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THINKING WITH ROY AND ŽIŽEK ON THE FREEDOM OF A FORCED COVID-19 ‘NEW NORMAL’

Allan M. Abiera¹, Prakriti Mukherjee², & Jan Gresil S. Kahambing²

¹ Southern Leyte State University, Philippines

^{2,3} University of Macau, SAR China

allan.abiera@yahoo.com¹, prakriti92@gmail.com², and vince_jb7@hotmail.com³

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Abstract

The increasing imagination of crisis within the contemporary scene is set within the state of emergency that is the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. In this background, there is the problem of redefining the conditions of normality. The paper aims to take some insights about how to think through this predicament from Arundhati Roy and Slavoj Žižek who are, the authors deemed, subversives against the normal regulatory course of thought. To do this, the study applies the method of textual hermeneutics on both thinker's oeuvre, particularly those that relate to the pandemic and specifically Roy's *AZADI* and Žižek's *Pa(ndem)ic!* 1 and 2, and contextualizes their energetic radical visions to one of the co-authors' compiled takes on various cases during COVID-19. In this paper's reading, which attempts to succinctly open a leeway for such takes by aligning the implications *with* both thinkers' views for thinking forward and enacting possibilities, Roy's resolve through love and Žižek's notion of a forced choice can be reflected on in traversing the inevitable portal of the 'New Normal.'

Keywords: COVID-19, forced choice, freedom, love, new normal, thinking

Introduction

The COVID-19 'Crisis' and the 'New Normal' Background

As of this writing, the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has already recorded 410 million cases with 5.81 million deaths. The pandemic has shown, at this point, the many faces of a loaded disaster in the sense that for some areas, one can experience an ecological crisis, a medical emergency, and terrorism (Kahambing, 2021a). Comparable to the ecological crisis in *Living in the End Times*, the situation is also a mishmash of sociological, technological, and biological systems (Žižek, 2010). In Slavoj Žižek's *Pandemic!: COVID-19 Shakes the World* (2020), three conspicuous faces are obvious: "medical (the epidemic itself), economic (which will hit hard whatever the outcome of the epidemic), and psychological" [even at the level of "simple bodily contact"]. Peters (2020), for instance, mentions this idea of pandemic love that stays distant from its object of affection, which for Žižek means realizing "a new appreciation of the intimate bodily contact" wherein "one should therefore turn around the common wisdom according to which sexual lust is bodily while love is spiritual:

sexual love is more bodily than sex without love” (2020b, p.3). On the outset, economies are crumbling and new forms of relationalities (but also of oppressive systems) are emerging, effectively damaging the ways in which people live. It has redefined and stacked the meaning of ‘crisis’ particularly as it affects what it means to be human, human decency (and its obverse of dehumanization; see Markowitz, et.al.), or in education, the humanities (Duque, et.al. 2021). Like Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* (2020 [1951]), a suspicion to thinking *after a damaged life* permeates.

It seems, then, that with the rise of these “new” modalities of living, the question of the novelty of thoughts arising and the conditions ahead describe and prescribe a problem that would be and is already labeled as “new normal.” As Galfarsoro (2010, p. 3) laconically claims: “There is no possible return to the normality of the past. Another new ‘normal’ is needed.” And this necessity confronts us with the burden of choice albeit it appears that forced decisions are already being made in the everyday dispositions of everyone under a global vulnerable situation. Because of the virus, “we are united by our escape from the lowest form of life. This is not a matter of choice. Rather, we are already responding in this way” (Kremer, 2020, p. 7). The branding of the “New Normal” might be, to put it in Heideggerian terms, the simultaneous veiling and unveiling of what is supposed to be the situation of normalcy *as* a kind of ‘old’ normal. The New Normal could just be old wine in new wineskins, and the choice is mired by obfuscatory language and setups.

The increasing imagination of crisis within the contemporary scene is, therefore, set within the state of emergency of the pandemic. In this background, there is the problem of redefining the conditions of normality. The paper aims to take some insights about how to think through this predicament from Arundhati Roy and Slavoj Žižek who are, the authors deemed, subversives against the normal regulatory course of thought.

Theoretical Framework

To assess the theoretical framing of the background, the sides of the analysis should also be complex, thinking simultaneously of the new and the old, of the forthcoming and/or the ‘always-already.’ Arundhati Roy and Slavoj Žižek both have taken the task of writing possibilities in this enigmatic state-of-affairs under the name of ‘Normal.’ For instance, what Žižek (2020, p. 16) designates as “a modest conspiracy theory”—where “the representatives of the existing global capitalist order are [...] ruthlessly exploiting the epidemic in order to impose a new form of governance” under which “many old and weak people will be sacrificed and left to die” so that the “most probable outcome [...] is that a new barbarian capitalism will prevail,”—Roy already counts as fact especially in her country, India. Throughout her works, one can see that this ‘new barbarian capitalism’ is an existing and continually damaging threat to freedom. Her reflections of India’s dismal state range from mass displacements from dam projects in *The Cost of Living* (1999), unseen local and fringe-forms of struggle in *Walking with the Comrades* (2011), and the unjust plight of the Kashmir region in *Kashmir: The Case for Freedom* (2011). It is interesting to emphasize this ‘*for*’ in freedom rather than *of* freedom because, like the migrant and displaced indigenous groups in the Philippines (Molabola, et. al., 2020; Kahambing, 2021j),

the struggle is still ongoing. With the pandemic, these past problems become graver and mystified with what can be described in a compounding metaphor as blacker darkness. Reviewing Žižek's *Pandemic*, Gunkel aptly hits the problem: "the question therefore is not, 'when can things go back to normal?' The question should be 'why do we want things to go back to normal, when in fact things have never been normal?'" (2020, p. 6).

The backdrop of *forced* choices, under the conditions of uncertainty, ironically carries this contingency with necessity – that we have to move along – and this makes up an inevitability, the inescapability of trudging a portal and the role of *thinking* that comes with it. Arundhati Roy in her latest work, *AZADI*, says that "...as the Covid-19 pandemic burns through us, our world is passing through a portal [...] We may not always have a choice—but not thinking about it will not be an option" (Roy, 2020; see also Webster & Neal, 2021).

Method

For the methodology, the paper uses textual hermeneutics to gather insights for contextual application. This aims not just to clarify what is obscure (see Kahambing, 2020) but, based on *Hermeneuein's* original directional meaning, also to 'translate' (Palmer, 1969). This paper then both 1) explains and 2) translates both thinker's oeuvre, particularly those that relate to the pandemic and specifically Roy's *AZADI* and Žižek's *Pa(ndem)ic!* 1 and 2, and contextualizes their energetic radical visions to one of the co-authors' compiled takes on various cases during COVID-19. The translation juxtaposes their ideas to some contexts, with some relevant reflections from the other co-authors as well. As Palmer (1969) says, 'translation, then, makes us conscious of the clash of our own world of understanding and that in which the work is operating' (p. 30).

Results

Think! On Freedom in/through Forced Choices

"Not thinking about it will not be an option" is the forced reflective stance Roy directs. Not writing about this forced choice, in this case, is also not an option. When Roy met Snowden in the Moscow Un-Summit, it was the same impulse of necessity to write it: "Yet it definitely cannot *not* be written about. Because it did happen" (Roy & Cusack, 2016, p. 81). Tied with responsibility, this form of writing is, for her, *Azadi* – the Urdu, originally Persian, name for *Freedom* (Roy, 2020, p. 31). Faced with the current COVID-19 crisis, the question of normality again should be met with the choice to trudge its portals. To quote at length her ending words to 'The Pandemic Is a Portal':

Whatever it is, coronavirus has made the mighty kneel and brought the world to a halt like nothing else could. Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to "normality," trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists. And in the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality. Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine

their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.

We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it. (Roy, 2020, pp. 117-118)

What can be initially inferred from this is that maybe there is nothing so wrong about the light reimagination of the new world, of the use of writing, or of fiction. In the case of Žižek, maybe even “a cute pair of mittens” could do it. In *Heaven in Disorder* (2021),

No simple universal formula can provide the answer—there are moments in which pragmatic support for modest progressive measures is needed; there are moments when a radical confrontation is the only way; and there are moments when a sobering silence (and a cute pair of mittens) speak more than a thousand words. (Žižek, 2021, p. 3).

This complex global predicament we are confronted with locates the power of fiction against a fascist hegemonic power. Capitalism ingrained with fascist, totalitarian governance seems to dictate power not just over life but also over death when biopolitics à la Foucault (1976) becomes what Mbembé calls ‘necropolitics.’ Roy sees this power as reductive of the governed by relegating them as ethereal subjects like spirits. Fictionalizing can include forwarding a different kind of story. Quoting Marx and Engel’s *Communist Manifesto*, Roy mentions capitalism as the sorcerer unable to secure the netherworld’s powers, enabling the market middle class to have a life adjoined to the dead – of the “ghosts of 250,000 debt-ridden farmers who have killed themselves, and of the 800 million who have been impoverished and dispossessed to make way for us. And who survive on less than twenty Indian rupees a day” (2014, p. 11). While film director Michael Moore (2009) has narrated capitalism as a (rather doomed or tragic) *love story* – the richest 1% in the American capitalist system owning more than the rest of 95% combined – India’s case is a *ghost story*: “In a nation of 1.2 billion, India’s one hundred richest people own assets equivalent to one-fourth of the GDP” (Roy, 2014, p. 10), reducing the rest as ghosts with ephemeral lives of survival, living between life and death. With the COVID-19 crisis, this story is brought into a ‘new barbarism’ in Žižek’s words, openly corrupting the economy in broad daylight, robbing the poor ghosts of capitalism with their life essences.

In her conversation with Nick Estes (2020b), Roy speaks of *Azadi*—freedom for the Kashmiri— *fascism*, and *fiction*, the very subtitles of the book. Accordingly, freedom is to live with dignity. A viable way to do that is thinking through literary imagination, without the option of keeping quiet. As an architect by education and then working in cinema to her first fictional book, *The God of Small Things* (1997), traversing the ‘end of imagination’ does not mean telling the truth to power, but telling the story of *our* fight. With the Modi government and

the fascists around him, under a ‘One Nation, One Language’ symbolic violence, language is “a perfect entry point.” The problem of fascism is a problem of caste (*Jāti*) and its modern proliferations. While anthropologists now use ‘ethnicity’ rather than race, and while race is different from caste, there are comparable elements when the caste system becomes permanently woven in the fabric of cultural and societal relations. Roy, however, speaks of caste’s dangerous underpinnings, that is, when caste has given itself religious sanctions. With this divine guarantee in caste, priests (*brahmins*), warriors (*kshatriyas*), traders (*vaisya*), workers (*sudras*), and the untouchables (*dalits*), retain their standing with little and no chance of social mobility. In *The Doctor and the Saint: Caste, Race, and Annihilation of Caste*, she connects this quandary with the apparatuses of capitalism.

Can caste be annihilated? Not unless we show the courage to rearrange the stars in our firmament. Not unless those who call themselves revolutionary develop a radical critique of Brahminism. Not unless those who understand Brahminism sharpen their critique of capitalism. (Roy, 2017, p. 104).

Such a critique would be possible if its radicality can combat the fake history that enlivens the role of caste in India, where fascism, hand-in-hand with capitalism, controls every aspect of life that the dishonesty becomes unbelievable. With massacres happening in the Modi-Trump meeting and news channels, media outlets including Bollywood make resistance disappear as major human rights activists, students, are put into prison. The poor, Roy says, no longer reside in the imagination of the elite, even in literature, so that they are simply attached to the environment or background. The economy is crashing and the lockdowns – which is merely social compression for people who don’t have homes – displace a lot of workers. All this with warfare, classes, surveillance, polarizations in mind. Imagining this, along with global climate change coupled with what Naomi Klein (2007) calls ‘disaster capitalism’ where those in power profit from crises, and when chaos and things break down, the transition will not be easy. The poor, those in lower castes, indigenous groups fight displacement and are begging for citizenship, but democracy is compromised because the election machinery is controlled by the party. And Gandhi didn’t change his caste-based views but only sugar-coated the system, that yes, it is one’s hereditary job to clean shit, but it is a holy job! Concerning writing, Roy (2020b) says that “the problem is not always simplification, the problem is of a kind of nationalism that eulogizes the densest occupation in the world and demonizes the people.” And out of necessity, “these things have to be said. Ultimately, India needs *Azadi* from Kashmir almost more than Kashmir needs *Azadi* from India. India’s ship is sinking and a lot of this is because of this hate-fuelled blind rage that it can’t manage to see through.” The possibility for solidarity at this point is a way of understanding one’s position, both subjectively and in the big picture. In her words, “before any kind of solidarity can be embarked upon, one needs to understand what’s going on there. Solidarity could begin with reading. Read and understand what has been going on to people” (Roy, 2020b). In her conversation with Imani Perry, Roy (2020a)

states: “What can we do except stand up and keep speaking about it and writing about it, putting ourselves in the way of it, telling a different story.”

Roy calls for the *Azadi* that rethinks the future and the cleavage humanity has created that enabled the living conditions of people with non-ideal environments. A line in her *The End of Imagination* can continue with a more active proposal: “railing against the past will not heal us. History has *happened*. It’s over and done with. All we can do is to change its course by encouraging what we love instead of destroying what we don’t” (Roy, 1998, p. 67). Roy is radically suspect about this absolute eulogy for nationalism. “What sort of love is this love that we have for countries? What sort of country is it that will ever live up to our dreams? What sort of dreams were these that have been broken?” (Roy & Cusack, 2016, p. 91). For her,

An old-growth forest, a mountain range, or a river valley is more important and certainly more lovable than any country will ever be. I could weep for a river valley, and I have. But for a country? Oh man, I don’t know... (Roy & Cusack, 2016, p. 95).

Speaking about the portal with the freedom to trudge it promotes a radical way of thinking about thinking: that thinking is about finding possibilities out of seemingly deadlocked choices. They speak of moving forward amid the stalemate of an event where, in our current predicament of COVID – the World Health Organization (WHO) says – will “mutate like the flu and is likely here to stay” (Mendez, 2021). For Žižek, this portal, within a global frame, also presents a choice. Featherstone (2021) abstracted his review quite clearly:

Žižek finds the basis of humanity in our (human) mortality and being toward death that open out onto a new horizon of releasement (*Gelassenheit*) beyond biotechnoeconomic nihilism. Žižek imagines that the pandemic presents humanity with an existential choice about the way we organize social life. This choice is between the biopolitical domination of Chinese authoritarianism that seeks to control every aspect of life, American disaster capitalism that accepts the brutality of the state of nature, and finally Žižek's utopian spirit of communism based on a recognition of human and planetary finitude.

A pressing problem here is the ignorance about choosing the right choice. In *Pandemic 2: Chronicles of a Time Lost*, Žižek (2020) combats this “will not-to-know”, the “refusal to take the pandemic seriously that is now apparent” in the form of “it is better to act as if nothing serious is occurring—let the scientists search for a vaccine but otherwise leave us alone to continue with life as usual” (p. 142). Here, he presents 5 crucial points. First, the refusal to *think* is often taken as a special “excess-knowledge” on the part of conspiracists claiming and imposing a secret ‘deep state’ plot that takes control of everything. This refusal makes up for a kind of ignorance that has ‘eyes wide open’ but listens only to conspiracy theories. Second, the refusal is ‘not direct denial’ but is, in psychoanalytic terms, a ‘fetishistic disavowal’ that assumes the stance of “I know

very well (that the pandemic is serious), but’—but I cannot accept it, I suspend the symbolic efficiency of my knowledge and continue to act as though I don’t know it” (p. 143). Third, we mustn’t trust science absolutely because, citing Heidegger, ‘science doesn’t think’, that is, it lacks the reflexive procedure proper in ethics to reflect on subjectivity and the current “social and ideological presuppositions and implications” (p. 144). Fourth, this non-thinking aspect of science, which is different from non-cognition – thinking is different from cognition – is a strength because ‘to function in our daily lives, we have to ignore many things’ (p. 144). And finally, this refusal to think is not about the oppressed manipulated by those in power. Those in power are also manipulated by their own ignorance since they also don’t know what they are doing. Consequently, the ignorance of the oppressed is ‘not simply imposed on them from outside, but is immanent to their way of life.’ As Žižek explicates concerning mandatory masks and manipulative policies that the oppressed perceive as violent threats to their freedom and dignity: “People ‘ignore’ the full truth of the pandemic not because of some epistemological limitation or animalistic will not-to-know, but because of a deep existential anxiety: are we still human when we are *forced* to act like this?” (p. 146). Herein lies the full calling for a choice is laid open as he caps it:

This is the choice we all have to make: will we succumb to the temptation of the will-to-ignorance or are we ready to really think the pandemic, not only as a bio-chemical health issue but as something rooted in the complex totality of our (humanity’s) place in nature and of our social and ideological relations—a decision that may entail that we behave “unnaturally” and construct a new normality? (Žižek, 2020, p. 146).

Thinking with possibilities can even extend to thinking about utopias. The irony of utopia under totalitarianism, however, is the existence of a *gulag*, an adjoining hell (Kundera, 1980). Here, Žižek claims that “we should dare to enact the impossible, we should rediscover how to, not imagine, but to enact utopias” (Žižek, 2004; 2017). This is freedom. For Žižek, one can paradoxically have freedom in forced choices. He says that: “In the subject’s relationship to the community to which he belongs, there is always such a paradoxical point of *choix forcé*—at this point, the community is saying to the subject: you have the freedom to choose, but on condition that you choose the right thing” (Žižek, 1989, p. 186). This connects to Roy’s line that we might reword as: It’s not that we may not always have a choice but we have nothing but a forced choice to enter the portal of the new normal. That is to say, we need to confront the new normal by ‘encouraging with love.’ Roy and Žižek’s words provide an impetus for thinking and it is along those lines that we confer with responding and reflecting one of the co-author’s takes on various cases and contexts during the pandemic.

Thinking about Some COVID-19 Public Health Cases

In reflecting on this fact, whatever we do with and in this portal, the concept of the ‘vanishing mediator’ hovers over the historical horizon (Kahambing, 2019; 2021f). The ethical choices to be made in the portal can synthesize a new structure of the world. The specifics of this in the pandemic are crucial decisions.

The first case could be to rethink public health in crowded facilities, particularly the determination of prisons and, consequently, the persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) as an extremely vulnerable population during the pandemic (Kahambing, 2021c). Drawing from one of the co-authors' weekly apostolate visits to one of the metropolitan jails in the Philippines (2013-2014), for instance, the dismal situation can be exposed as the conspicuous inequality and depravity of the PDLs' basic right to have adequate sleeping space (Kahambing, 2021g). Taking this into account, there is the requirement for contact-tracing methods in preventing contagion, which can follow the Irish model albeit with some insufficiencies for application. The problem is noticeably much graver than simply proposing to form Contact Tracing Teams (CTTs). Here, not just in prisons but also in spaces that are highly dense with overpopulation, the decisions for these are critical in future contagion and viral waves. Reimagining these spaces can mean ethically thinking about mass vaccinations, moral arguments for prioritarianism, and compact forms of communal solidarity (Bautista, et.al, 2020) that engage with thorough collective-based decisions. It is difficult to remember the mass cremations in India, in another case, which signaled the failure to act imaginably in preventing the fatal effects of contagion.

A second case could be to rethink food and sustainability. In the pandemic, a sustainable diet and cruciform ethics – sacrificing affluence for the planet – can be crucial (Kahambing, 2021e). However, this decisive move is not a universal duty but must be context-specific. That assertion that: 'Everyone must really do this. However, not everyone can practice these things, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some individuals cannot afford to eat, much more have a healthy diet' (Cabatbat, 2021), and taking this merely as a starter for awakening the community is not the point. The context of cruciform ethics is, in reiteration with emphasis, to assert self-emptying habits like lessening of consumption, particularly – and not universally – to affluent human societies that '*practice a gluttony of excessive or wasteful eating, or energy profligacy,*' which categorically excludes 'some individuals' who 'cannot afford to eat' in a seemingly moralizing stance. The position argues for a kenotic element of sustainability, which was later complemented with the consideration of the very same individuals under the disturbing condition of eating recycled food waste in the Philippines called 'Pagpag' (Kahambing, 2021h). In India, the pandemic has enabled the poor to refuse any kind of work because they are getting food at a minimal cost just by sitting at home. A co-author from such country claims that the lower class is receiving food and money (given for their survival), the upper class never suffers that much but it is the middle class that are the guinea pigs, or "the new poor", the new ghosts living off of the cadavers of bad governance.

This brings us to the third and critical case on global health governance (Kahambing, 2021a). After stipulating that an ethical consideration *can* adopt an 'open-minded epistemology' in vaccinations (also expounded this elsewhere; see Kahambing, 2021b), one can proceed to an original position of a radicalization – an opening up from solidly shut or conserved moral dispositions – of certain strict interpretative forms of shut conservatism that impede the achievement of herd immunity: the ethical principle of autonomy (e.g. waiting and preferring vaccine brands) and the philosophical and religious reasons for vaccine exemptions (e.g. personal hesitations, often without proper health education, or religious mandates,

including those that seem to expect blind obedience) (Kahambing, 2021d; 2021i). Rights-based rethinking of the use of ‘Mandatory’ in COVID-19 vaccinations should be balanced with the risk-based arguments (Yu & Kahambing, 2022), which avoids stigmatization (Kahambing & Edilo, 2020). There is a need for proper health education and an aversion to blind obedience. An important feature of this radicalization is not terroristic. Not all *radical* means are necessarily impositions in the same way that radical extremist Islam implies the ideological apparatus for global terrorism. Another is that herd immunity does not necessarily mean 100% inoculation to be ‘imposed,’ but the definition of the concept also mutates like the virus – hence the possibility of *zugzwang* (Kahambing, 2021). This is not a moral imposition but an amoral way of traversing deeply molded cultural kinds of moral conservatism similar to Roy’s critique of caste.

In modern uses, caste should be contextually different from class. One co-author lives in a small town in West Bengal, a city known for its progressive thinking, where the caste system is not viewed in a harsh way and caste is only noticed when you go to *mandir* for offerings or to get married or other special occasions. In which case, those in the earlier generations preferred same-caste or upper-caste marriages but the current generation tends to prefer to look for partners in lower caste so that they can look for a secured future. Due to the pandemic situation, some special policies were necessary for the survival of the lower class but because the lower class very often consists of the people from the lower caste, these policies also strengthened the caste system as an unintended consequence. That means that these policy measures need a fresh look so that more productive, sustainable situations prevail. There are ways to circumvent the system and with the pandemic, new opportunities arise with odd mobilities.

The radical move, of course, is not a form of mental gymnastics in a sanctuary or ivory tower. And the ethics of thinking at this point in the pandemic for Žižek has a huge caveat: we should be wary of certain radicalities that do not change anything, or to “pseudo-radical intellectuals who criticize the existing order from a comfortable morally superior position, well aware that their criticism will have no actual effects” (Žižek, 2021a). A vital certain lesson in the *Cambridge Textbook of Bioethics* is imperative: “religious points of view cannot be allowed to dominate the ethical aspects of clinical decision making. These traditions should have a voice but not a veto” (Boyle & Novak, 2008). *A voice but not a veto* – such heavy words do not of course mean moral imposition but a plea for voices to have a genuine dialogue, hence producing a more cogent view with a proper understanding of context. Otherwise, we would be correctly hitting tennis balls but on different tennis courts. The New Normal should be about finding the right forced choices.

Here, the idea of absolute unity is again counterproductive under the impulse of emergency. “While we have not unified humanity, maybe the pandemic driven discovery of the necessity of quiet time, personal coping tools, authentic love, and the beauty of basics will move us one step closer towards each other and Žižek’s vision of global solidarity” (Whitcomb, 2020). Solidarity is not about hastened results, and for Roy, this can even take a terrifying turn of events. That is to say, thinking must not hasten to overestimate or underestimate matters.

Conclusion

Thinking must not be confined to dualistic modalities such as whether actions are obligations or impositions, but must radically find possibilities, especially in a state where the term ‘New Normal’ seems to be a forced condition we must accept. In this setup, we are confronted with a forced choice to enter the ‘portal.’ With the existence of variants and the prospect of COVID-19 mutations represented currently by *Omicron*, and going towards the end, possibly by *Omega*, what does this mean for thinking amid a forced choice?

Roy recollects from previous essays in *My Seditious Heart* that thinking out of love is a necessary path to take because of the stakes at hand so not thinking is not an option. She says, “But let’s not forget that the stakes we’re playing for are huge. Our fatigue and our shame could mean the end of us. The end of our children and our children’s children. *Of everything we love*. We have to reach within ourselves and find the strength *to think*. To fight” (Roy, 2019, p. 23). As another co-author puts it in one of his books, “nothing matters except your love” (Abiera, 2019, p. 22). Finding an existential meaning is a life-altering event that gives a shot of hope (Egargo & Kahambing, 2021).

Isn’t this the same energy for freedom? Here, freedom too *as* fighting out of love is not about the contingent demands and wants that voluntary choice demonstrates. Freedom is not making petty choices or just choosing binaries – between pizza or ice cream perhaps – but is instead a matter of choosing one’s fate (Kahambing, 2019). Fate, much like forced choice, is not fixed and we can still choose our forced choice albeit paradoxically through its necessity. In this sense, *thinking*, which latches on to the concept of freedom as love, seeks to find radical possibilities within the necessary path that we should take in changing the coordinates of the ‘New Normal.’

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