand delivers a philosophy that also concerns the economically disadvantaged and socially discriminated worldwide. As Matt Jenson (2003) claims:

> There was and is something about his music, life and message that has the capacity to speak to the human condition on both a very personal and universal level – from a carefree sunny vibration, to the deepest feelings of both earthly and spiritual love, to anger and frustration with oppressive systems and mind sets, to the part of all of us that is a rebel and wants freedom.

In his book, *Before the legend,* Christopher John Farley (2006) also emphasis Marley's universality:

> Even when he was singing about revelation and revolution, or vampires sucking the blood of the sufferers, or buffalo soldiers stolen from Africa, there was something redemptive, something sunny, about Marley's outlook. Marley once said: "I don't think of Third World. To me, I am of the First World. I can't put people in classes." He was always seeking to bring people together rather than to divide them. On another occasion he declared: "There is no right or left. We go straight ahead." That's part of why Marley's music is embraced all around the world, by people of disparate economic, political, and social circumstances: rude boys and frat boys, soccer moms and stockbrokers, rebel leaders and captains of industry. Marley was a smiling revolutionary, and the rhythmic and melodic affability of his music made his insurgent message go down easy.

In addition Stephens (1999: 13) indicates:

> Bob Marley's music, most immediately about black liberation, has been reframed by the singer and his corporate producers and delivered to a global, multiethnic audience, which in turn "reads" these texts in ways often far removed from their original "racial" context.

Sen is as universal as Marley is; not only because Sen is widely known across the globe but also because his work deals with problems every society has to face such as the definition and implications of freedom, the dilemmas that fairness and efficiency rise; and the individual approach and policy responses towards these concepts. Sen clearly puts it:

> If individuals do, in fact, incessantly and uncompromisingly advance only their narrow self-interests, then the pursuit of justice will be hampered at every step by the opposition of everyone who has something to lose from any proposed change. If, on the other hand, individuals as social persons have broader values and objectives, including sympathy for others and commitment to ethical norms, then the promotion of social justice need not face unremitting opposition at every move.

Finally, there is another interesting characteristic that Marley and Sen shared: their willingness to trespass certain boundaries traditionally established in their own professions, and they have been successful at doing so: on the one hand, although many economists disagree with Sen, they respect him, as a consequence Sen has been president of the American Economic Association. On the one hand, Marley goes beyond themes of love to offer a social critique. Sen has gone beyond methodological assumptions and studies topics

usually left out by economists (such as famines). In the case of Sen, Atkinson (1987) clearly states this quasi-Quixotic enterprise:

> By emphasizing the richness of human motives, the institutional complexities of development, the subtleties of social goals, he has stimulated research on topics that are not always aesthetically satisfying but are always important (and he often succeeds in treating them with an elegance others failed to attain). His writing has not only helped persuade those in other disciplines that discourse with economists is possible but has also contributed prominently to their own thinking.

Sen's theories have, like any other, several handicaps and ambiguous gaps (see Hacking, 1996 for a brief critique of Sen's approaches); some of them have to do with the link between levels of effort and achievement, some other with the negative consequences of redistribution. Nevertheless, the benefits of his theories are also numerous and they explained their popularity and acceptance in the worldwide market of ideas.

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