The Paradox of Liberation: Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions, Michael Walzer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 192 pp., $26 cloth.

doi:10.1017/S0892679415000301

In his newest book, Michael Walzer addresses a modern paradox: national liberation movements based on the ideas of secular liberalism were triumphant in the post–World War II period; yet, once established, the new secular states have been challenged with increasing effectiveness by religious revivalists.

Walzer examines in detail three examples of the creation of independent states: India and Israel in 1947–1948 and Algeria in 1962. In three of his four chapters he interweaves the case studies in mutually illuminating comparisons and contrasts, and in another he focuses in greater detail on Israel and what he characterizes as the opposition between Zionism and Judaism. These four chapters were in their initial form the 2013 Henry L. Stimson Lectures at Yale University. Because almost half the questions from faculty and students were not about India, Israel, or Algeria, but rather about the United States, Walzer added a postscript to the book in order to discuss how the American story is like and unlike the other cases.

The book is masterly in its presentation of nuanced accounts that draw on historical documents and recent theoretical arguments to counter a remarkably resilient array of stereotypes about religion and secularism. In some respects his title—or at least the subtitle—does not do justice to the subtlety of his argument. While he does indeed portray secular revolutions and religious counterrevolutions, his contention is that the two are interconnected in extraordinarily complex ways and certainly do not constitute a straightforward sequence.

Walzer offers multiple accounts of the views of secular advocates for national liberation. For example, he discusses and quotes Jawaharlal Nehru, Theodor Herzl, David Ben-Gurion, and Ahmed Ben Bella in their staunch advocacy for a secular state as the guarantor of liberation. He also devotes most of a chapter to Marxist arguments for a universalism that must allow states to rule over more provincial loyalties so as to contain the pathologies of religious zealotry and to counter the false consciousness that religious beliefs produce.

Walzer is explicit about his personal sympathy with efforts to create a strong and coherent secular culture, and he is impatient with those who refuse to acknowledge the accomplishments of secular liberalism. Again and again, he turns to the question of the status of women to underscore those gains and to demonstrate the vulnerability of such achievements to attacks from both traditional and revivalist religions. Despite his sympathy for the secular project of liberation, however, he states flatly that this effort has failed in all three of the cases he examines. In view of that outcome, he rejects the position that liberation is the exclusive preserve of secularists and calls for collaboration across the religious-secular divide.

A key message of the book is that secular advocates need to engage with traditional communities. In seeking to learn a lesson from the "usefully wrong" Marxist critique, Walzer returns repeatedly to a distinction between "negation" and "negotiation." Negation is the unqualified rejection of

traditionalist worldviews. In contrast, negotiation entails critical engagement with particular communities, including those devoted to religious beliefs and practices. In developing this distinction, Walzer draws on the writings of Clifford Geertz, Ashis Nandy, Akeel Bilgrami, Uma Narayan, Martha Nussbaum, and Amartya Sen—certainly an extraordinarily distinguished set of theorists who have focused in particular on cultural developments in India and other postcolonial societies.

In formulating his argument about the need to reach out to traditional communities, Walzer repeatedly invokes the imperative for repetition or reiteration—that is, a recognition that change unavoidably requires a process of incremental adjustments rather than a single definitive transformation. The mistake of too many national liberationists is to deem their intervention as dispositive. In each of the cases he examines, there is instead a process that may move forward more effectively over the long term when it includes active engagement between liberation movements and traditional values.

For example, according to Walzer, Nehru would have been better served if he had tried to incorporate Gandhi and his adherents into his secularizing program. As Walzer notes, "even when Gandhi openly opposed Hindu beliefs and practices, he spoke to the people in a religious language that was largely foreign to other leaders of the national liberation movement" (p. 20). In contrast, Walzer describes Nehru as "mostly tone deaf" to the "religious traditions that played such a large part in shaping Indian civilization" (p. 122).

In the case of Herzl and Ben-Gurion, liberation required overcoming "the mentality of exile" and the "legacy of statelessness," and therefore "its most prominent and successful advocates were likely to be Jews who had assimilated into the world of their oppressors and who viewed their own people with a foreign eye." To note one remarkable anecdote that Walzer cites, Herzl was eager to accept the British offer of land in Uganda for a new state. Because he had few ties to Jewish religious traditions, he apparently had little sense of the opposition that accepting this offer would arouse.

In the Algerian case, Walzer traces the evolution from an explicit invocation of Islamic principles to an almost secular socialism. There was in the initial manifesto of 1954 a call for an "Algerian state, sovereign, democratic, and social, within the framework of the principles of Islam." By 1956 the goal became "the birth of an Algerian state in the form of a democratic and social republic—and not the restoration of monarchy or of a theocracy" (p. 10). A year later, the stated aim of establishing a democratic and social republic included the clause "which is not in contradiction with the principles of Islam" (p. 10). Walzer quotes the early nationalist leader Ben Bella, who studied Lenin and Sartre and Malraux while in prison and who, in the aftermath of independence, spoke of "Islamic socialism"—which, as his Muslim critics quickly claimed, was more socialist than Islamic.

Walzer is fully aware of the cross-claims in regard to any invocation of connections between national liberation movements and religious traditions. To let the Indian case stand for all three, Gandhi was—and still is—subject to criticism for in effect strengthening Hindu traditions that continue to be a source of dissention and even violence in the country that he helped to liberate. But Walzer, not (it sometimes seems) without reluctance and

ambivalence, concludes that a reiterative process that allows and even encourages critical engagement with religious traditions may often serve national liberation better in the long run than does a secularism that is out of touch with local communities. Negotiation is preferable to negation. Or to quote the final sentence of the book: "Liberation is an ongoing project."

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679415000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press