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Nationalism, Class, and Revolution

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Abstract and Keywords

The myth that Marx wrote little of value on nationalism or national movements has been sustained by superficial scholarship and attempts to portray him as a class reductionist. In fact, Marx's extensive writings on Poland and Ireland show a subtle interweaving of nationalism and class in relation to revolution. Marx's lifelong concern with and support for Polish national emancipation is expressed as early as the Communist Manifesto of 1848 but more substantively in his speeches on Poland during that period. Here he makes clear the importance of an emancipatory nationalism that aims at social reform of land and property structures vs. a narrowly nationalist movement aimed solely at throwing off a foreign yoke. On Ireland, the class dimension of Marx's analysis of nationalism is more pronounced, as he singles out the peasant-based and anti-landlord Fenian movement of the 1860s as a harbinger, not only of a progressive national revolution in Ireland but also of a wider working-class revolution. At the same time, he holds that anti-Irish racism on the part of the English working class is blocking the development of a class-conscious English proletariat. Other writings on the national aspirations of the Slavic peoples of Europe, save the Poles, are less original. Marx, and even more so Engels, views these small nations as the tools of Pan-Slavist policies of the Russian Empire, the most conservative power of the time. These writings exhibit a pronounced ethnocentrism and lack entirely the originality and subtlety of those on Poland and Ireland.

Keywords: nationalism, ethnicity, class, revolution, landed property, democracy, racism, ethnic chauvinism

Marx's perspectives on nationalism are not outlined in any single text, nor are they explicitly articulated in *Capital* or *Grundrisse*, his major critiques of political economy. Instead, they can be found mainly in his journalistic articles, speeches to radical organizations, letters, and private research notebooks.

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This has led to some surprising and unsupported generalizations about Marx's shortcomings in this area. Nearly four decades ago, the noted Polish historian Andrzej Walicki lamented the "stubborn vitality" of a "classic misreading" of Marx according to which his writings exhibit "a standpoint of total indifference toward the national problems as having, allegedly, no relevance to the real situation or class interests of the industrial working class of Europe" (1982:358). Examples of this misreading abound. A prominent one can be found in Anthony Giddens's study of the nation-state, in which he quickly dispatches Marx: "It is manifestly the case that Marx paid little attention to the nature and impact of nationalism, and the comments he does make are mostly neither instructive nor profound" (1987:212). In a gesture that suggests a surprisingly cavalier use of scholarly sources, Giddens cites Solomon Bloom's *World of Nations* (1941) as the sole source for his peremptory declaration about Marx. But Bloom's view of Marx on nationalism ran exactly in the opposite direction of Giddens's declaration, as will be discussed. In his bibliography, Giddens cites none of Marx's actual writings on nationalism or ethnicity.

The best known of Marx's treatments of nationalism is among the most misleading. It occurs in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, where he and Engels write famously, "The working men have no country" (Marx and Engels [1848] 1976:502), adding a few lines later: "National differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto" (Marx and Engels [1848] 1976:503)

But as Bloom showed nearly eighty years ago in the first scholarly study in English of Marx and nationalism: "The *Manifest* [*sic*] is a cryptic and epigrammatic document and therefore easily misread" (1941:26). For Marx was in no way taking a class reductionist position in terms of the coexistence of national consciousness alongside that of class. As Bloom adds with respect to the sentence, "The working men have no country": "This blunt statement has been the object of much conservative and radical speculation. It has been frequently taken to affirm precisely what Marx was at pains to deny: that nationalities had no real existence, that they should not exist, that the emotion of patriotism was foreign to the proletariat, and that the doctrine of 'scientific socialism' implied some rather special attitude toward nationalism" (1941:24). National differences and antagonisms were in some respects lessening, in others increasing, and were part of the web of social relations that constituted the modern capitalist order.

Nor do these kinds of passages in the *Manifesto* represent a repudiation of national liberation or emancipation as a key aspect of socialist and revolutionary movements. For the same *Manifesto* also contains a statement of clear support for Polish national emancipation, although it specifies that communists [many people use Communists to refer to Communist Parties, and communist for the more generic term] are supporting the left-wing anti-landowner wing of that movement: "In Poland, they support the party that insists on an agrarian revolution as the prime condition for national emancipation, that party which fomented the insurrection of Cracow in 1846" (Marx and Engels [1848] 1976:

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518). Without awareness of the kind of point Bloom was making, this statement on Poland could seem incomprehensible, or at best opportunistic. What is at issue here though is the difference between, on the one hand, global abstract trends such as homogenization under the capitalist world market, and on the other, the concrete social existence of working people and societies in a world shaped not only by class but also by nationality, race, gender, and other social relations that are not based solely upon class. In philosophical terms, Marx's universals were not abstract but concrete, internally differentiated and contradictory.

Besides Poland, the other case of national emancipation that Marx and most other progressives of his time espoused was that of Ireland. Both of these nations had long-standing and clear cultural—and more so in the case of Poland, linguistic—identities as nations based upon previous history as independent political entities in a specific territory. Throughout the nineteenth century, both were under a form of foreign rule that denied not just their self-determination but also their very identity as peoples and as nations. As Michael Löwy and Enzo Traverso note, Marx rejected many forms of nationalism—British and French, for example—as stemming from dominant nations, whereas he supported the nationalism of oppressed nations and peoples. This stemmed from “a basic theoretical point: the dichotomy of dominant/oppressed nations” (Löwy and Traverso 1998:28). One could add to this the dichotomy reactionary/emancipatory, along the lines of which Marx vehemently opposed the US Confederacy's claims to self-determination and independence because it was based upon support of slavery as a basic principle (Anderson 2016).

1. A Lifetime of Support for Poland as Part of the European Revolution

Although Marx wrote less on Poland than on Ireland, Poland actually loomed larger as a case of national emancipation for him and for other socialists of the time. First, Poland was in the center of Europe, bordering several countries with important socialist and revolutionary movements. Two of these, Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, occupied Polish territory, along with Russia, as part of the infamous partition of 1795 that had wiped Poland off the map as an independent nation. Second, the Polish revolutionary movement was more cosmopolitan in its orientation than that of Ireland, with Polish exiles with military training playing roles in revolutions ranging from the U.S. in 1776, to the Napoleonic wars on the side of France, to the Paris Commune of 1871. Third, Poland's very attempt to assert its national emancipation formed a thorn in the side of what both liberals and socialists viewed at the time as the world's most reactionary power, Tsarist Russia. Thus, the radical labor movement of Marx's time supported Poland, with "Vive la Pologne" a common slogan of plebeian and revolutionary elements in nineteenth-century Paris, especially in around the time of the 1848 revolution (Davies 2005:26). Most other important revolutionary leaders like Auguste Blanqui and Mikhail Bakunin strongly supported Poland, too. As Marx wrote in 1856, support for Poland was the "'external thermometer' by which one could measure 'the intensity and viability of all revolutions since 1789'" ([1856] 1983:85). Since one of his rivals, the utopian socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, was the only major socialist to oppose Poland and support Russia, Marx used this fact to good effect as part of his polemics against him. Marx's support for Poland was so well known that when he returned briefly to Prussia in 1867 to meet with the publisher of *Das Kapital*, the press reported the rumor that he had been sent from London for the purpose of making "propaganda" in favor of a new Polish "insurrection" (Marx [1867] 1985a:202).

Even before the *Communist Manifesto*, one can find speeches by Marx espousing strong support for Polish independence, in the wake of the 1846 Krakow uprising. These speeches link Polish independence to the struggle for democracy and to working-class revolution more generally. In an 1847 speech, he pours scorn on the idea of restoring "the old Poland," for the new global capitalist system has made that impossible, plus it would be a reactionary dream. At this stage, Marx argues rather schematically that only a working-class revolution in England will free Poland because the new global system needs to be attacked at its center: "Hence Poland must be liberated not in Poland but in England" (Marx and Engels [1847] 1976a:388–389). In a speech one year later, around the time of the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*, he stressed that the Polish revolution needed a social character, albeit not yet a communist one, for "a democratic Poland was impossible without the abolition of feudal rights, without the agrarian movement that would transform the dependent peasantry into free proprietors, modern proprietors." Fortunately, he added, the Polish movement was led by a "national party"

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that was “above all reforming and democratic,” rather than a “narrowly nationalist party” (Marx and Engels [1848] 1976b:549, trans. slightly altered on basis of French original in Marx [1848] 1994:1001). This espousal of a socially progressive Polish nationalism fleshed out the brief sentence in support of Polish national emancipation in the *Manifesto* that was quoted previously.

In terms of the direction of revolutionary change moving from West to East, Marx adopted a different stance in the aftermath of the 1863–1864 Polish uprising (Barbier 1992). He now wrote that a Polish national and democratic revolution might help spark a wider Western European one, as seen in a letter to Engels of February 13, 1863: “The era of revolution has now fairly opened in Europe once more This time, let us hope, the lava will flow from East to West” ([1863] 1985b:453). In the aftermath of this Polish uprising, the third major one of the century, Marx and Engels corresponded about writing a pamphlet on Poland, but due to illness and overwork on Marx’s part, this never came about.

Marx’s support for Poland in 1863–1864 was part of a broad current of opinion among European socialists and liberals. This included many working-class groups and networks. These networks, which also supported Abraham Lincoln’s government in its civil war against pro-slavery secessionists, comprised workers from Germany, France, Britain, and other countries. They played a major role in the founding of the International Working Men’s Association or First International in September 1864 in London. Marx was the main author of the International’s Inaugural Address, which on foreign policy firmly sided not only with the US government against the Confederacy, but also with “heroic Poland being assassinated by, Russia.” The Address stated further: “The fight for such a foreign policy forms part of the general struggle for the emancipation of labor,” firmly linking the principle of internationalism to labor’s struggle against capital (Marx [1864] 1985c:13).

Once the First International began to operate, further debates over Poland ensued, in which Marx argued that at several junctures—the Napoleonic wars, the 1830 French revolution, and the period of Polish revolution (1846) and then Western European revolution (1848)—the Western European democrats had betrayed Poland. Moreover, doing so had doomed them in the end as well, as their betrayal of Poland strengthened Russia, which then proceeded to intervene in the West, crushing revolutionary movements. These concerns were never written up in essay form but notes for Marx’s speeches to meetings of the First International, as well as his far lengthier research notebooks on Poland’s relations with France, have been preserved. In these notes and speeches, which go into great detail on diplomatic relations, French parliamentary debates, and military affairs, he refutes the notion, prevalent on the left at the time, that the various French revolutions had supported Poland (Anderson 2016, Marx 1971). Later, Marx and Engels both referred repeatedly to the leading role that Polish exiles played in the Paris Commune. As a whole, Marx saw Poland as a bulwark against Tsarism, and thus a shield for the Western European democratic and labor movements against reactionary intervention from the East. He also saw Poland as a revolutionary country, one that in

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insurrection after insurrection, fought for both national emancipation and democracy, and he saw the Polish exiles as a major ally of revolutionary and democratic movements globally.

Only occasionally, however, did Marx discuss the class and economic basis of the Polish revolutionary movement. When he did so, he emphasized those parts of the movement that were the furthest to the left in the sense of calling for radical changes in landed property relations as well as independence and democracy. This suggests, on the one hand, that Marx did not really develop fully his analysis of Poland, scattered as it was in relatively short texts throughout his intellectual career. On the other hand, the firmness, even intransigence, with which he continued to support Poland, and the ways in which he considered such support a litmus test for the revolutionary movement of his day, form a dramatic illustration of the fact that not all of his thinking on issues he considered crucial were based solely upon class and economic considerations. Finally, the Polish case shows Marx as an ardent supporter of democratic movements, even when those movements did not as a whole broach the class question, so long as they operated in a basically progressive direction. And here, Poland as a barrier to Russian reactionary intervention in Central and Western Europe seems to have been a key factor.

2. Ireland: Intersections of Class, Ethnicity, and Nation

On Ireland, Marx carried out more of a class and economic analysis while also supporting Irish national liberation in a clear and consistent manner. Engels also wrote a lot on Ireland, much of it in conjunction with Marx's own projects concerning that country. And while Ireland was a more peripheral topic than Poland for the European left of Marx's time, his writings on Ireland have gained wider currency since his death than those on Poland. A one-volume selection of Marx and Engels's writings on Ireland was widely available for decades (Marx and Engels 1972) but there was no counterpart for Poland. This relative neglect of Marx's writings on Poland was also due to the baleful influence of the Stalinist regime in Russia, which feared even progressive forms of Polish nationalism and actively suppressed some of Marx's most strident attacks on Tsarist Russia, leaving them out of their publications of his collected works for decades.

Marx discussed Ireland from the 1840s onward, generally supporting Irish national emancipation, while at the same time criticizing harshly those Irish politicians who, in his view, worked closely with the Irish landowning classes and failed to really oppose British rule. During this early period, Engels often wrote more on the topic than did Marx. For his part, Marx's connections to the radical working class British Chartist movement allowed him to interact with revolutionary Irish workers and intellectuals in Britain, as two of Chartism's major leaders were Irishmen living there. British repression inside Ireland received bitter reproaches from Marx, who argued that despite its veneer of

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civilization and rule of law, Britain conducted itself in Ireland in a manner similar to the brutal Tsarist rulers in Poland or the authoritarian Bonapartist regime in France (Mathur and Dix 2009). Since most British politicians publicly deplored and occasionally attacked Russian atrocities and Bonapartist repression, this was a stinging criticism indeed, especially when Marx was able to publish such criticisms in the leading US newspaper of the time, the *New York Tribune*. In this early period, the most extensive contribution by the two men was Engels's heart-rending description of the utter poverty and degradation of the Irish immigrant community in his classic 1845 study of Manchester, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Engels 1975). But at this stage, Marx saw Irish national emancipation as flowing from radical revolution in more industrially advanced Britain, in what Ian Cummins termed "an Anglocentric approach to the liberation of Ireland" (1980, p. 208).

In the years surrounding the publication of Volume I of *Capital* in German in 1867, Marx became more intensely involved with Irish issues (Slater forthcoming). *Capital* contains a substantial discussion of the degradation of the Irish peasantry under the colonial rule of Britain, the most developed capitalist society of the time. Here, Marx stressed that British capital was uprooting the entire mode of existence of the peasantry, driving them into emigration to Britain or North America. In the wake of the horrific famine that gripped the country in the 1840s, British capital evicted starving peasants and consolidated subsistence farms into large commercial ones devoted to sheep and cattle. While British capital gained in the short run a profitable capitalist agricultural sector in Ireland, the emigration of millions of Irish people to the United States was in the long run a danger to Britain. For as Marx saw it, US capitalism was already putting up a challenge to Britain in that period. This was because, the United States, strengthened by the social transformations and state-supported industrialization of the Civil War, and angered by Britain's tilting toward the Confederacy during the war, was absorbing Irish and other immigrants to form the most gigantic working class the world had seen up to that time. The Irish American working class, exploited as it was, was building up what would become the greatest accumulation of capital up to then. While these processes were just beginning in the 1860s, Marx discerned their long-term power and significance.

In his evocation of future US economic supremacy over Britain, Marx refers to the members of the revolutionary Irish Fenian Brotherhood among the Irish immigrant laboring classes forced to leave their homeland for the United States.: "Like all good things in the world, this profitable mode of proceeding has its drawbacks. The accumulation of the Irish in America keeps pace with the accumulation of rents in Ireland. The Irishman, banished by the sheep and the ox, reappears on the other side of the ocean as a Fenian. There a young but gigantic republic rises, more and more threateningly, to face the old queen of the waves" (Marx 1976c, p. 870). This evocation of the Fenian, banished from Ireland but rising across the ocean in the increasingly powerful United States, provides the link between the more economic analysis in *Capital* and Marx's more overtly political writings on Ireland, which reached their zenith in the

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years 1867 to 1870, right after the book first appeared in print in German. Many of these writings were part of debates within the First International, in which Marx had some success in getting leading members of the English labor movement to support Irish national liberation.

By the late 1860s, the peasant-based Fenians had gained a large following among plebeian elements in both Ireland and the Irish diaspora in Britain and the United States. The class basis of their movement set it apart from many earlier versions of Irish nationalism, which had been linked more closely to the church and to ethnically Irish landowners (Ellis 1996). Moreover, the Fenians espoused a democratic republic, freedom of conscience and no state religion, land to the peasant, and the produce of their labor to the workers. It was not an explicitly socialist movement, but it was a plebeian and progressive one. At the same time, the Fenians, after an abortive uprising inside Ireland 1867, began to resort to terrorist attacks inside Britain and to attacks across the US border into Canada. To a remarkable degree, Marx and his allies managed for a time to maintain the support of the English trade union leaders of the First International for the Irish, even in the face of these terrorist attacks in London and Manchester, which were met by hangings by the British government, sometimes of clearly innocent people. Marx and his allies got the First International to make a public appeal for clemency for Irish political prisoners convicted of armed attacks, and to hold a rally of thousands of workers to that end (Anderson 2016).

At a theoretical level, Marx wrote during this period that he had changed his position on Ireland. Earlier, he thought the ascendancy of the British working classes was a precondition for the liberation of Ireland, but he now supported Irish independence as a precondition for a serious movement of the British working class against the capitalists and landowners who made up the dominant classes. In a letter to Engels of December 11, 1869, he now wrote

For a long time I believed that it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working class ascendancy. I always expressed this point of view in the *New York Tribune*. Deeper study has now convinced me of the opposite. The English working class will *never accomplish anything* before it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland. That is why the Irish question is so important for the social movement in general.

(Marx [1869] 1988:398)

Here, far more explicitly than in his writings on Poland, Marx indicated a change of position, toward the notion of revolution emerging from an area peripheral to the centers of capitalist industrialization.

But this was a private communication to his closest comrade, in which he also indicated that he could not say this quite so openly to the English trade unionists who occupied important positions on the General Council of the International, for fear of a nationalist backlash: “In part I cannot tell the English workers themselves” (Marx [1869] 1988:398).

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In that same period, in 1869–1870, Marx made several key points in letters and especially in a “Confidential Communication” he wrote in French on behalf of the International (Marx [1870] 198; Marx [1870] 1966):

(1) The British working classes were the largest and most organized in the world, who had achieved the ten-hour day and other major gains over years, and who had earned the admiration of progressives of all classes by their firm support of the North during the U.S. Civil War. This support of the North and firm opposition to slavery stood in direct opposition to the British government, which leaned toward the South and even seemed to threaten intervention to support the Confederacy. Moreover, this occurred at a time when workers were suffering enormously as a result mass unemployment due to the cotton shortage that stemmed from Union naval blockades of Southern ports. (Nimtz 2003)

(2) At the same time, the English workers possessed a sense of superiority and condescension toward Irish workers inside Britain, whom they accused of lowering wages and weakening the labor movement. This created a strong barrier to real class consciousness among British workers, as anti-Irish prejudice on the part of the English not only divided the working classes, but also gave English workers a false sense of connection to the dominant classes, as he argued in the “Confidential Communication”: “The English bourgeoisie has ... divided the proletariat into two hostile camps.... *In all the big industrial centers in England*, there is profound antagonism between the Irish proletarian and the English proletarian. The common English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers wages and the *standard of life*. He feels national and religious antipathies for him. He views him similarly to how the poor whites of the Southern states of North America viewed black slaves. This antagonism among the proletarians of England is artificially nourished and kept up by the bourgeoisie. It knows that this split is the true secret of the preservation of its power” (Marx [1870] 1985d:120, trans. slightly altered on basis of French original in Marx [1870] 1966:359). All this functioned similarly to the effects of racism in the U.S. in terms of dividing the working class, Marx maintained.

(3) The British ruling classes comprised not only capitalists, but also landowners, who had much power inside the military and governmental apparatuses. That landowning class had vast holdings in both Ireland and Britain. At one level, this strengthened them, but their Irish holdings also constituted a vulnerability. For there, the peasant unrest exemplified by the Fenians could target its local landowners all the more forcefully because their opposition was based upon both class and national considerations: “In the first place, Ireland is the *bulwark* of English landlordism. If it fell in Ireland, it would fall in England. In Ireland this is a hundred times easier because *the economic struggle there is concentrated exclusively on landed property*, because this struggle is at the same time national, and because the people there are more revolutionary and angry than in England. Landlordism in Ireland is maintained solely by *the English army*. The moment the *forced Union* between the two countries ends, a social revolution will immediately break out in Ireland (Marx [1870] 1985d:119–120, trans. slightly altered on basis of

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French original in Marx [1870] 1966:358–359). For this reason, a great revolutionary blow against the British landowning classes could be struck in Ireland.

(4) Thus, Ireland formed what Marx termed a “lever” that could set in motion a wider struggle against the ruling classes of Britain. In a sketch of likely possibilities for international labor struggle, he suggested that an Irish uprising, combined with insurrectionary initiatives from Western Europe’s most revolutionary country, France, could set in motion the most powerful working class the world had seen up to that time, the British working class: “Although revolutionary initiative will probably come from France, England alone can serve as the lever for a serious economic Revolution. It is the only country where there are no more peasants and where landed property is concentrated in a few hands. It is the only country where *the capitalist form*, that is to say, combined labor on a large scale under the authority of capitalists [*des maîtres capitalistes*], has seized hold of almost the whole of production. It is the only country where the *vast majority of the population consists of wage laborers*....The English have all the *material conditions* [*matière nécessaire*] for social revolution. What they lack is *a sense of generalization and revolutionary passion*. It is only the General Council that can provide them with this, that can thus accelerate the truly revolutionary movement in this country, and consequently *everywhere*....If England is the bulwark of landlordism and European capitalism, the only point where official England can be struck a great blow *is Ireland*” (Marx [1870] 1985d:118–119, trans. slightly altered on basis of French original in Marx [1870] 1966:356–357). Inside Britain, Irish revolutionaries would presumably gain the respect of English workers from their fight against the landowning classes that plebeian elements as a whole despised, helping English workers to overcome their ethnic prejudices and to unite with their Irish brothers and sisters inside the British working class. In weakening the landowners, the military would be weakened as well, making repression of British workers more difficult. Moreover, it is likely that Marx also believed that Irish workers inside Britain would transmit revolutionary consciousness from Ireland into Britain, thereby affecting the working classes as a whole. In this way, Irish national liberation would interact with the British working class to form a solidly based revolutionary movement that could challenge the most powerful economic and political system of the day, the British Empire, perhaps resulting in a worker-peasant revolution across Ireland, Britain, and Europe.

In these 1869–1870 writings on Ireland, Marx does not address directly the possibility that the British rural poor might also join in, but this also would have had to occur for a successful revolutionary uprising. Overall, these writings on Ireland constitute Marx’s most extensively theorized picture of how nationalism (and ethnicity) could interact with class in both revolutionary and non-revolutionary ways. As August Nimtz notes, for Marx after the 1850s, revolutionary initiative “did not reside exclusively in the advanced industrialized world” (2000:204). Marx had already put forth this point in 1863 with respect to Poland’s uprising’s potential effects on Western Europe, but here it was theorized more deeply, in relation to working class revolution rather than democratic revolution more generally. Still later, in the 1880s, Marx theorized that a Western European working-class revolution could be sparked by uprisings based upon agrarian

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Russia's communal peasant villages, as they defended themselves against capitalist encroachment (Dunayevskaya 1982, Shanin 1983). While that set of problems takes us outside the issue of nationalism as such, it is another illustration of Marx's shift from a Western European centered conceptualization of revolution after the 1850s.

Marx's other treatments of nationalism are less developed and less important theoretically. While he wrote supportively about anticolonial resistance by the Chinese and the Indians in their respective conflicts with Britain in the late 1850s, he did not view Chinese or Indian national consciousness as having developed beyond a sort of defense of precolonial structures (Benner 1995). He saw one major exception to this in China, where the anti-dynastic Taiping rebellion exhibited many egalitarian features, including on gender. But at the same time, the brutality and ideological confusion of the Taiping rebels lost them a lot of popular support, sealing their doom at the hands of the imperial regime and the European powers (Anderson 2016).

Another area needs at least to be mentioned, although it does not redound to Marx's credit. Except for his writings on the Poles, Marx condescended toward other Slavic peoples, like the Czechs, the Serbs, and the Bulgarians. He believed that these groups felt a general affinity toward Russia, and that they had therefore backed the side of reaction in 1848 and after. Overall, he viewed them as dominated by the Tsarist-backed Pan-Slavist movement, which was itself quite reactionary. For these reasons, he opposed their national aspirations, arguing that they were overwhelmingly rural peoples without any real history or economic development. They often formed the rank and file of the Austrian army, a major force in repressing revolution, and even more so, the Russian army. As Marx saw it, these small Slavic nations were destined to be absorbed by what he viewed as more progressive, educated, and economically developed nations like the Germans and the Hungarians. And while Engels went further, expressing some ethnocentric and even racist sentiments toward the Slavs, Marx seemed to share most of these sentiments as well, even if perhaps in less virulent form (Nimni 1991, Rosdolsky 1986).

In sum, Marx's writings on Poland and Ireland create a subtle and original portrait of the ways in which failure to support oppressed nations can weaken the working classes. At the same time, they show the need for alliances and even unity between class-based and progressive nationalist movements, to the benefit of both in their struggle against entrenched ruling classes. However, in some of his other writings on nationalism, Marx's writings show more the prejudices of the time than an important theoretical analysis upon which we can draw for today. Nonetheless, the most developed of his writings on nationalism can still give us important insights.

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