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## **Social Criticism without Emancipation: Reflections on Michael Walzer's Critical Project**

In this paper I discuss and criticize Michael Walzer's concept of social criticism. I detect in his project an unacknowledged attempt at the reactivation of the young-Marxian idea of criticism as a "reform of consciousness". However, I argue, Walzer challenges one of the most prominent and controversial assumptions of the Marxian project – the existence of the universal subject of emancipation. I claim that while Walzer's elimination of this universal claims of social criticism is an understandable and important attempt at freeing political thought from philosophical illusions, it takes away the most significant *reason* for social criticism – an effort of oppressed groups at emancipation from domination. I agree with Walzer's critique of the universality of the oppressed subject at the basis of Marxian thought. However, what I find troubling in Walzer's idea is the resulting separation of criticism and emancipation, and this separation presents an impasse that I will try to illuminate in my article.

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Contemporary democracies are vivid manifestations of the divorce between theory and practice: reflection on democracy and actual democratic practice are clearly disconnected, and the political decision-making process has become incompatible with democratic participation. This divergence has led to disappointment with democratic practice and to the people's sense of being incapacitated when it comes to influencing the decision-making that affects their own lives. Both phenomena are observable in most contemporary democracies. It does not take any special effort to discern the hazards such a situation produces in the context of the current crisis, which is not a solely economic crisis, as it is increasingly identified also as a crisis of democratic participation. Therefore, one of the most important questions of current reflection on democ-

racy should not be – as it has been until now – the implementation of democracy in countries that are not yet democratic, but rather the sustaining and reactivating of democracy in the countries already regarded as democratic.

I believe that M. Walzer's project of engaged criticism, or what he calls *connected criticism*, is one of the most promising attempts to overcome the discrepancy between democratic theory and practice that characterizes contemporary democracies. The objective of his project is to create alternatives to the solutions proposed by the critical theory developed within the tradition of the Frankfurt School, still dominant today, which I see as permeated with liberal ideas that to a great extent have contributed to the current *status quo*. The major drawback in the idea presented by contemporary critical theorists is their excessive investment in "searching for foundations", that is, in striving to establish a theoretical justification for criticism that would turn it into a universal tool for evaluating societies. Such a conception draws upon deep philosophical premises derived primarily from the Kantian project of philosophical critique pertaining to the unity of rationality, which if transferred onto the social-political plane is profoundly undemocratic. In practice, they assume the exclusion of all voices deemed *non-rational* and stances that do not fit the *rational agreement* launched in the Habermasian *ideal speech situation* (Habermas 1990, p. 86) or in solutions proposed in the context of *the veil of ignorance*, to use John Rawls' phrase (Rawls 1971, p. 12).

I would like to propose a critical reading of M. Walzer's concept of social criticism inspired by the Marxian thesis of the internal relationship between criticism and emancipation. I believe that M. Walzer's thought is one of the most successful contemporary attempts to reactivate the young Marx's project of critique as a *reform of consciousness* (see: Marx 1997, p. 212). Critique means in this project neither an inventing nor discovering of moral norms, but a reinterpretation of one's own social situation as an oppressed subject. Walzer's project, on the other hand, introduces an essential difference by discarding its motif of emancipation, which I am inclined to regard as his project's weakness rather than its strength. The rejection of emancipation is in M. Walzer's project a logical consequence of rejecting universalism, which he sees as the chief deficiency in Marx's project. In what follows, I argue first of all that the condition for internal criticism does not have to be, as M. Walzer seems to maintain, a rejection of universalism. There are political situations in which the need for universalism ceases to be a metaphysical or "external" postulate and becomes a real need. This puts into question M. Walzer's postulate that one has to reject all forms of criticism which do not come "from within" the community. The question of universalism in criticism is also associated with another fundamental problem that of the concept of engaged criticism, i.e., with the difficulty of drawing a boundary between what is internal in the community and what is external to it. Who makes such a judgment? It is obvious that there is no "objective institution" which would determine such a division.

Secondly, I believe that rejecting universalism does not necessarily lead to rejecting emancipation, since emancipation can be conceived of on a more modest scale than the *general human emancipation* that Marx's idea stipulated and that M. Walzer rightly abandons. I am referring here to Marx's early writings, where he employs the notions of *political* or *partial* emancipation (Marx 1978, p. 62), which assume the liberation of certain social groups in certain realms, e.g., emancipation from religion. Today the idea of *practicing freedom*, or *expanding the realm of freedom* on an individual scale and with respect to one's own situation, is further developed in Foucault's late writings (see, for example, Foucault 1994, p. 710).

Examining M. Walzer's concept, I try to identify themes that are close to Marx's thought, and which I believe are an important inspiration for his project, both as a constructive point of reference when it comes to the Gramscian interpretation of ideology as a mechanism for creating standards of social criticism, and as an object of criticism when it comes to the interpretation of ideology as "false consciousness". In the first part of this article, I shall examine closely M. Walzer's concept of justice, which is based on a notion of complex equality and civic participation. I will then focus on his concept of criticism as an interpretation, and will point out its dilemmas as they arise from A. Gramsci's idea of the organic intellectual. In the second part of the article, I will analyse M. Walzer's (1994) attempt at addressing the problem of universalism as undertaken in his *Thick and Thin*. In conclusion, referring to the Walzer-Said polemic (Said 1986a; 1986b; Walzer 1986), I present the political and philosophical implications of the fundamental deficit in M. Walzer's concept of social criticism, namely, the fact that he does not take into account the idea of the emancipation.

## Social justice and political participation

M. Walzer's main preoccupation, which to a large extent enables us to understand his approach to justice and social criticism, is the relationship between the philosopher and his/her political community (Miller 2007, p. VIII). The concern is inspired by encounters and long-lasting debates with the Harvard philosophers, J. Rawls, R. Nozick and R. Dworkin, whose attitude to community has become a model Walzer strove to avoid at all costs. For M. Walzer, the attitude is emblematically exemplified in L. Wittgenstein's famous pronouncement from *Zettel*, in which the Vienna philosopher asserts that: *A philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas. That is what makes him into a philosopher* (Wittgenstein 1967, p. 83). Slightly sarcastically, M. Walzer calls such an attitude to community "heroic" since, adopting it, a philosopher consciously withdraws from the political community and its dominant ideas in

order to attain a detachment which would allow him to apprehend the general and universal principles applicable to all possible communities. According to M. Walzer, such attitude will sooner or later be painfully confronted with reality. The philosopher's words delivered from the "mountain tops" might be misconstrued by the community and, hence, they will not contribute to any improvement, especially if they defy the moral principles endorsed by the community. What we notice here is the distinction that M. Walzer will eagerly uphold throughout his reflection on social criticism, i.e. the differentiation between the world of morality and politics and the world of philosophy located "outside" all the communal interdependencies:

*Philosophical validation and political authorisation are two entirely different things. They belong to two entirely different spheres of human activity. Authorisation is the work of citizens governing themselves among themselves. Validation is the work of the philosopher reasoning alone in a world he inhabits alone or fills with the products of his own speculations. Democracy has no claims in the philosophical realm, and philosophers have no special rights in the political community. In the world of opinion, truth is indeed another opinion and the philosopher is only another opinion maker (Walzer 2007, p. 2).*

M. Walzer is, thus, convinced that all criticism should observe the autonomy of these worlds in the same way as we should observe the autonomy of the various spheres of social life, if we want to attain social justice. This unique "separability of spheres" of the social world is both the foundation of the equitable distribution of goods as well as a protection against philosophers' designs who endeavour to arbitrarily impose a vision of the social order and moral norms allegedly reflecting the eternal, rational verities of humanity.

The idea of separability of spheres of the social world is clearly visible in M. Walzer's spherical concept of justice. In *Spheres of Justice*, author argues that one *primary set of goods* equally valid and identically comprehended in all moral worlds simply does not exist. Goods are produced by people in diverse contexts, and their social meanings as well as the modes of distributing them are historically contingent. The central feature of the distribution is, according to M. Walzer, that *every social good or set of goods constitutes (...) a distributive sphere* (1983, p. 10), which means that these distributions should be *autonomous*. *Relative autonomy* of distributive spheres is the *critical and radical principle* which should expose usurpation and abuse of goods by the government or other parties. Arguing that dominance – i.e. the use of goods against their *social meaning* – is unjust, M. Walzer postulates the idea of the autonomous distribution of all social goods as a precondition of the just distribution of goods. The immediate implication of the idea is regulating and restraining the convertibility of goods.

Proposing this, M. Walzer underscores that we are not simply the holders of goods which land in our hands "just like that"; rather, the goods at our disposal have their

*social meaning* – they are collectively produced and invested with specific meanings, which subsequently determine the way these goods are distributed. That is why the way in which social goods are produced and used generates our identity.

In this context, M. Walzer introduces a differentiation into “simple” and “complex” equality, which is central to his theory of justice. In most general terms, simple justice consists in equal distribution of a society’s dominant good. Sustaining the equal access to the dominant good is, according to M. Walzer, practically impossible, and it will always entail the resumption of domination in one form or another. Therefore, justice can be sought more effectively if complex justice is pursued, i.e. through *reduction of dominance* rather than through *breaking the monopoly*. In this situation, various goods in a society would be monopolised by various groups, but no specific good could be freely and unrestrictedly converted into all the other ones. M. Walzer encapsulates the distribution principle in a simple dictum: *No social good x should be distributed to men and women who possess some other good y merely because they possess y and without regard to the meaning of x* (1983, p. 20). The distribution principle could indeed protect societies against transposing inequality from one sphere onto another. And as such, it could bring about a more even dissemination of power, provided that a given society boasts a considerable political membership. Basically speaking, such membership should be fostered by equal distribution of power and elimination of the monopolisation of power by the privileged ones.

The spherical concept of justice is closely connected to the issue of political participation, which was elaborated by M. Walzer in his subsequent text, *Exodus and Revolution* (1985). In the book, M. Walzer expands upon the theme by referring to the biblical story of the liberation of the Israeli people. The example is meant to convey the age-old model of citizenship as a critical engagement in the community’s matters. The Israeli people’s liberation invoked in *Exodus and Revolution* is grounded in the divine promise of deliverance, the fulfilment of which is predicated on the Israelis’ dutiful discharge of their mission of service to God as well as on the respecting of Israel’s sanctity as a chosen nation. Taking on the responsibilities of moral and political agents and incurring obligations to God and to each other become the conditions of freedom for Israel. Freedom that the Israelis obtain is, thus, positive freedom which entails their active political and religious participation in the fashioning of their own community.

The religious dimension of the participation-oriented communal thinking recurs, subsequently, in 1993, in which M. Walzer puts forward the prophet Amos as a model of a connected social critic. Although he frequently underlines that the religious examples he resort to (prophecy in this case) are of interest to him only in the sense of a certain *social practice* and that he by no means strives to *understand the men or the texts* (1993, p. 69), many scholars emphasise that M. Walzer’s involvement in Judaism plays a crucial role in his social thought (see, e.g. Bounds 1994, p. 356; Krupnick 1989, p. 694; Revering 2005; Said 1986). The prophet Amos is a critic who defies his

society's headmen, customs and ceremonies *in the name of values recognised and shared in the same society* (Walzer 1993, p. 89). His persuasive power ensues primarily from his membership in the community that he criticizes. As its member, he can recognise and understand the fundamental values endorsed by this community, which imbues his criticism with maximum profundity. And because the people consider him "their own", the implementation of changes he proposes is easier since the community will remain fully intact (there will be no intrusive, external interference). Amos's point is not the "invention" of new values, but a "reform" of the values already in place. In this sense, social criticism, which is anchored in the *common understanding* (Walzer 1983, p. 9) of principles, becomes for M. Walzer simply one of political membership forms, i.e. an indispensable element of democracy.

In *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, M. Walzer juxtaposes such model of social criticism (*the path of interpretation*) and two other kinds of criticism (*paths in moral philosophy*): *the path of discovery* and *the path of invention*. In broad lines, the path of discovery consists in that the philosopher or the law-maker receives or, exactly, "discovers" the previously existing moral law or social life principles; consequently, his task is to convey these laws to humankind, i.e. to the members of his community. The path of invention is a modern phenomenon and ensues from people's realisation (e.g. under the influence of Nietzsche's or Kant's critique) that in the natural world there are no "ready-made" moral projects, be it divine or natural ones. The social life principles are man-made; optimally, they are produced by a group of people who can adequately "separate themselves" from their community, forget about their social positioning and vital interests in order to "neutrally" and "objectively" decide what it is that lies in the whole humankind's best interest. The path of invention is thus a human projection of a moral order subordinated to a particular goal and proceeding from a common agreement. Enumerating the examples of thinking about criticism in such terms, M. Walzer points to the Habermasian concept of *the ideal speech situation* (Habermas 1990, p. 86), which suggests the viability of ideologically untainted conversation about the core values, and to the Rawlsian idea of *the veil of ignorance* (Rawls 1971, p. 12), which guarantees that in a conversation about justice nobody will be prompted by their own interests.

M. Walzer positively promotes the path of interpretation, i.e. a form of connected criticism. The fundamental question that such a postulate evokes is: What standards are the starting points for connected criticism? If the standards are not universally held by the whole of humankind, where does their critical power come from? To answer such questions, one could resort to the Marxian-Gramscian concept of ideology or hegemony. The notion holds that the possibilities of criticism are guaranteed by the fact that the ruling class is always compelled to put forward its own interest as a common interest. Therefore, each ruling class "pretends" not to participate in the struggle for power and to be interested solely in protecting the common interest. Such presentation of one's own interest is made possible only by intellectuals who perform apolo-

getic work. This work, however, becomes also a foundation for developing the standards of future criticism. The standards worked out as a cloak concealing one's own particularist interests must be universalistic in nature and attractive also to the subordinate classes. The ruling classes are obviously unable to meet these standards because they will strive to realise their own, particular aims. At the same time, the standards generated by the intellectuals for the benefit of the ruling class persist as unfulfilled promises. And since they must reflect also the subordinated classes' interest (they are universal after all, aren't they?), the standards become perfect underpinnings for criticism.

### **An organic intellectual: between the masses and the elite**

Clearly, one of the basic problems in M. Walzer's concept of social criticism is the relationship between the particular and the universal dimensions of criticism. This is actually one of the fundamental issues Marx persistently strove to unravel in this reflection on ideology and emancipation. Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which M. Walzer devotes a whole chapter in his 2002 (pp. 80–101) to, is an emblematic example of the Marxian dilemmas of criticism. For M. Walzer, Gramsci is a critical intellectual type in whom the problem of universalism and particularism is expressed in the tension between the ideas of the intellectual's distance and the intellectual's engagement.

A. Gramsci as a figure of a social critic is unique for a variety of reasons. First of all because he spent the last 11 years of his life in a Fascist prison, he did not know much about what was going on outside the prison walls. Thus, he would seem an ideal model of an alienated, "detached and heroic" critic. Nevertheless, M. Walzer argues that Gramsci's chosen model of criticism assumed a certain form of engaged (internal) criticism of the working class, with intellectuals supposed to play a superior role in it.

M. Walzer encapsulates Gramsci's dilemma as a social critic in the following way: for social criticism to be effective, they must target, not at the dominant group or the gross inequities of the world, but *the consciousness, the culture and the way of life, of the very people he hopes to lead* (Walzer 2002, p. 88). Such task can however be accomplished only from within by a non-coercive gradual reform of their intellectual and moral life, by *modification of the cultural environment*. The task is by no means easily to accomplish: people's knowledge (common sense) is nebulous and essentially limited because their cultural lives are in fact only ideologically "distorted" representations of their actual living practice, while the intellectual's knowledge must be rigorous and scientific. Thus, the relationship between the intellectual and the people

cannot be purely democratic, as A. Gramsci would have it. It rather resembles the master-pupil relationship. In this sense, the intellectual will always be an alienated conveyor of truth which can seem novel and remote to the people.

In Gramsci, the link between the mass and the elite was supposed to be provided by *organic intellectuals, which every new class creates alongside itself and elaborates in the course of its development* (Gramsci 1971, p. 5). The organic intellectual was to be an exemplary internal critic essentially differing from the traditional intellectual, who came from the bourgeois and in most cases acted in the service of the regime in place. The organic intellectual was to be of working class origins and, hence, capable of understanding the people's problems and, primarily, of identifying their proper interest. It is at this point that we stumble upon a major difficulty. How can the working class produce organic intellectuals, who are supposed to lead them towards a gradual transformation of consciousness, if it does not wield any power on the level of the state yet? The point in question here is, specifically, the access to education, which, according to M. Walzer, is central to Gramsci's project.

In 1971, A. Gramsci deliberates upon the reform of education proposed by the Fascist government. For Gramsci, the essence of an educational reform does not lie in the alteration of the school curriculum, but in something entirely different, i.e. making the school progressive and responsive to new challenges depends first and foremost on whether schooling becomes common and accessible also to the working class. The school will permanently change when, and only when, children of the lower social strata are admitted to it. The curricular change does not matter because the literary and scientific canon is universal. First of all the school, like the party, cannot conform to the people's common sense. The teacher must be able to discern the difference between the culture and society he epitomises and the culture and society of his students, and consequently endeavour to shape his students upon the premises of the former and in opposition to the people's culture.

Thus, the organic intellectual's knowledge and consciousness must to a degree correspond to the traditional intellectual's knowledge and consciousness; nevertheless, it must be directed differently. The success of the "positional warfare" is predicated upon the students' abandoning their own culture and transforming their consciousness, which will effectuate a takeover of hegemony. Of course, it should be borne in mind that all this serves to restore the workers' consciousness and make them realise the actual senses of their practical activity and situation, which only intellectuals and the party are aware of. Here, evidently a contradiction emerges in Gramsci's thinking. On the one hand, he perceives the necessity of "organic" criticism, and on the other, he cannot envisage the working class critique without taking a position "outside one's own culture and society".

*Gramsci is a victim, we might say, of Marxist teleology. Advancement is the form of his detachment, and it is a bar to comradesly politics. The more advanced*



*his theory, the more detached he is in practice from working-class backwardness. His political activity is an irregular movement toward and then away from the people he hopes to lead. He knows that he can't lead them without their consent, but he also knows (...) that they ought to consent, and in the course of "real historical development" will consent, to his leadership* (Walzer 2002, pp. 99–100).

Therefore, Gramsci's problem is his failure to notice the circular logic in his reasoning. To M. Walzer, an obvious solution to Gramsci's dilemma lies in realising that the external critical view is utterly impossible, in other words—in relinquishing universalism. The price to be paid for such rejection is, however, far steeper than a simple dispelling of certain philosophical delusions. What sense does it make to practise criticism in the first place, if this criticism neither resides in any rationale, nor assumes that its subject wants to make a difference or "reinterpret" his/her own social situation because he/she feels oppressed by another agent. What is the point of criticism at all then? I believe that this moment evidently implies that relinquishing the universal dimension of criticism entails relinquishing its emancipatory dimension. What does it mean to say then that only criticism that comes from within one's own community is validated? Does any agent that demands emancipation still belong to his own community or does he place himself outside it by divergently defining his goals and interests? As E. Laclau (1996, pp. 1–19) convincingly shows, one of the essential components of the *emancipatory logic* is the co-existence of two dimensions – the dichotomic dimension and the dimension of ground – that simultaneously condition and preclude each other. It means that each emancipatory act must both comprise the *dichotomy* between the oppressed and oppressing subjects as well as be rooted in the idea that emancipation is *the act of foundation*, which reaches the ground of the social and, as such, must encompass the totality of the social. What this implies is that universalism and particularism are indispensable elements of each emancipatory movement, and what follows, of all social criticism.

### **Moral minimalism and moral maximalism**

Of course, M. Walzer perceives this problem and, in a sense, faces up to it; his purpose is to show that universalism and particularism *are not necessarily incompatible* (1994, p. IX), which he accomplishes by resorting to the notions of moral *minimalism* and *maximalism*. In 1994 he starts his argument sketching a vivid image of a manifestation in Prague in 1989. Those marching in the Prague streets carry placards with various slogans that profusely feature such words as "Truth" and "Justice". M. Walzer wonders what meaning these words might have and concludes that there must be

a certain content in them which makes these words comprehensible to all people irrespective of their cultural contexts. This content is what M. Walzer calls *the minimal meaning*, which can be captured in accounts of *thin* morality. Of course, the meaning will refer to a certain general truth understandable and appealing to everybody everywhere – nobody wants to be deceived and abused by the government, regardless of what kind of regime they live in.

The same words can, however, be understood radically differently, if “thick interpretation” is applied. Various meanings, inscribed in these moral categories, cease then to be ubiquitously comprehensible and universally valid as the minimalist message was. If we scrutinised, from the perspective of a mature, Western democracy, the specific meanings that the Czechs could have attributed to justice, for example, we might not only stop making sense of them but also stop concurring with them. Similarly to the Geertzian thick description (Geertz 1973, p. 3–30), the maximalist approach of moral categories consist in the possibly fullest, historically situated and culturally contextualised interpretation. Thus, our understanding of the terms written on the placards of a street manifestation will differ from our understanding of the same terms during a debate on the tax system in a given country.

Where does such dualism come from and how does it happen that in our minds we hold two different understandings of truth or justice, which we apply in diverse contexts and for various purposes? M. Walzer stresses that this is not tantamount to having two different moralities. *Rather, minimalist meanings are embedded in the maximal morality, expressed in the same idiom, sharing the same (historical/cultural/religious/political) orientation* (Walzer 1994, p. 3). The meanings are divested of their burden of “thickness” only in the situations of a “personal or social crisis” or a political conflict, e.g. a protest against the communist tyranny, as was the case with the Czech demonstration. The things are different, then, from what philosophers tend to envisage, imagining that at the beginning there always are some fundamental, universal principles, identical to all, principles that we only subsequently “make thick” in various cultural contexts, adjusting them to specific circumstances. *Morality is thick from the beginning (...) and it reveals itself thinly only on special occasions, when moral language is turned to special purposes* (1994, p. 4). The duality of human morality is a *sine qua non* element of our social life, which is both universalist, as we are all human, and particularist, as we all live in a society.

Why then should we speak of thin morality, in the first place, if it is merely something like *thick morality that is temporarily abstracted* (1994, p. 11)? M. Walzer emphasises that despite the limited autonomy of minimalist morality, it does play an important role in social life. Namely, it makes the “solidarity” of people possible. It should be remembered, nevertheless, that the experience of minimalism is possible only because maximal morality exists. We are able to understand the slogans carried by the marchers during the Prague manifestation, we can even march along together with them for a while, but ultimately, our demonstration paths will diverge and head

each in its own direction, towards its own thick morality. *If we did not have our own parade, we could not march vicariously in Prague. We would have no understanding at all of "truth" or "justice"* (1994, p. 19). According to M. Walzer, the only real morality is the maximal morality, in which the moral minimum is entrenched and from which it can only for a while be abstracted.

M. Walzer claims that the pitfalls of minimal morality can be seen in *new tribalism*. Along with the triumphs of democracy in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, after 1989 the regions have witnessed an astounding revival of ethnic, religious and national identities. M. Walzer calls them *tribal* identities since under the totalitarian regimes they lingered somewhere at the peripheries, preserving their cultural specificities and passively resisting the state-orchestrated unification efforts. In such circumstances, a query naturally arises whether there is a single model or principle which would determine the form of such separation, regardless of the state, culture and religion.

M. Walzer observes that the idea "self-determination" could be acknowledged as such a principle – *They ought to be allowed to govern themselves* (1994, p. 68). The principle seems to be simple and barely questionable – everybody who has been divested of the right to decide about themselves in compliance with their own culture and tradition should have this right restored to them. This minimalist principle will nevertheless have entirely divergent "maximal" meanings depending on particular circumstances. We could also imagine a situation in which the principle does not work at all, for example, when *the self-government of tribe A, happily divorced, makes tribe B a vulnerable and unhappy minority in its own homeland* (1994, p. 69). To illustrate the case, M. Walzer cites the Serbian minority inhabiting independent Croatia. In such cases, the principle of self-determination should invariably be accompanied by the principle of neutrality guaranteed by the state, granting the undifferentiated civil rights to all. Yet, wasn't the former Yugoslavia, theoretically at least, a neutral state?

The minimalist principle of self-determination stumbles also over other obstacles. A great deal depends on what group or (national, ethnic or religious) minority we deal with. For instance, there are nations which are evidently "enslaved", conquered forcefully by other nations and oppressed throughout centuries, and yet they preserve their distinct identities. There are migrant minorities which are less bent on separation but demand certain privileges. There are also minority groups which have considerable economic resources at their disposal and, consequently, have incomparably more clout than the groups that lack such resources. Groups concentrated in a certain area should be approached differently than those which are scattered and dispersed, and groups whose culture differs only slightly from the majority culture – differently than those whose culture is radically different. For example, what course of action should be adopted towards the Albanian minority inhabiting Kosowo, a territory on the border with independent Albania? M. Walzer enumerates three options from which a solution to such quandary can be chosen: the territory in question could be incorporated into the home state (a *humanitarian* solution), the population could be re-located (a *brutal*

solution) or a third, intermediate (*practical*) solution could be implemented – giving the population a wide-ranging autonomy, including the control over cultural and educational institutions.

All these examples are supposed to highlight how extremely difficult it is to find one *minimalist* model of action applicable to contemporary tribes in the face of their separatist tendencies:

*But no minimalist account of justice can specify the precise form of these arrangements. In fact, the forms are historically negotiated, and they depend upon shared understandings of what such negotiations mean and how they work. (...) We have to work slowly and experimentally toward arrangements that satisfy the members (not the militants) of this or that minority. There is no single correct outcome* (1994, p. 74–75).

This means, of course, that we will never find the permanent and ultimate solutions applicable universally and ubiquitously as well as that the negotiation process is lastingly inscribed into our social life. Tribalism, i.e. the attachment of groups and individuals to their histories, cultures and identities, as well as particularism bound up with it, is the only permanent feature of our societies. Hence all attempts at establishing universal principles to serve as cornerstones of international politics or social criticism are bound to fail, according to M. Walzer.

### **Criticism, engagement and emancipation: Walzer vs. Said**

It is difficult to resist M. Walzer's persuasive argumentation, which not only sounds rationally grounded but also seems to align with our commonsensical intuitions. In practical everyday conduct, none of us thinks about moral principles in terms of outcomes of painstaking negotiations carried out by isolated individuals (gazing down from the mountain tops). Rather, we tend to think of certain *rules* worked out by the community and tradition, which should be observed for the sake of sustaining the moral order. On everyday basis, we behave in a sense automatically. Walzer's relativism and pluralism seem to warrant us maximum freedom and equality in daily decision-making, and his emphasis on criticism gives us hope for change if something goes amiss in our social life.

We must not fail to notice, however, that at some points Walzer's thought has its serious shortcomings. The deficiencies that Walzer's concept needs to grapple with have been aptly articulated in E. Said. Said's critique incited a heated polemic the two gentlemen engaged in the journal *Grand Street* in 1986.

Said's major objection concerned Walzer's (1972) statement from *Nationalism, Internationalism, and the Jews*, published in *Dissent*, about the ways of dealing with national minority groups in a state:

*For them, very often, the roughness can only be smoothed a little; it cannot be avoided. And sometimes it can only be smoothed by helping people to leave, who have to leave, like the Indians of Kenya and Tanzania, the colons of North Africa, the Jews of the Arab world* (Walzer 1972, p. 195).

E. Said wonders how M. Walzer can call his own stance progressive and even radical in the first place and states that in all probability M. Walzer is unconscious of the degree to which Israel's military victories have affected his work by imparting an unattractive moral triumphalism ... to nearly everything he writes (Said 1986a, p. 100). Responding subsequently to Walzer's polemic, E. Said articulates his own position all the more emphatically: No one would deny that critics belong to a community... What Walzer cannot see is that there is a considerable moral difference between the connectedness of a critic with an oppressing society, and a critic whose connection is to an oppressed one" (Said 1986b, p. 253).

The arguments and questions highlight a crucial aspect of Walzer's thought which tends to be overlooked. The Said-Walzer controversy, and basically speaking the controversy over the viability of genuine and effective social criticism as such, concerns first and foremost the problem of *the critic's rootedness* in his own culture and community. The controversy becomes really palpable if we view it from the respective vantage points the two thinkers occupy: it is a debate between an American Palestinian fervently advocating the equitable treatment of Palestine and the Orient by the Western world and an American Jew ardently involved in the rebuilding of the Israeli state after World War Two. The query that E. Said poses fundamentally refines Walzer's reflection since it takes into account not only the critic's attitude to his own community but also the community's positioning in relation to its environment. Said thus expresses doubts concerning the very core of Walzer's project: is it really and necessarily so that the idea of critical detachment, which M. Walzer rejects as *a priori*, cannot somehow assume the critic's connectedness with and engagement in his own community? Are the two things in fact inevitably mutually exclusive? Indeed, the solution M. Walzer proposes not only leads to unequal treatment of subjects in a community but also entails a kind of "a double standard". Who is a *real* member of a community and who is *an alien*? When is criticism internal and when is it external? And, who can legitimately decide upon such matters?

A. Camus, who was defended by M. Walzer in 2002, is an emblematic embodiment of such dilemmas. After the Algerian war broke out in 1954, A. Camus was faced with the necessity of choice similar to that of the mythic Odysseus: should he opt for his own country (colonial French Algeria) or should he choose *the eternal justice* (Walzer 2002, p. 132)? According to most critics, A. Camus renounces the

eternal justice for the sake of his country, just like Odysseus renounced immortality. Consequently, he is doomed to perplexity, lingering split in-between two radical solutions to the Algerian question. On the one hand A. Camus cannot identify with the radical factions of *pieds noirs*, whose brutal policies he has opposed throughout his lifetime, but on the other hand, he cannot join Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, the supporters of the FLN, because he longs for his homeland and for the maintenance of the *status quo*. According to M. Walzer, indulging in this quandary A. Camus gives up the critical detachment, which stipulates that one should *side with the oppressed*, because their protests *embody universal principles* (Walzer 2002, p. 149–150). If one views a picture from a distance, one can hardly spot the figures of particular people in it. Discarding the detachment, A. Camus resolves *never to sit on a judge's bench ... like so many of our philosophers* (Camus 1991, p. 207). The primary commandment that he observes is adhering to his own community, being “intimate” with it and understanding it from within, instead of turning it into an alien force to be criticised from the universal perspectives and stances.

Such reasoning generates an obvious paradox: M. Walzer favours Camus' attachment to the community of settlers-colonisers over the Algerian nation's one-hundred-and-thirty-year-old enslavement and freedom struggles. If we bear this in mind, which party to this conflict is in the right hardly begs a question. This, however, entails assuming that certain minimal principles do exist to which the international community appeals in denouncing the colonialist engagement of the French government. Criticism would thus be intrinsically *external*. Inexorably, M. Walzer adopts here the stance of the *oppressors*, which proceeds – as Said observed – from his identification with the Israeli nation and its hegemonic position *vis a vis* Palestine (1986a, p. 103). Is the critical voice of Israel's 20% Palestinian citizens *external* to the community? If so, should they be denied the right to express criticism and *be helped to leave*? If he criticised *pieds noirs* from the position of the FLN independence struggles, would A. Camus automatically denounce his own community and assume a stance *external* to it? We can hardly resist the impression that at such points Walzer's sophisticated construction begins to crumble. The situations E. Said cites are only a sample from a whole range of similar ones across the world. National, ethnic, and cultural problems all over the globe are as many as there are nations, and they crop up wherever the state borders have been redrawn in the course of history. Ubiquitously, we deal with specific, particular situations, none of which can be measured with one, universal yardstick. Therein, M. Walzer is certainly right. And yet, if we presume that the only real criticism capable of actually making a difference is the “internal” criticism that results from the critic's *connectedness* with his community, don't we disempower all those who are by definition alien to their own community because they feel distinct and separate from the majority? Would M. Walzer resolve to *help the Jews to leave*, if they did not have their own state and had not become fully independent of the Arab world?

Practice shows that the language of universalism or moral minimalism, to use Walzer's terminology, is sometimes the only chance for the groups which, being an absolute minority in their own society, have no opportunity whatsoever of effecting change in it. Evidently, M. Walzer himself is unable to evade the problem of universalism when he tackles the issue of moral minimalism. One might say that universalism, which M. Walzer methodologically ousts, sneaks into his reflection through the back door of the *substance of his thought* (see Galston 1989, p. 126). It is impossible to proclaim general assertions about community, human nature or social criticism and to evade the problem of universalism at the same time. And this can hardly be facilitated by "moderating" one's stance somewhat, which M. Walzer does in 1994, where he allows certain forms of minimalist or universalist criticism, acknowledging them as a form of maximalism. Perhaps, a solution to these dilemmas might be found, as W. Galston (1989, p. 126) proposes, in adopting a third stance – "the view from everywhere", which would defuse the tension between "the view from nowhere" (universal knowledge) that M. Walzer rejects and "the view from somewhere" (situated knowledge), which entirely eschews universalism. If, following M. Walzer (1983, p. XIV), we oppose Plato's urges and refuse to leave the cave as well as assume that there are many various caves, the view from everywhere would rely on a certain convergence observable in our diverse understandings of the fundamental ethical and social premises. In this way we could attain a universality of sorts without grounding it in transcendental metaphysics.

All charges against M. Walzer are in my opinion reducible to a single, crucial objection. Although he is to a degree inspired by the Marxian critical project, M. Walzer clearly discards what was its central rationale and objective: he relinquishes the concept of *emancipation* of people. For M. Walzer, rejection of criticism's universalisms is tantamount to abandoning the liberatory rhetoric. This, however, produces a certain "moral vacillation" that E. Said underscores – M. Walzer fails to differentiate between the oppressed and the oppressors. I believe that this is the moment at which Walzer's internal criticism project actually forfeits its radicalism and to a certain extent also undercuts its own validity. At this point, the deficit resulting from too radical a rejection of Marxism becomes manifest.

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### **Krytyka społeczna bez emancypacji: rozważania nad projektem krytycznym Michaela Walzera**

Artykuł dotyczy koncepcji krytyki społecznej Michaela Walzera. Przedstawiam jego koncepcję w kontekście Marksowskiej idei krytyki jako „reformy świadomości”, która w moim przekonaniu była dla Walzera ważną inspiracją. Nie zgadzam się jednak z całkowitym odrzuceniem przez Walzera Marksowskiego dyskursu emancypacyjnego. Uważam za słuszną krytykę Marksowskiej idei uniwersalnego



podmiotu emancypacji, jednakże, co staram się dowieść w artykule, nie musi to bynajmniej oznaczać odrzucenia samej idei emancypacji, która, zgodnie z koncepcją Marksa, jest zawsze racją i celem krytyki. Niedostrzeganie tej zależności przez Walzera uważam za istotny deficyt jego koncepcji krytyki społecznej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *Michael Walzer, krytyka społeczna, emancypacja, uczestnictwo obywatelskie, uniwersalizm, partykularyzm*