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Social Critique and Engagement between Universalism, Anti-Authoritarianism and Diagnosis of Domination

Abstract   The paper discusses a particular 'isomorphy' between two forms of social criticism: the 'holistic' theoretical social critique represented by such authors as Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth and 'collective social engagement' represented by such civic movements as the 'We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own' initiative in contemporary Serbia, which the paper tries to distinguish from more conventional forms of popular protest. This 'isomorphy', the paper argues, consists in a tension between three distinct imperatives of the justification of critique – those of normative universalism, epistemological anti-authoritarianism, and diagnosis of social domination – produced by the attempts of both the 'holistic' social critics and the collectively engaged actors to simultaneously respond to all three imperatives. After presenting the three types of theoretical critique that crystallize around each imperative, the paper discusses the internal tension that arises in the works of 'holistic' theoretical critics and then identifies the same kind of tension in the 'We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own' initiative. The tension in the movement's critique is outlined through a brief analysis of the activists' discourse as articulated in the bulletin *We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own* issued in March 2015. Since the examples also suggest that collective engagement is better than theoretical critique at keeping this tension 'productive', the paper finally offers some tentative thoughts on the possible reasons for this difference.

Keywords: isomorphy, tension, critique, justification, engagement, universalism, contextualism, diagnosis, Serbia

Introduction

This paper tries to identify and outline a particular 'isomorphy' between contemporary theoretical attempts at articulating a 'holistic' social critique, on the one hand, and contemporary forms of civic protest that I term 'collective social engagement' on the other. Both, I argue, are characterized by a tension that is created through an attempt to simultaneously respond to three principal *imperatives of the justification of critique*: those of *normative universalism*, *anti-authoritarianism* and *societal diagnosis*, which I briefly explain below. This tension can only be resolved by focusing on satisfying, as completely as possible, one of the three imperatives at the cost of the other two, and most types of theoretical social critique resort to this strategy. One exception are the 'holistic' social critics such as Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth who persist in simultaneously pursuing and interweaving the goals of normative universalism, anti-authoritarianism and a diagnosis of contemporary forms of injustice and domination. Theoretical critique

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with a 'holistic' ambition, I argue, has difficulties maintaining an equilibrium between the three imperatives of justification, as they pull the theorist in mutually diverging directions. The temptation to reduce the complexity of critique by focusing on only one or two of the imperatives is present even in Habermas and Honneth, but such reductive inclinations make their perspectives either more normatively particularistic and ultimately unjustifiable (if they abandon universalism or anti-authoritarianism) or insensitive to actual societal problems (if they abandon the diagnostic task).

As I will try to show on the example of one prominent contemporary civic movement in Serbia – the initiative 'We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own' ('Ne da[vi]mo Beograd') – the form of political action that I term 'collective social engagement' is characterized by the same kind of internal tension, as the actors involved in the movement simultaneously use the language of universalism, anti-authoritarianism and societal diagnosis. In the case of engagement as opposed to theoretical critique, the tension arises from the engaged actors' primary aim of transforming the 'cause' of their engagement, a phenomenon that had hitherto been considered non-political, into a political issue. To achieve this complex task, mobilizing only one vocabulary of critique – universalism, contextualism or diagnosis – would be insufficient.

The tension at the core of theoretical social critique

There are three main contemporary imperatives of the justification of normative claims raised in theoretical social critique: those of *normative universalism* (the claim to a trans-contextual validity of normative statements), *epistemological anti-authoritarianism* ('epistemic humility' that gives up on 'transcending' a particular socio-historical context) and the imperative of the *diagnosis* of real-world social injustices and domination that are often left completely unaddressed by abstract, 'free-floating' universalist theories of justice or contextualist forms of critique. One can identify these imperatives as fundamental due to the fact that most contemporary forms of theoretical critique crystallize around either one of them. Contemporary varieties of theoretical critique can therefore be divided into three very broad categories, by no means internally homogeneous and characterized by significant overlaps:

1. The *universalist* (proceduralist) type, which is characterized by a *deontological* approach to the grounding of critique that safeguards the *universal validity* of its normative claims. Universalist perspectives most often assume the form of a purely proceduralist (or formal) deontological political theory or theory of justice that provides the normative standard of criticism in all particular socio-historical contexts. For example, the majority of the contemporary 'third-generation' critical theorists such as Seyla Benhabib,

Maeve Cooke, Rainer Forst, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato have focused on elaborating the political-theoretic dimension of Habermasian critical theory while the *social-theoretical* side of Habermas' project has largely slid into the background (e.g. Benhabib 2004; Forst 2002, 2003; Cohen 2012; Cohen and Arato 1994). The reason, I would argue, should be looked for in a contemporary distrust of social theory as epistemologically 'authoritarian' due to its predominantly positivist orientation (Cooke 2006). Universalist theoretical critique generally avoids or treats as illegitimate the question of *diagnosing* societal problems in the form of the causal (structural) explanations of social injustices and forms of domination, and also avoids grounding critique in an explicit social ontology or a theory of the subject. Instead of tracing the causal mechanisms behind forms of social injustice, proceduralist theorists usually rely on mere empirical descriptions of instances of injustice and then apply univeralist norms of critique to them.

358   2. The *contextualist* variety (Michael Walzer, Richard Rorty, Luc Boltanski), the type of social critique that focuses on satisfying the normative imperative of *epistemological anti-authoritarianism*, brings together diverse currents across disciplinary boundaries such as pragmatism, communitarianism in political philosophy and Luc Boltanski's 'sociology of critique'. What the contextualists have in common is the (more or less explicit) treatment of forms of critique that aspire either to normative universalism or the 'diagnosis' of societal maladies as epistemologically *authoritarian*. The universalist theorist of justice and the radical 'diagnostic' both require that we, 'ordinary actors', endorse their normative perspective on reality as the only right (or 'true') one. As they reject this authoritarian position, contextualists also share another fundamental premise in grounding critique: they mostly relegate the task of critique to the 'actors themselves'. They either rely on the existing (institutionalized or informal) norms in a given sociohistorical context and try to apply them in a more systematic manner, or they try to 'reconstruct' ordinary actors' perspectives in the form of a coherent system. In any case, they refrain from substantive normative speculation and locate the criteria of critique in the empirically existing (and theoretically reconstructed) discourses of justification and political contestation (Boltanski, 2011; Walzer, 1983; Rorty, 1989).

This is the only type of critique that satisfies the 'strong' conception of postmetaphysical thought as articulated in Richard Rorty's works, which requires that social critique be fully *nominalist*, that it fully acknowledge the *contingency of history* and abandon any form of historical teleology (e.g. Jürgen Habermas' 'rationalization of the lifeworld'); and that the normative grounds of critique be free of any *substantive ontological speculation* (a theory of the subject, a social ontology, or any 'trans-contextual' characteristics of social reality in general) (see Rorty, 1989; see also Prodanović in this volume).

3. The *diagnostic* critique (contemporary neo-Marxism, critique inspired by the works of Michel Foucault, by Lacanian or Freudian psychonalysis, etc.): this approach to social critique, in contrast to the previous two, is based on a high degree of speculation regarding the nature of the human subject and the ontology of the social (even though much of it is devoted to 'deconstructing' the conventional notions of subjectivity and social action). The approach tends to focus on the 'deep-lying' dynamics of social domination operating at the level of human *subjectivation* (the socially conditioned self-formation) and is therefore very effective in conceptualizing what one could term 'structural domination' (e.g. Butler, Laclau and Žižek, 2000). Also unlike the previous two types, this form of critique mostly follows the strategy of quietly ignoring the issues of epistemological authoritarianism and universal normative validity, and prefers instead to go 'straight to the matter', to the pressing issues of injustice and domination in the real world. In spite of their emancipatory intent, diagnostic standpoints can be very authoritarian towards what Richard Rorty calls the 'final vocabularies' of ordinary social actors (Rorty, 1989). In the language of critical theory, 'diagnosticians' often reduce the 'empirically effective' normativity of social action – the normative claims of ordinary actors – to epiphenomenal effects of structural power. Diagnostic perspectives are sometimes underpinned by very counter-intuitive normative foundations, such as the psychoanalytic theories of the subject and corresponding social ontologies. Within this type of social critique the entire social reality often appears as fundamentally and intrinsically 'domination-producing', and any universalist or contextualist perspective which tries to envision a transformation of social reality in the more conventional, 'Enlightenment' sense of the term looks irredeemably 'naive' and 'superficial'[1].

Each of the three outlined types of theoretical social critique is particularly good at satisfying one of the imperatives of justification. The proceduralist type produces ever more complex and nuanced attempts at articulating a universalist *theory of justice*; the contextualist variety manages quite successfully to ground critique in a fully *post-metaphysical epistemology* (nominalism) and a 'non-authoritarian' view on the role of the theorist (e.g. the 'situated critic' of Michael Walzer's perspective); and the diagnostic current displays a particularly acute understanding of 'structural domination' in various social orders, i.e. how the *relations of power* permeate the process

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1   Maeve Cooke reaches a similar conclusion in her critique of Hardt's and Negri's *Empire*: 'the immanence of power dissemination and perpetuation means that political change will be insufficient: even a radical democratization of the market – for instance, one that encompasses redistribution of wealth, reorganizing of work practices, and redressing of imbalances in social status – will fail to remedy its dominating effects. So long as social domination is stamped on the brains and bodies of subjectivities and reproduced by their ways of being in the world, democratization is futile' (Cooke, 2006: 193).

of subject-formation in different socio-economic formations. However, as a result of this crystallization around one of the three imperatives of justification, each of the three varieties gives up on at least one crucial task of social critique. The proceduralist variety gives up on articulating a diagnosis of social domination grounded in explanatory propositions about social reality (social theory); the contextualist one on securing the foundations of critique which would be somewhat more independent of the fluctuations in the normative self-understanding of a given political community; and the diagnostic one, in contrast, gives up on articulating a more 'non-authoritarian' basis of critique that would resonate to a greater degree with the self-understanding of 'ordinary' social actors.

'Holistic' social critique: Habermas and Honneth

As mentioned earlier, one exception to the increasing crystallization of forms of theoretical social critique around one or the other of the three imperatives of justification is the 'intersubjectivist' strand within contemporary critical theory represented by authors such as Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth. Jürgen Habermas' social critique, most systematically articulated in his two-volume *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1984, 1987) can, for example, be seen as an attempt to simultaneously satisfy all three imperatives of justification within a *holistic* type of critique. Habermas attempts to formulate a normatively universalist foundation of critique (discourse ethics) that is at the same time grounded in the perspectives of ordinary social actors (everyday speech situations) and that also has a diagnostic intent: Habermas diagnoses forms of social domination (e.g. the concept of the 'systemic colonization of the lifeworld') on the grounds of a social-theoretical concept of 'communicative reason'. More generally, Habermas conceptualizes social domination as all forms of the 'systematic distortion' of rational communication by power and by the imperatives of material social reproduction (Habermas, 1984, 1987).

However, the perspective from which Habermas theorizes social domination, I would argue, is rather narrow and removed from the self-understanding of 'ordinary' social actors, particularly those engaged in political action informed by progressive normative claims (feminist, ecological, minority-rights movements, etc.). As Habermas' conception of domination is rooted in his broader theorization of the 'social', it has rather little sensitivity for an entire dimension of social dynamic which we could define, in the spirit of Pierre Bourdieu's work, as the 'symbolic struggle' between social groups for the realization of their normative worldviews within modern institutional complexes. Due to Habermas' strong philosophical 'anti-essentialism', his theoretical diagnosis of social domination is, in my view, very restricted and ignores a whole range of theoretical concerns which motivated the first-generation critical theorists such as 'commodity

fetishism', 'culture industry', the 'repression of drives', 'identity thinking' or the progressive expansion of 'instrumental reason' (e.g. Adorno, 1981, 2001; Marcuse, 1974, 1991). Habermas' strong orientation towards normative universalism ultimately results in the marginalization of the diagnostic task. As Christopher Zurn, for example, asks:

> what had become of the great critical areas of interest of the past: the phenomenal changes in cultural life through the industrialized mass media and new communications technology, the transformations of personality structures, the nature and role of ideology in the maintenance of structures of domination and oppression? What had become of the leading social concepts imbued with emancipatory content: alienation, anomie, commodification, reification ... and so on (Zurn, 2010: 9)?

The work of Axel Honneth, a leading figure in the 'third-generation' critical theory, tries to reintroduce some of these concerns into the Habermasian type of social critique. One of the central aims of Honneth's work has been to shift the social-theoretical 'optic' of Habermasian critical theory towards the earlier mentioned dimension of social reality neglected by Habermas – the fundamental conflict over the normative frameworks of social action – and to develop the corresponding 'conflict-theoretic' accounts of social integration and change. Honneth's project of developing a *social-philosophical* critical theory (Honneth, 2009) is motivated by two key ambitions. On the one hand, the early Honneth's works were underpinned by a conviction that critical theory has lost some of its Marxist 'edge' with Habermas' linguistic turn, and Honneth therefore envisaged his own project as that of formulating the missing critique of capitalism and a theorization of class conflict within the confines of Habermas' intersubjectivist paradigm (Honneth, 1991)[2]. This diagnostic task, however, required Honneth to return to a normatively more *substantive* approach to social critique than Habermas' abstract discourse ethics, one that would have something to say, for example, about the political struggles against the economic injustices of today. On the other hand, Honneth has had little doubt that Habermas has greatly enhanced both the normative universalism and the epistemological anti-authoritarianism of critical theory with the linguistic turn. The second main task that Honneth had set himself can thus be understood as the further enhancement of Habermasian critical theory along the lines of normative univesalism and contextualist anti-authoritarianism.

It is precisely this (overly) ambitious project of a *simultaneous* radicalization of critique and a further refinement of critical theory's normative foundations

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2   As Deranty points out in *Beyond Communication*, 'the complexity of this relationship [Honneth's to Habermas], stems from the fact that the many critical objections brought against Habermas are themselves inspired by Honneth's early Neo-Marxist position' (Deranty, 2009: 11).

which makes Honneth's theory internally conflicted and vulnerable to an array of criticisms (see Alexander and Pia Lara, 1996; Deranty, 2010, 2009; Ivković, 2014). In his attempt to rearticulate Habermasian critical theory in all three dimensions, Honneth has ultimately made a somewhat controversial move. He has largely abandoned Habermas' normative 'formalism' (the proceduralism which characterizes discourse ethics), the core of the latter's post-metaphysical perspective, and has introduced instead a normatively substantive foundation of critique in the form of the 'universal preconditions of human self-formation' (Honneth, 1996). In Honneth's perspective, these preconditions consist in three distinct forms of intersubjective *recognition*: love, respect, and esteem. The concept of the three varieties of recognition at the same time provides the basis for the *diagnostic* aspect of Honneth's critique (various 'pathologies' of intersubjective recognition) and allows Honneth to make a 'contextualist' argument that his own grounds of critique in the form of social actors' normative 'claims to recognition' are merely *reconstructions* of these actors' everyday experiences (Honneth, 1996).

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Just as the tension between the three imperatives of justification induced Habermas to severely restrict the diagnostic aspect of his work to safeguard the first two (universalist and contextualist), the same tension in Honneth's project seems to have resulted in a marginalization of the pursuit of universalism.

Collective social engagement as a particular type of political action

The above discussed tension at the core of 'holistic' social critique such as Habermas' and Honneth's mirrors the one that exists in certain forms of contemporary political action which could be termed 'collective social engagement'. However, unlike the realm of theoretical critique where, as I tried to show on Habermas' and Honneth's examples, the tension has so far proven paralyzing to some extent (as it has induced both of them to marginalize the pursuit of one of the imperatives), collective social engagement has a greater potential to keep this tension a 'productive' one.

Let me first clarify how I conceptualize 'collective social engagement' against the background of the broader notion of 'popular protest'. While conventional popular protest has a cause within the sphere of institutional politics, collective engagement is the type of political action that takes place (at least in its initial phases) *outside* this sphere, as it arises from certain social actors' 'experience of injustice' in everyday life, and its first phase is the collective articulation of this experience that constitutes the given group of actors as the 'agent' of engagement. While conventional protest movements rally around a cause that is already perceived as political by the

general public (e.g. electoral fraud, legal discrimination of a minority), the most important trait of engagement is the engaged actors' aim to 'politicize' a certain concrete issue that would otherwise not be considered political (contested) by the general public.[3] 'Political' in this sense means above all normatively *contested*: a certain occurrence, phenomenon or course of action becomes 'political' once there are two or more opposing normative perspectives on it in the public sphere (see also Zaharijević in this volume). The engaged actors have the aim of *generalizing* the normative contest that first arises in relation to a concrete experience of injustice. Ultimately, the engaged actors most often also aim to 'institutionalize' their standpoint, which means that their standpoint should be included in the legal framework that regulates the state's action with respect to the object of their engagement.

The crucial difference between collective engagement and conventional protest lies in the constitution (articulation) of the movement's *cause*: in a classical political protest, the cause is 'always already' political (contested in the public) at the initial point of the experience of injustice. In collective social engagement the experience of injustice pertains to a cause that is not-yet-political, and it is the successful articulation of that experience that transforms the 'special interest' of a particular group into a matter of general concern. The 'politicization' of the cause, as I argued in the introduction, requires the simultaneous pursuit of three different strategies of justifying critique that correspond to the three normative imperatives. Below I analyze briefly the case of one prominent instance of collective social engagement in contemporary Serbia – the 'We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own' initiative – in order to point out the tension between the three distinct 'vocabularies' of critique employed by the movement that is 'isomorphic' with the one we found in the realm of theory. However, when looking at the concrete examples of the three vocabularies, one also observes that they can much more easily be 'interwoven' and kept in a state of 'productive tension' than in theoretical social critique. In the concluding section I will briefly discuss the reasons for this greater 'productivity' of tension in collective engagement as opposed to theory.

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'We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own' Initiative: politicization through a 'holistic' vocabulary of critique

In the 2012 election campaign in Serbia, the Serbian Progressive Party introduced for the first time the idea of a large-scale project of urban renovation in downtown Belgrade entitled 'Belgrade Waterfront' ('Beograd

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3   Saying that a given phenomenon is not (yet) contested in public does not necessarily imply that the public sees it as *justified*; it is sufficient that there is a lack of a perceivable normative contest (a public debate) in relation to it.

na vodi').[4] Sometime upon coming to power, the Progressive Party decided to realize the project, now declared to be of 'national significance', and found a partner in a private company 'Eagle Hills' from United Arab Emirates. The project required that the Serbian state lease around 100 acres of land along the river Sava in downtown Belgrade to the private investor (Eagle Hills), who would build around 200 objects for commercial and residential purposes on this plot of land. At the time the project was presented to the public, the company's prospective investment was supposed to be worth around 3,5 billion euros, but the exact figure that later appeared in the contract proved to be much lower: 150 million. As specified by the contract, the Serbian state is obliged to infrastructurally prepare the whole terrain for building at a huge cost, while the investor will enjoy extra-territorial rights on this part of sovereign Serbian territory over a period of 30 years, which is the envisaged period for completing the whole urban development plan.

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Although a large section of the expert public in Serbia (architects, urban planners, engineers, legal scholars, etc.) immediately criticized the project, the broader public was mostly silent on the issue and the climate seemed to be one of a general acceptance of the project as justified and politically uncontroversial. The scope of this paper prevents an independent discussion of the project, but suffice it to say that the project has since its very inception fitted into the broader neoliberal agenda of the Serbian Progressive Party government led by Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić. This agenda of an accelerated socio-economic transformation of Serbia into a peripheral capitalist state includes the reshaping of downtown Belgrade into a gentri-fied, increasingly gated island of economic prosperity surrounded by the rest of the country in the form of an impoverished recruitment pool of low-wage labor for local economic elites and global capital. Similar projects of large-scale 'urban renewal' which serve the (overlapping) interests of global capital and local political and economic elites exist throughout the world and could be seen as part of a global trend of 'neoliberalization'. Moreover, it remains unclear whether the project will at all be realized to any significant degree, or whether it was from the outset conceived largely as a propa-ganda device or a money laundering scheme. The official contract between the Serbian government and the private investor was signed on 26. April 2015, became accessible to the public on 20. September, and the initial stages of the project's realization began in the immediate aftermath.

In October 2014, soon after the Serbian government's announcement of the 'Plan for the Special Purpose Area' which presented the stages of the project's realization over a period of 30 years, the citizens' initiative 'We

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4   The Serbian title of the project would literally translate as 'Belgrade on Water' – this is why the Initiative against it uses the metaphor of 'drowning' Belgrade in its name.

Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own' was founded and immediately presented a list of thorough and professionally competent objections to the Plan. The most active members of the initiative, which soon gained a considerable following, have engaged in various forms of civic activism, organizing protests when crucial official documents related to the project were being signed, holding public debates, attending the meetings of the relevant government bodies open to the public, starting a website and Facebook page and issuing a bulletin with detailed analyses and criticisms of the project. As stated on its website, the initiative considers the 'Belgrade Waterfront' project to be 'catastrophic for Belgrade and Serbia from an economic, transportation and urban development aspects', and maintains that it 'in no way constitutes a project of national significance' ('Ne da(vi)mo Beograd', internet)[5]. In defining the movement, members of the initiative state that

> the initiative 'We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own' was created because it is opposed to the project 'Belgrade Waterfront', its objectives, consequences and the way the whole process of 'planning' and the legalization of the project takes place. Through its activities, the initiative has brought together - and continues to bring - a large number of experts, associations, NGOs, collectives, lawyers, academics, journalists, architects, urban planners, with the idea to stress the importance of citizen participation in issues of urban development, both in terms of the project 'Belgrade Waterfront' and on the broader front of the city's development as a whole. The ambition of the initiative is to expand to the greatest possible degree the public awareness of where and how we want to live ('Ne da(vi)mo Beograd', internet).

The initiative is clearly an instance of 'collective social engagement' as defined above, and can be situated within the broader 'right to the city' type of political protest (similar initiatives exist in the region and across the world, for example in Zagreb and Dubrovnik in Croatia, but also in Hamburg, in South Africa, in the United States as the 'Right to the City Alliance', etc.). The aim of the movement is the re-articulation of an issue that the Serbian government wishes to present as a non-ideological, 'technocratic' and 'developmental' matter (as 'progress' pure and simple) into a political one – an issue that includes questions of justice, public welfare, arbitrary exercise of power, transparency, economic exploitation and many others. For this purpose, the movement uses the language of *normative universalism*, criticizing the project as *unjust* due to the fact that it is detrimental to public welfare and serves the interest of the ruling political and economic elites.

Another universalist component of the movement's discourse is the *proceduralist* criticism of the government's violation of democratic and constitutional procedures and its arbitrary amendment of existing laws, as

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5   All translations from Serbian in the paper are mine.

members of the movement state that their aim is to make the processes of urban planning and realization of projects more transparent and subject to public debate. However, the movement also uses the language of *contextualist* critique as it questions the *legality* of the 'Belgrade Waterfront' project from the point of view of the existing legal framework in Serbia (which is being amended by the government to legalize the project). Finally, some of the activists also engage in *societal diagnosis* as they analyze the planning and the initial stages of the project's realization not only in terms of the authoritarian behavior of the government but as forms of structural social domination embedded in the broader socio-economic transformation of Serbia into a peripheral capitalist state[6].

Below are some examples of the three varieties (vocabularies) of social critique and their partial entwinement that can be found in the analytical bulletin *Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* [*We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own!*] that the movement issued in March 2015.

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Universalism

The following statements in the bulletin illustrate the proceduralist aspect of the movement's universalism centred around the critique of the Serbian government's authoritarian behavior in relation to the project 'Belgrade Waterfront':

> 'Our desire is to arise the citizens' interest in the development of their environment; to contribute to the processes and procedures related to the project 'Belgrade Waterfront' becoming more transparent; to insist on the establishing of new institutions and procedures and the functioning of the existing ones whose aim is to involve citizens in a dialogue about their living environment and the protection of the public interest, and not (only) that of investors' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015a).

> 'The government of Serbia has declared the photographs of a model of 'Belgrade Waterfront' – two million square meters of residential/commercial spaces that a friend of Serbia, Mohammed Al Abar, intends to build and rent – a "project of national significance"(!?)' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015b).

> 'Such elimination of the institutions[7] that have launched and were responsible for one of the (proclaimed) largest projects in recent Serbian history

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6   It should be stressed that the 'diagnostic' type of discourse within the movement which inclines towards (various types of) neo-Marxism is limited to some members of the movement. The movement is ideologically heterogenous, its members ranging from classical and left liberals to (a minority of) radical leftists.

7   The institutions the text refers to include the abolished Serbian National Agency for Spatial Planning and the General Plan of Belgrade (often referred to as the 'Urban Development Constitution' of Belgrade) which was amended in April 2014.

gives us reason to doubt the seriousness of the project and the competence of its authors and perpetrators' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015c).

The statement below, on the other hand, demonstrates the movement's commitment to a universalist theory of justice (egalitarianism) which questions the very institutional system of today's Serbia (as it calls for the creation of a 'new social architecture'):

> 'The treatment of housing as an investment option prevents an ever greater number of people from leading a dignified life. To change this situation we must collectively create a new social architecture that will treat housing as a basic common good, and not as basis for enrichment' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015d).

Contextualism

In its critique of the government's arbitrary exercise of power, the movement also relies to some extent on the existing legal framework in Serbia and points to the violation of specific laws and regulations. For example, in relation to an unexpected inspection of private homes in Karađorđeva Street in Belgrade by representatives of the Agency for Urban Development Land, the movement invokes the existing Serbian Law on Expropriation:

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> 'Maybe they were impatient in the City Administration (after all, their wings are carrying us toward the realization of a project of national significance), but the Law on Expropriation is explicit in ensuring that such preparatory actions may only be carried out after obtaining a license from the Ministry of Finance' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015e).

In relation to the controversial building of the promotional object 'Sava Nova' on the river bank, the movement once again relies on the existing regulations:

> 'The real user is not the state enterprise "Belgrade Waterfront Ltd" but a private user – although all types of transmission of the right to use the temporary object are expressly prohibited by existing regulations. The private user would have to be selected in an official competition process for setting up a temporary facility' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015f).

And below we see an instance of a successful interweaving of universalist and contextualist components of the movement's discourse:

> 'The project of (proclaimed but never demonstrated) national importance is characterized by non-transparent processes, potentially huge risks and the evasion and distortion of legal and legislative mechanisms. Existing documents related to planning are expressly deregulated and adopted contrary to the law, in a non-democratic procedure in which the participation of citizens is reduced to nothing more than a formality' (*Ne da(vi) mo Beograd!* 2015a).

Diagnosis

A crucial aspect of the 'We Won't let Belgrade D(r)own' initiative (even if it is limited to some members only) is an attempt to analyze and critique the 'Belgrade Waterfront' project beyond the charge of the government's authoritarianism, through situating the project in the broader context of the Serbian socio-economic transition to peripheral capitalism:

> 'And so, while we stare at the sky, doubting that the city on water will ever become reality, money from the budget is disappearing under our very noses…' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015g)

> 'The purpose of these mega-projects is not to contribute to the competitiveness of cities but to give more power to political elites. These are politically orchestrated spectacles. The *modus operandi* of these 'Dubaisations' is always the same: it starts with an aggressive marketing campaign and the ceremonial opening of the model, with the politicians and investors photographed next to it' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015h)

A particularly acute diagnostic passage:

> 'The remnants of the state housing funds are destroyed in a planned manner and the land on which they are built is sold for a pittance. All of that goes hand in hand with brutal austerity measures of centralized European institutions that affect the poorest strata most acutely. All elements of the housing infrastructure such as the existing apartments, public and municipal land and rent prices are pushed onto the international speculative market' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015d).

And below is an instance of a successful interweaving of universalist vocabulary with that of diagnosis:

> 'Modification of plans, and even laws, in the interest of individuals or certain groups indicates a disorganized state and the ignoring of the public interest and citizens. In the end, the individual profits and the city bears the risks' (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd!* 2015i).

Conclusion: a productive tension

As the above examples demonstrate, the 'politicization' of a phenomenon such as a megalomaniacal urban renewal project – the persuasion of the public that a certain issue is not merely a matter of 'development' and 'progress', or that it is not merely of concern to a small group of actors – requires a simultaneous battle on three different fronts of justification. It requires the interweaving of the three vocabularies of critique in a comprehensive or 'holistic' type of collective social engagement exemplified by the 'We Won't let Belgrade D(r)own' initiative. If the initiative's members only employed the vocabulary of abstract normative universalism (the universalist principle of egalitarianism and the proceduralist insistence on participation

and transparency), they could easily be criticized from a 'contextualist' perspective as 'utopians', as people who reject completely the existing (by definition imperfect) legal/institutional system in Serbia. If they only relied on the existing legal regulations (or rather their violation) as standards of critique, they would lose the grounds of critique once the government arbitrarily changed these regulations. Finally, if they only used a 'diagnostic' vocabulary of causal explanation (e.g. the Marxist-inspired explanation of the project as driven by the logic of capital) they would be vulnerable to the charge of 'epistemological authoritarianism'. Why should their fellow citizens who do not endorse the broader vision of the social reality that underpins the causal explanation (diagnosis) endorse their critique?

On the other hand, the interweaving of the three vocabularies of critique produces a certain tension in the engaged actors' discourse, and the above examples and brief analyses of selected statements offer some insight in this respect. Since the movement uses the universalist language of egalitarianism to criticize the country's legal system as a framework in which a particular unjust phenomenon occurs but also invokes the existing laws of that order (which do not live up to the demanding universalist standard of egalitarianism) to criticize their violation in the relevant context, one can identify a particular 'universalist-contextualist' tension between the two vocabularies of critique.

The movement's universalist language that focuses on the importance of *procedures* also sits somewhat uneasily with the activists' *diagnosis* of the 'Belgrade Waterfront' project as part of the 'neoliberalization' of Serbia, since the citizens who disagree with the broader social-theoretical premises of this diagnosis are under no obligation to accept it (we thus see a 'universalist-diagnostic' tension arise). Finally, the contextualist focus on the government's violation of existing laws and regulations is somewhat difficult to square *both* with the universalist conception of justice that the movement endorses (consider the activists' notion of a 'new social architecture' in contrast to their reliance on the existing Law on Expropriation) *and* with the language of diagnosis. In the left-leaning diagnostic perspective that exists within the movement, the current legal framework should appear as a product of the twenty five years of Serbia's socio-economic transition to peripheral capitalism, and is thus part of the problem rather than solution.

However, the two above examples that could be seen as instances of a 'successful interweaving' of different vocabularies within one critical statement (the examples of the fusion of universalism and contextualism and of universalism and diagnosis) indicate that collective social engagement might be somewhat more successful in maintaining the 'productive tension' between the three imperatives of justification than the theoretical 'holistic' critique such as Habermas' or Honneth's. This, I would argue, is due to the

fact that, unlike theoretical critiques which often merely aspire to an 'intrinsic relation to practice' (e.g. the tradition of critical theory), forms of collective social engagement such as the 'We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own' movement really *have* such an intrinsic connection. Their logic could be seen as 'inductive' in the sense that the elaboration of critique starts from an experience of injustice related to a concrete societal phenomenon and then 'generalizes' it through complex attempts at transforming this phenomenon into a political issue. The normative statements that the engaged actors articulate in all three vocabularies of critique can at all times be traced back to this primary impetus of 'politicization'. They are 'intrinsically' related to practice in the sense that they serve the emancipatory purpose of politicization, and this is what makes their internal tension inherently 'productive'. Theoretical perspectives such as Habermas' and Honneth's, on the other hand, follow the 'deductive' logic of applying purely theoretically justified criteria of critique to concrete empirical phenomena, so that the tension between the three imperatives arises before, and independently of, the societal phenomena that are criticized, and is not characterized by an 'inherent' productivity of politicization. In this sense, collective social engagement can to some extent serve as a model for holistic social critique articulated within the confines of theory.

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Marjan Ivković

Društvena kritika i angažman između univerzalizma, anti-autoritarnosti i dijagnoze društvene dominacije

Apstrakt

U radu se razmatra specifična „izomorfija" koja se može uočiti između dve forme društvene kritike: 'holističke' teorijske kritike koju predstavljaju autori poput

Jirgena Habermasa i Aksela Honeta i 'kolektivnog društvenog angažmana' koji predstavljaju pokreti poput 'Ne da(vi)mo Beograd' u današnjoj Srbiji, a koje rad nastoji da razgraniči od konvencionalnijih formi građanskog protesta. Ova izomorfija, kako rad nastoji da pokaže, ogleda se u tenziji između tri imperativa opravdanja kritike – imperativa normativnog univerzalizma, epistemološke anti-autoritarnosti i dijagnoze društvene dominacije – koja nastaje usled pokušaja 'holističkih' teorijskih kritičara i kolektivnog angažovanih aktera da istovremeno odgovore na zahteve sva tri imperativa. Nakon predstavljanja tri vrste teorijske društvene kritike koje se kristalizuju oko svakog od imperativa, rad najpre razmatra tenziju između sva tri imperativa u formi u kojoj se javlja kod 'holističkih' teorijskih kritičara Habermasa i Honeta, a potom identifikuje istu vrstu tenzije u inicijativi 'Ne da(vi)mo Beograd'. Tenzija unutar diskursa ovog pokreta oslikana je kroz kraću analizu biltena *Ne da(vi)mo Beograd* koji je pokret izdao u martu 2015. Pošto analizirani primeri ukazuju da je kolektivni angažman uspešniji od teorijske kritike u održavanju pomenute tenzije „produktivnom", rad naposletku nakratko razmatra moguće uzroke ove razlike.

Ključne reči: izomorfija, tenzija, kritika, opravdanje, angažman, univerzalizam, kontekstualizam, dijagnoza, Srbija