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MARX, ENGELS AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION*

EPHRAIM NIMNI

THE WRITINGS OF MARX AND ENGELS on the national question reveal great differences in interpretation from one historical situation to another. In this paper I propose that there is an underlying paradigm which makes their seemingly divergent analyses part of a coherent whole. The main parameters of this paradigm are derived from three conceptions widely considered central to historical materialism: the theory of evolution; the theory of economic determination of the forces of production; and a derivative category of both, the Eurocentric bias in the analysis of concrete case studies.

The theory of *evolution* holds that social transformation can be grasped in universal laws of historical development. History is a progressive series of changes through universal and hierarchically defined stages. There are many variations of this theory, but in broad terms, it is accepted by the vast majority of schools that constitute the Marxist tradition.

The second parameter is the theory of economic determination of the forces of production. This theory is a form of *economic reductionism*, because it declares that all meaningful changes within the social arena take place in the sphere of economic (class) relations. Marx himself expressed this theory in terms of his metaphoric distinction between *base* and *superstructure*. The superstructure is shaped and determined, after various stages of more or less complex mediations, by the processes of change that occur at the level of the base.

The third parameter, the Eurocentric bias in concrete case studies is, strictly speaking, derived from the first two. It is not a

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separate analytical category, and cannot be understood without reference to economic reductionism or the theory of evolution. It warrants separate consideration, however, because of its important methodological consequences when the Marxist analysis of national phenomena is applied to the non-European world. The Marxist tradition is trapped in the paradoxical situation of claiming to be a universal theory of social emancipation, while using an ethnocentric methodology to conceptualize social formations located outside the area of Western culture. *Eurocentrism*, then, refers to the construction of a model of development which universalizes empirically observed European categories of development: social transformation in different societies is understood in terms of a Western developmental rationale; "the country that is more developed industrially shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future" (Marx, 1977, Vol. I, 19).

I will argue that the above-mentioned parameters give coherence and unity to the apparently contradictory positions of Marx and Engels on the national question.

The Problematic Heritage of Marx and Engels

An influential group of Marx-Engels scholars maintains, in a variety of works, that the latter had no theoretically coherent approach to the national question; that Marx and Engels related to every national movement on a purely "*ad hoc*" basis; and that their attitude was often dictated by circumstantial political events (Davis, 1967; Löwy, 1976, 81; Talmon, 1981, 38; Pelczynski, 1984, 262; Haupt, 1974, 13; for a different approach see Walicki, 1982, 375).

Contrary to this position, I argue that Marx and Engels had a coherent view of the national question, even if there is no single literature that directly presents their theories in an explicit way. The social-evolutionary and economic reductionist parameters provide the basis for a theory of the national question which is compatible with the apparently contradictory positions held by the founding fathers of historical materialism in relation to various movements of national emancipation. This largely unwritten, but no less real and influential, perception of the national question provided the intellectual basis for the way in which subse-

quent generations of Marxists have understood the burdensome problem of nationalism.

Two considerations were crucial in the formulation of Marx' and Engels' understanding of the national question: the first was their use of a universal, but at the same time, historically located model for national development. This is the model "state — language — nation." The second concerned the capacity or incapacity of concrete national communities to evolve from "lower" to "higher" stages of development. This is the theory of "historical vs. non-historical" nations. It is necessary to evaluate these two considerations in some detail.

The Pattern "State — Language — Nation"

For Marx and Engels, the "modern nation" was the direct outcome of a process whereby the feudal mode of production was superseded by the capitalist mode of production, causing dramatic concomitant changes in the process of social organization. This event impelled most Western European social formations to evolve into linguistically cohesive and politically centralized units through the formation of "modern states." Thus, what Marx and Engels called "modern nations" only came into existence through the embryonic capitalist economy in transition from feudalism to capitalism. As a direct result of this process, the feudal society was slowly united under the structure of the embryonic modern state. This caused the destruction of local peculiarities, initiating the process of uniformization of populations, which was considered an important condition for the formation of a market economy (Engels, 1977a, 1977b; Haupt and Weill, 1974, 281).

In Marx' view, one of the strongest indicators of uniformization was the emergence and development of Western European languages. A crucial characteristic of the capitalist mode of production is the intensification of the division of labor, coupled with a growing interdependence among units of production, holding together a mass of dispossessed free laborers capable of selling their labor-power in a free market. Capitalism breaks the isolation of feudal units, increasing the interaction of the various participants in the newly formed market. This in turn necessitates a "medium" for efficient communication; thus according to Marx, Western European languages emerged to fulfill this role and to

consolidate distinct and recognizable linguistic units based on the embryonic absolutist state (Haupt and Weill, 1974, 275). This is, in essence, Marx' and Engels' account of the emergence of "modern nations." From this argument it is possible to derive two important criteria that distinguish "modern nations" from more "ancient" national communities: 1) modern nations must hold a population large enough to allow for an internal division of labor which characterizes a capitalist system with its competing classes; and 2) modern nations must occupy a cohesive and "sufficiently large" territorial space to provide for the existence of a "viable state" (Bloom, 1975, 44).

This understanding of the formation of "modern nations" is clearly derived from Marx' and Engels' observation of the process in Western Europe — particularly France, and to a limited extent, England. But above all, it adheres to the view of the French Revolution as the model for national development. The national consolidation that took place after the French Revolution was a model for national formation in other "less developed" parts of the world. Given the importance of the "French model" in Marx' and Engels' thought, it may be useful briefly to discuss the national process in that country, particularly at the time of the French Revolution.

The Jacobins and other French revolutionaries believed that the best way to establish a democratic state was to follow a path of tight centralization and linguistic standardization. They saw the existence of non Parisian-French speaking peoples within the boundaries of the French state as a considerable menace to this process of uniformization. The geographical area occupied by the French absolutist state, however, was in fact inhabited during the best part of the pre-revolutionary period by a conglomerate of linguistic communities, some of which spoke Romance languages (Langue D'Oc, Langue D'Oil, Catalan), others Celtic languages (Breton), and other ancient pre-Latin languages (Euzkera). In reality, the language of the court of Versailles, which subsequently became "French," was spoken by only a minority of the population. During the Middle Ages there were not one but several French languages. Each province spoke and wrote its own "dialect" (Giraud, 1968, 27).

During the period preceding the Revolution the language of Paris began to exercise definitive supremacy, eventually convert-

ing itself into the official language of the state (Doujot, 1946). After the revolution this process was greatly encouraged by the revolutionary government, anxious to create a “national state” with a uniform language for all its citizens. But this task was not at all easy. According to Brunnot (1958, 44–49), of a total population of about 25 million, between six and seven million did not understand Parisian French; a similar number was capable only of holding a very basic conversation in this language; ten million were bilingual, using their respective “dialects” as their mother tongue and Parisian French as the “lingua franca.” Only three million inhabitants of Paris and surrounding areas spoke “French” as their mother tongue, and an even smaller number were literate in this language.

This situation was reported to the 1791 constitutional convention, resulting in intensified efforts by the revolutionary government to spread the use of the French language as fast as possible. Two closely connected factors account for this: the revolutionaries’ wish to create a democratic and tightly centralized state, and the need to ensure the hegemony of the Parisian bourgeoisie against pockets of feudal and aristocratic resistance in remote locations. Given the close association between Parisian French and revolutionary aims, it is hardly surprising that the counterrevolution was stronger in those areas where French was hardly spoken — Brittany, for example. A tightly centralized state was bound to destroy the administrative and cultural autonomy of the non-French national communities.

The combination of cultural imperialism and tight administrative centralization led to an almost complete destruction of the culture and language of the non-Parisian French national communities. As the animosity of the oppressed national communities towards the Parisian bourgeoisie grew, they became the rallying point for counterrevolutionary activities. In response the Jacobins equated the national identity of those unfortunate peoples with counterrevolution, without realizing that it was the Jacobins’ own lack of sensitivity towards their cultural aspirations that was pushing these communities into the arms of the reaction. The Jacobin Deputies Barère and Grégoire presented a report to the constitutional assembly of 1794 with a revealing title: *Report on the Need and Means to Destroy Rural Dialects (Patois) and Universalize the Use of the French Language*. This work eloquently illustrates the

ideas of the Jacobins in relation to what we may call today “national minorities” (Rosdolsky, 1986, 31–32; Salvi, 1973, 477).¹ One year later, the deputies advanced the following revolutionary slogan: “In the one and undivided Republic, the one and undivided use of the language of freedom” — a slogan which, as Rosdolsky argues, conveniently forgot that French was also the language of the court of Versailles and of prerevolutionary absolutism in general.

This tendency to use the French language as the cultural medium for the advancement of revolutionary goals was noted by Marx, in his famous refutation of Lafargue’s attempt to pursue the abolition of all national differences:

... the English laughed very much when I began my speech by saying that our friend Lafargue and others had spoken “*en français*” to us, i.e., a language that nine tenths of the audience did not understand. I also suggested that by the negation of nationalities, he appeared quite unconsciously to understand their absorption by the *model French nation*. (MECW, Vol. 21, 288–9.)

Marx, however, did not draw any theoretical conclusions from this incident, and continued to believe that the “French model” was the universal path for national development. State centralization and national unification with the consequent assimilation of small national communities was the only viable path to social progress. The preference for large centralized states was not only a strategic consideration, but also the basis of Marx’ and Engels’ unwritten conceptualization of the national phenomenon. The framework for this position can be detected in their conceptualization of civil society, the national state, and what they called the “historical nations.”

The concept of “civil society” was taken by Marx from Hegel’s political philosophy. Civil society, for Hegel, is the place where individual self-interest receives its legitimation and becomes

1 Rosdolsky (1964, 100; 1980, 24; 1986, 31) quotes a revealing passage: “Federalism and superstition speak low Breton . . . the emigration and hatred to the republic speak German, the counter-revolution speaks Italian and fanaticism speaks Basque (Euzkera). . . . It is necessary to popularise the (French) language; it is necessary to stop *this linguistic aristocracy* that seems to have established a civilised nation in the midst of barbaric ones” (“Séance du 8 Pluviôse,” *Gazette Nationale, ou le Moniteur Universel*).

emancipated from religious and other considerations, which until the formation of civil society limited the free play of individual interests (Avineri, 1972, 142). This definition of civil society should be not confused with Hegel's definition of the state. Civil society is based on needs of a "lower kind," which are best defined in the concept of *Verstand* (knowledge, understanding in the concrete mechanical sense). The state is the expression of a "higher level of reason" which Hegel calls *Vernunft* (an ethical principle that permits essential understanding or consciousness). For Hegel, the state is the consciousness of freedom, but in a way that permits one to enjoy that freedom "in conjunction with others," while in civil society people realized their freedom with disregard for the freedom of others (Avineri, 1972, 143).

Marx was certainly influenced by the Hegelian conceptualization of civil society and its relation to the state, but he located that relationship in the developmental historicity of both concepts within the process of production. Civil society emerges, for Marx, at a specific stage of development of the productive forces. Here he inherited the evolutionist-universal perspective developed by Hegel; but he explicitly rejected its idealistic base. This becomes clear when Marx argues that the modern state, by its very constitution, is unable to overcome the egoism of civil society, because "mere political emancipation" (the "bourgeois state") leaves intact the world of private interest (civil society). Marx (1974, 57) concludes that:

Civil society embraces the whole material intercourse of individuals within a definite stage of development of productive forces. It embraces the whole commercial and industrial life of a given stage, and, insofar, transcends the state and the nation, though, on the other hand again, it must assert itself in its foreign relations as *nationality* and inwardly must organise itself as state. (Emphasis added.)

This is an important consideration. The *general* form of civil society is present in the more *specific* forms of "state" and "nation," and given that civil society is only the reflection of the dominant forces within it, it follows that in the capitalist mode of production the dominant class (the bourgeoisie) determines the content of civil society, while civil society itself, as described by Marx, *can not* exist outside capitalist relations of production.

The implications of Marx' discussion of civil society are important for the national question. The "modern nation" is a historical phenomenon that has to be located at a precise historical period; this is the era of the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie as a hegemonic class — the period of consolidation of the capitalist mode of production.

In this context the different treatment given by Marx and Engels to different national communities acquires meaning and coherence. The "modern nation" is an epiphenomenal result of the development of the bourgeoisie as the hegemonic class, and the former must be evaluated on the merits of the latter. If it represents a higher stage of development of the productive forces in relation to a pre-determined process of historical change; if it abolishes the feudal system by building a "national state"; then the nationalist movement deserves support as a "tool" for progressive social change. If, however, the nationalist movement emerges among linguistic or cultural communities incapable of surviving the upheavals of capitalist transformation, because they are too small or have a weak or non-existent bourgeoisie, then the nationalist movement becomes a "regressive" force — one which is incapable of overcoming the stage of "peasant-feudal" social organization. Marx and Engels repeatedly argued that national communities incapable of constituting "proper national states" should "vanish" by being assimilated into more "progressive" and "vital" nations.

The conceptualization of the emergence and development of "modern nations" presented in this social-evolutionary and epiphenomenal way may be seen in every analysis of concrete features of national movements in the works of Marx and Engels and constitutes their theory of national development, even though the general theoretical question is not specifically discussed in any single work. There is, however, a problem that must be addressed in order to understand the implications of Marx' and Engels' position on the national question: the terminological ambiguity that recurs in their works.

The Terminological Ambiguity

In different European languages the concepts of "people," "nation" and "nationality" have at times different and confusing

meanings. This situation is further complicated by the no less confusing and indiscriminate use of this terminology in the specialist literature. The terms “nation,” “nationality,” “people,” “nation state,” are either taken as synonyms or to mean different things in different situations, creating a terminological confusion that is seldom clarified with clear-cut definitions (Vilar, 1962, 29). Marx and Engels were not an exception to this rule; the terms “nation” and “nationality” have different meanings in their work (Haupt, 1974, 21).

In English and French the word “nation” usually refers to the population of a sovereign state, but it is sometimes taken to mean clearly identifiable national communities that lack a national state (for example, the Welsh nation or the Catalan nation). The word “nationality” has two different and confusing meanings: 1) a synonym of citizenship, juridical definition of membership of a state usually defined by entitlement to a passport (British nationality, French nationality); and 2) a community of culture and/or descent, which also incorporates some of the meanings of the more contemporary term “ethnicity” (English nationality, Welsh nationality).²

Marx and Engels generally used the word “nation” in its English and French meaning to designate the permanent population of a nation-state. The term “nationality,” however, was used in its Central and Eastern European denotation, to designate an ethno-cultural community that had not achieved full national status because it lacked a state of its own (Rosdolsky, 1965, 337). In Marx’ and Engels’ works, “nationalities” will either become “nations” by acquiring a state of their own (Poland, Ireland), or alternatively they are said to be “historyless peoples” (*Geschichts-*

2 In other Western European languages, the term has a more restricted meaning because the term “people” (*peuple, pueblo, volk* in French, Spanish and German) has a wider ethno-political denotation. In German the term *Nationalität* acquires almost exclusively the denotation (2), since the denotation (1) is covered by the word *Staatsangehörigkeit*. Also the term *Volkszugehörigkeit* defines people of the same (normally German) ancestral ethnic origin, and it is enshrined in the “Transitional Provisions of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany,” article 116 (1), “Definition of German Citizenship.” The other well-known case of an ethnic criterion enshrined in Basic Laws of a state is the State of Israel; see sections (1) and (4) of the “Law of Return.” In Slavic languages, the term *narod* and related forms has also an ethno-political denotation. For a recent discussion of the lack of an English equivalent for the Russian *narodnost*, see the illuminating article by T. Shanin (1986, 113ff).

losen Völker), national communities that lack “historical vitality” because of their inability to consolidate a national state. For Marx and Engels, these “non-historical nationalities” are intrinsically reactionary because of their inability to adapt to the capitalist mode of production. This is because their survival is only guaranteed in the old order; so, by necessity, they have to be regressive to avoid extinction.

Consequently, modern nations are for Marx and Engels what we today call “nation states”: ethno-cultural and linguistic communities with their own state. Nationalities are ethno-cultural and linguistic groups not developed into full nations because they lack their own state. This model of national formation is greatly inspired by the historical development of the French and, to a lesser extent, the British case, which by nature of being “the most advanced nations” must serve as a model for “less developed” national communities.

There is however, another dimension to Marx’ and Engels’ discussion of national communities. *Nations*, as noted earlier, were for Marx one of the concrete forms of the general form “civil society.” Civil society only comes into existence as a specific configuration of certain classes. Since the bourgeoisie is the universally dominant class, civil society gives legitimacy to bourgeois class domination by creating the impression that the class requirements of the bourgeoisie to reproduce its conditions of existence are the “general” requirements of society as a whole. Thus, the state in its “national” form must promote the best possible conditions for fulfillment of these “general” requirements, which point toward the “final goal” of abolishing capitalist relations of production. This has far-reaching consequences for the “nation,” which can be schematized in the following way: Abolition of capitalism will cause the abolition of: a) civil society as an entity reproducing the conditions of existence of class societies; b) the bourgeoisie as the hegemonic class of civil society and the proletariat as the subordinated oppressed class; c) the state as the instrument through which the bourgeoisie controls civil society; and d) the nation as the framework for the existence of the bourgeois state.

The nation, as the framework for the existence of the capitalist (national) state, creates a “linguistic unit” that is essential in consolidating the conditions of existence of capitalism, by gen-

erating a medium of communication (language) and a focus of identity which gives a general appearance to the sectarian interests of the bourgeoisie (nationalism). Thus, in terms of this unilinear and Eurocentric process of development, the nation is crucially linked to the capitalist state, because *both* are concrete epiphenomenal expressions of “civil society” — the mechanism which created them in the first place. Once the state is abolished (or withers away), a similar fate awaits the nation. Consider the statement in the *Communist Manifesto*:

... the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.

This is a tactical ploy to gain power from the bourgeoisie on its own terrain, since the nation will be abolished by the advancing tide of history:

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. The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster.

Marx and Engels expected the proletariat to become the “national class” for a short period, believing that this is a transitional but historically necessary step in order to advance to a “higher” stage, the abolition of the national state. In this sense Marx’ ironic remarks on Lafargue’s speech do not indicate that he rejected the abolition of nations as such, but merely that he rejected the idea that this stage of development had come to pass at the time of the meetings of the First International.

The parameters of analysis outlined in the introduction help to give coherence to the apparently contradictory formulations of Marx and Engels on the national question. Their support for the right to self determination in the Irish and Polish case, as well as their opposition to self-determination for the so-called “South Slavs,” can be explained in terms of the rigid evolutionary model, the epiphenomenal economism, and the Western Eurocentric approach that permeated their interpretations. These parameters of analysis, concerned as they were with the universal effect of the

transformation of the productive forces, are insensitive to the specific circumstances that generate the emergence of concrete national movements. Classical Marxist epistemology is concerned only with the impact of universal processes of social transformation, and is therefore blind to all those aspects that cannot be directly derived from the laws of political economy. The nation is understood as a residual creation of the productive forces to secure the conditions of domination of the bourgeoisie during the transition to, and consolidation of, the capitalist mode of production. A clear effect of this understanding is the most unfortunate aspect of Marx' and Engels' conceptualization of the national question: the theory of nations "without history."

The Theory of Nations "Without History"

Božě! . . . , Ach nikdo není na zemi Kdoby Slavům (sic) spravedlivost činil?³

The way in which Marx and Engels related to a number of stateless or numerically small national communities has been a source of both embarrassment and amazement for a considerable number of commentators within the Marxist tradition, from the second international right up to recent works on the subject (Kautsky, 1978; Davis, 1967, 73; Haupt, 1974, 22; Löwy, 1976, 83). However the most detailed and illuminating discussion can be found in R. Rosdolsky's seminal work. With the exception of Rosdolsky's thorough and illuminating research, there have been few attempts to understand Marx' and Engels' position on the subject, and no attempt to locate it in the context of their overall theoretical positions. The following discussion will try to provide a link between the theory of non-historical nations and the general Marxist views on the national question.

As has been noted, the idea of progressive centralization as the economy develops from a lower to a higher stage is at the heart of Marx' and Engels' analysis of the national question. It is therefore hardly surprising to find that Marx and Engels re-

³ "God!, is there anybody in this earth that will do justice to the Slavs?"; the desperate plight of the Czechs, disdainfully quoted by Engels in a letter to Kautsky on February 1882 (*MEW*, Vol. 35, 272; quoted by Rosdolsky, 1964, 197; 1980, 136; 1986, 137).

garded every form of nationalist ideology and activity as aimed towards the formation and consolidation of national states. Nationalist ideology is for Marx, a mere epiphenomena of the growth of the nation (Smith, 1973, 21). One of the main problems with this pattern of analysis is that it leads on the one hand to a gross overestimation of the structural need of the bourgeoisie to build a national state, and on the other hand to a parallel underestimation of cultural and ethnic factors (insofar as they are not explained as epiphenomena of the economy) in the formation of national communities. The problem here is not only the use of Western European models of development, but also a "capital-centered" emphasis in the discussion of all aspects of national phenomena. Nationalist movements and national communities are always defined in terms of their functionality within the capitalist system (Galliot, 1979, 809). Once the goal of national communities is defined to be the formation of national states, the resultant problem in this over-simplified analysis is how to explain the existence and behavior of nationalist movements that are neither capable of forming, nor willing to form, a national state.

If, in accordance with the Marxian interpretation, the growth of the nation only heralds the formation of national states so that the bourgeoisie can secure its hegemonic position, then national communities incapable of constituting national states are acting against "the tide of history." They perform a "reactionary function," since they cannot develop a "healthy" and hegemonic bourgeoisie, a condition "*sine qua non*" for the subsequent proletarian revolution. This analysis, however, leads to an even more serious and disturbing conclusion: these usually small national communities are not only "functionally" reactionary, but *intrinsically* reactionary relics of the past, which must disappear to pave the way for social progress. Since the only purpose of national agitation is the drive to build a national state, national communities that because of their size are not viable independent economic units have no "*raison d'être*." If these national communities wish to follow a path of national revival, they will become "socially regressive," since they cannot adapt to the capitalist mode of production and therefore have to remain "feudal enclaves" in order to subsist as independent entities. Furthermore, these "feudal enclaves" have no other choice but to "closely associate" with those reactionary forces that oppose the "progressive"

unifying role of the bourgeoisie. These unfortunate national communities (“ethnographic monuments” in Engels’ words) must culturally and politically perish in order to make way for the unifying role of the bourgeoisie.

The central idea behind this dubious concept of “non-historical nations” is that peoples (*Völker*) who had proven to be unable to build a state over a period of time will never be able to do so (Davis, 1967, 2). Hegel makes a sharp distinction between “nations” and “states.” For Hegel, a group of people may exist as a nation, but in such a condition the nation is unable to contribute to the unfolding of world history. A nation, according to Hegel, will only fulfill its “historical mission” if it is capable of building a stable state. Therefore it is not an accident that what Hegel calls “uncivilized peoples” have no history, because they have been proven “incapable of having a state.”

These idealistic speculations are perhaps one of the weakest features of Hegel’s political philosophy and are certainly in direct opposition to a historical materialist conception of history. It is indeed strange to find this conceptualization echoed in the works of the founders of historical materialism. The revival of Hegelian terminology, particularly in the context of the 1848 revolutions, was coupled with increasing usage of abusive language *vis-à-vis* communities that did not conform to the path to national development discussed above. The intense hostility of Marx and Engels towards these national communities can be ascertained from the following quotations.

Spaniards and Mexicans:

The Spaniards are indeed degenerate. But a degenerate Spaniard, a Mexican that is the ideal. All vices of the Spaniards — Boastfulness, Grandiloquence, and Quixoticism — are found in the Mexicans raised to the third power. (Marx, corresp., December 1847, in Aguilar, 1969, 67.)

Scandinavians:

Scandinavism is enthusiasm for the brutal, sordid, piratical old Norse national traits, for the deep inner life which is unable to express its exuberant ideas and sentiments in words, but can express them in deeds, namely in rudeness towards women, perpetual drunkenness and wild berserk frenzy alternating with tearful sentimentality . . . Obviously, the more primitive a nation is, the more closely its

customs and way of life resemble those of the old Norse people, the more "scandinavian" it must be. (MECW, Vol. 7, 422.)

Chinese:

It is almost needless to observe that, in the same measure in which opium has obtained the sovereignty over the Chinese, the Emperor and his staff of pedantic mandarins have become dispossessed of their own sovereignty. It would seem as though history had first to make this whole people drunk before it could rise them out of their hereditary stupidity. (Marx, "Revolution in China and in Europe," *New York Daily Tribune*, 14 June 1853, in Avineri, ed., 1969, 68.)

North African Bedouins:

The struggle of the Bedouins was a hopeless one, and though the manner in which brutal soldiers like Bugeaud have carried on the war is highly blameworthy, the conquest of Algeria is an important and fortunate fact for the progress of civilisation . . . and even if we may regret that the liberty of the Bedouins of the desert has been destroyed, we must not forget that these same Bedouins were a nation of robbers, whose principal means of living consisted in making excursions upon each other. . . . (Engels, in Avineri, ed., 1969, 47.)

This is only a sample; Marx and Engels were, to put it mildly, impatient with and intolerant of ethnic minorities. It is possible to ascertain this from their private correspondence, in which the most infamous example is the characterization of Lasalle as a "Jewish Nigger."⁴ But the dichotomy "historical/non-historical nations" was revived by Marx and Engels in the context of the 1848 revolution while discussing the revival to national life of the Czechs, Slovaks, Ukrainians (Ruthenians), and Serbs, all of which were Eastern European national communities that spoke Slavonic-related languages. These diverse national communities were constituted into a fictitious unit called the "Southern Slavs."

If the conditions of a national community do not allow for the formation of a "viable" state, the national community has to

4 "It is now perfectly clear to me that, as testified by his cranial formation and hair growth, he is descended from the negroes who joined Moses' exodus from Egypt (unless his paternal mother or grandmother was crossed with a nigger). Well this combination of Jewish and Germanic stock with the negroid basic substance is bound to yield a strange product" (Marx to Engels on 30 July 1862; *MEW*, Vol. 30, 259, English translation in Raddatz, ed., 1981).

assimilate to a larger state and a more viable national community, with “democracy as compensation” (MECW, 227, 362–8). But not only is this process of national assimilation highly desirable in Marx’ and Engels’ view; it also cannot be opposed. Nations that are incapable of forming national states and still persist in their claim to nationhood oppose the inexorable process of capitalist development. The conclusion was that, if national survival is to occur, the national community in question must seek to return to the state of affairs that preceded capitalist transformation, a retrograde step in the evolution of humanity.

In this context, as Rosdolsky rightly argues, the old Hegelian terminology served a very useful purpose in the analysis of the Slavonic national communities. These unfortunate peoples were defined as “non-historical,” in much the same way as Hegel used the term for the same peoples a century before. These national communities were understood as incapable of having national states of their own because they were either “too small” or they lived in areas of mixed population, in the midst of a “more energetic stock” (usually German, but also Magyar), in a situation in which the other national community was considered “more advanced” and “better equipped” in terms of its ability to build a national state.

Bohemia and Croatia (another disjected member of the Slavonic family, acted upon by the Hungarian, as Bohemia by the German) were the homes of what is called on the European continent “Panslavism.” Neither Bohemia nor Croatia was strong enough to exist as a nation by herself. Their respective nationalities, gradually undermined by the action of historical causes that inevitably absorbs into a *more energetic stock*, could only hope to be restored to anything like independence by an alliance with other Slavonic nations. (Marx, “Panslavism — The Schleswig Holstein War,” in Aveling, ed., 1971, 48, emphasis added.)

Thus, if the Slavonic East European nationalities cannot constitute national states, their only hope for survival was to constitute a federation of “Slavonic Nations,” under the leadership of the Czar of all Russia, the “bulwark of European reaction.” The democratic movement in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy will assimilate these “remnants of peoples,” transforming their culture and national identity into the “superior” German and Magyar culture, granting to them a democratic way of life as compensa-

tion. But given that national communities persisted in preserving their “backward” national identities and culture, they could only subsist on condition that they locate themselves within the sphere of influence of the equally “backward” semi-feudal Russian absolutism.

Engels (MECW, Vol. 8, 234–5) provided the theoretical justification for this view:

There is no country in Europe which does not have in some corner or other one or several fragments of peoples, the remnant of a former population that was suppressed and held in bondage by the nation which later became the main vehicle for historical development. These relics of a nation, mercilessly trampled under the course of history . . . always become fanatical standard bearers of counter revolution and remain so until their *complete extirpation* or loss of their national character, just as their whole existence in general is itself a protest against a great historical revolution.

Such in Scotland are the Gaels, the supporters of the Stuarts from 1640 to 1745.

Such in France are the Bretons, the supporters of the Bourbons from 1742 to 1800.

Such in Spain are the Basques, the supporters of Don Carlos.

Such in Austria are the panslavist Southern Slavs, who are nothing but residual fragments of peoples, resulting from an extremely confused thousand years development. This residual fragment, which is likewise extremely confused, sees its salvation only in the reversal of the whole European movement, which in its view ought to go not from west to east, but from east to west . . .

Here we find with unusual clarity the repetition of the Eurocentric pattern which first emerged with the French revolution. The revolution will destroy the particularism of small nationalities, incorporating them into the “higher” and more “developed” nations, becoming in this way the vehicle for emancipation from feudalism and superstition. German is the “language of liberty” for the Czechs in Bohemia, in the same way as French is the “language of liberty” for the Occitans and Bretons in the French State. In the same way as the Jacobins perceived the non-French nationalities as intrinsically reactionary, Marx and Engels so perceived the “South Slavs” in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Rosdolsky, 1964, 100; 1980, 24; 1986, 34).

The same argument that so strongly denies the right to self-determination and historical continuity of the “non-historical” nations also sustains a strong justification for the emancipation

and state independence of the so-called “historical nations.” These are national communities capable of being agents of historical transformation, that will further the formation of a strong capitalist economy. Marx and Engels strongly supported the right to state independence of the Irish and Poles, since they were considered historical nations that did not have a national state. In this sense, the right to self-determination (meaning state independence) is not an absolute right; it is the right of “some” nations — those which are capable of being “agents” or “vehicles” of social transformation, for themselves and for the nations that oppress them. The most important example was Poland (MECW, Vol. 7, 350–351).

Similar observations were made by Marx and Engels on the Irish question. They reasoned that England cannot embark on a true revolutionary path until it “got rid” of the Irish problem. Marx conclusively shows how the occupation of Ireland “underdeveloped” the country by making it an appendix of the British economy (Marx, 1977, Vol. I, 652–666). The separation and independence of Ireland from England was not only a vital step for Irish development, but also was essential for the British people since “a nation that oppresses another forges its own chains, because the average English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers wages and standard of life,” and this proletarian antagonism is nourished by the bourgeoisie in its goal to divide the workers (Marx and Engels, 1974, 258–60).

But this analysis is not applicable to the “non-historical nations,” and there is no *contradiction* or *incoherence*. The Irish and Polish national movements are perceived to advance the course of “progress” by constituting national states capable of developing a “healthy” contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, their state independence will be a considerable help for the proletarian struggles within the nations that subjugate them. The “non-historical” nations, by contrast, cannot develop a bourgeoisie, because they either are “peasant nations,” or cannot develop a state of their own, or live in a mixed area of residence, or are too small to create an internal market. In these conditions, the “non-historical” nations must seek alliances with the defenders of “the old order,” since this is the only way to secure their survival. The “irresistible flow of progress” requires the voluntary assimilation or the annihilation of these national

communities. If they persist in maintaining their national identity in alliance with reactionary forces, they will be simply “trampled over” by the forces of progress.

The contrast between Marx’ and Engels’ perceptive discussion of the Irish question and their ethnocentric attitude towards the “South Slavs” puzzled and surprised many observers and commentators. The most common explanation is that they had “no theory” on the national question, and the inconsistencies are the direct result of their “ad hoc” positions. Marx’ and Engels’ discussions of concrete national situations are considered to be connected to circumstantial political events and are seen to be devoid of any theoretical significance. This is the position of, among others, Löwy (1976, 81) and Davis (1967, 79–82).

I argue, however, that the presence of important traces of Hegelian historicism in their universal evolutionary theory, and the related understanding of the national state as a historical construct to secure the conditions of existence of the bourgeoisie, make an “*ad hoc*” discussion of the national question unthinkable. If all historical devices have a functional purpose in terms of the overall movement of history, it is inconceivable that the national phenomenon should be an exception. On the contrary, the systemic view of the evolution of humanity through different modes of production and their concomitant forms of social organization must provide the analytical tools to conceptualize the nation within definite historical boundaries. The “modern nation state” is for Marx and Engels that which secures the conditions of existence of the bourgeoisie, and as such it is intimately bound to the latter, for as Cutler *et al.* (1978, Vol. I, 216ff) argue, it is an absurdity to state that something secures the conditions of existence of something else that does not exist. Consequently, the emergence of every national state is indissolubly linked with the universalization of the capitalist mode of production and the hegemony of the bourgeoisie. The viability or otherwise of every national state is tested against this fundamental theoretical assumption. Each of Marx’ and Engels’ concrete analyses of a specific national community, from the firm advocacy of the right to self-determination of the Irish and Poles to the harsh treatment of the “Southern Slavs,” is guided by this principle, which gives meaning to every concrete analysis.

A second influential explanation of the embarrassing state-

ments about the “Southern Slavs” is provided by S. Bloom (1975, 49). Referring to Engels’ scornful attacks, he argues that most of them must not be taken into account, because Engels was more prone to political generalizations and he was rather more severe than Marx with small nations. The implication of this argument is that Marx should be disassociated from this analysis; it was Engels who promoted the use of Hegelian terminology as well as being guilty of a certain German jingoism in his youth. This explanation is also partly accepted by Davis. Rosdolsky (1964, 87; 1980, 10; 1986, Foreword) appears also to suggest the same argument.

This conclusion is unjustified, for two main reasons: first, as was shown above, Marx also indulged in derogatory denunciation of small and non-western European national communities. Second, and even more important, it is unthinkable that Marx and Engels in a situation of close collaboration and joint revolutionary work, would disagree over such a fundamental question. As David Fernbach rightly suggests in his introduction to the 1848 writings, Engels’ recurrent use of Hegelian terminology was mainly a consequence of the division of labor between the two partners. Engels was in charge of the national question and in the hypothetical case that the senior partner was in disagreement with the views of the junior partner, he never made this disagreement explicit. If such a disagreement existed, this would have been an extraordinary situation, given the importance of the issue during the period 1848–52.

F. Mehring, in a comprehensive study of the writings of Marx and Engels in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, argues that there is no clear way to determine the origin of the majority of the leading articles in this newspaper (most of the attacks on the “South Slavs” appeared there), which as a rule were written in close collaboration between the two partners. Consequently, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the articles using the Hegelian derogatory terminology were written in close collaboration and agreement, and were *not* the result of Engels’ idiosyncratic perception of the problem (Herod, 1976, 19).

Another perhaps more sophisticated interpretation is discussed in G. Haupt and C. Weill’s (1974, 284) well-documented article on the Marxian heritage on the national question. According to these authors, the persistent use of Hegelian terminology should be understood in the context in which it was used, namely the arena of political action. Consequently, this terminology is

neither the result of any aprioristic elaboration, nor does it arise from careful and systematic thinking concerning the problems involved. It arises from the revolutionary fervor of the 1848 revolutions. In this situation Marx and Engels perceived the task of the democratic and revolutionary forces to be: a) the destruction of the political system established in the Congress of Vienna of 1815; and b) the independence of "big" historical nations oppressed by multinational empires.

This strategy, however, did not take into account the interests of the small national communities (which Marx and Engels considered to be "backward peasant nations"), and which needed the equilibrium of the multinational empire to counteract the assimilationist pressures of their larger neighbors in order to maintain their national individuality. In this situation, the movements for national revival among the small Slavic national communities were pushed by the incapacity of the revolutionary movement to provide a solution to their national aspirations into the arms of the counterrevolutionaries, because by preserving the "status quo" they were not forcing assimilation upon themselves.⁵ Thus, according to Haupt and Weill (1974, 287) Marx and Engels drew theoretical conclusions from the transitory and conjunctural circumstances of the 1848 revolution, by defining these unfortunate peoples as "intrinsically reactionary."

While Haupt and Weill's hypothesis has the important merit of providing a plausible historical context for Marx' and Engels' bizarre analysis, it is still not entirely satisfactory for two main reasons: first, Marx and Engels maintained their strong animosity towards the small central European national communities over most of their political career. In 1855, in an article in the *New York Daily Tribune*; Marx argued that "one part of the Austrian Slavs consists of tribes whose history belongs to the past" (Herod, 1976, 33), and Engels (MEW, Vol. 18, 586) repeated this same argument in an article about Russia. In 1882, one year before the

5 This situation, 50 years later, was well understood by the Austrian socialists, who in the Brno (Brünn) Programme incorporated a number of important safeguards to protect the rights of these small national communities. See "Protokoll Über die Verhandlungen des Gesamt-Parteitag des sozialdemokratischen Arbeiterpartei in Österreich, Brünn," Spanish translation in *La Segunda Internacional y el Problema Nacional y Colonial*, 1978, Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente, Mexico, Siglo XXI Editores, 73, Vol 1, 181–217. For a summary and evaluation in English of the Brno (Brünn) Programme, see Kogan (1949, 204–217).

death of Marx, Engels declared in response to a criticism by Kautsky that he had no sympathy for the small slavonic groups and “ruins of nations,” who looked to the Czar for salvation. In 1885, two years after the death of Marx, Engels, in a letter to August Bebel (MEW, Vol. 36, 390) argued:

The European War is beginning to seriously threaten us. These miserable remnants of former nations — Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks and other dishonest rabble [Räubergesindel] — over which philistine liberals gush in the interests of Russia, are unwilling to grant each other the very air they breathe and seem to be compelled to cut each others’ greedy throats. That each of these tiny tribes can determine whether Europe is to be at war or peace serves these nationalistic philistines right. The first shot has been fired at the Dragoman, where and when the last shot will be fired, no-one knows.

Second, as shown earlier in this paper, Marx and Engels used their offensive terminology, and the Hegelian concepts, not only in writing about the “Southern Slavs,” but also with respect (or rather disrespect) to other national communities. In using this terminology, Marx and Engels created a system of *equivalences* which clearly implied the use of a dichotomous analysis of national communities. On one side were the “historical” great European nations — on the whole, the standard bearers of the process of “civilization and progress.” On the other were the small and non-western and central European nations — on the whole, “barbaric and reactionary.” This dichotomous conceptualization implies that the pattern of national development of Western and Central Europe should be considered “normal” and “universal,” and lack of compliance with it implies a reaction and retrogression. In conceptualizing national phenomena in this way, the emerging theoretical categories of analysis go beyond the specific case of the 1848 revolutions.

Otto Bauer, in his monumental work on the national question (Vienna, 1975, Vol. I, 270–292), provides a highly ingenious way out of this embarrassing analysis, by arguing that the concept of “non-historical nations” is not an absolute criterion, but the result of a set of historical circumstances occurring at a particular period in the process of development of the forces of production. In a different set of circumstances connected with the development of a more “advanced” stage of capitalist development, these “non-historical” nations will “awake to national life.” Bauer felt uneasy

about the categorical and deterministic use of the concepts of “historical” vs. “non-historical” nations, but nevertheless accepted them as the theoretical point of departure, if only to radically change their meaning.

Rosdolsky’s Critique of the Concept of “Non-Historical Nations”

But it is above all the distinguished Ukrainian Marxist scholar Roman Rosdolsky who, without any doubt, provides the most comprehensive, detailed and scholarly written work on the subject of the “non-historical” nations (Rosdolsky, 1964, 1980, 1986). Fortunately, this important work has recently been translated into English.⁶ Even if some of Rosdolsky’s conclusions appear to lack sufficient critical discussion, the work should be praised for its detailed evaluation and systematic use of primary sources.

The first part of Rosdolsky’s work is devoted to a comprehensive presentation of the attitudes of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* and of Marx and Engels towards each of the Eastern European national communities under discussion, attempting an initial tentative explanation of the reasons for their attitude towards these national communities. According to Rosdolsky (1964, 91–92; 1980, 15; 1986, 25–26), one factor that must be taken into account is the complexity of the national problem in Austria, and the difficulties faced by anyone attempting to provide a solution to the conflicting claims of the national movements under consideration:

On one side were plebeian peoples, only just awakened to a new historical life, without their own national bourgeoisie and working class, as yet scarcely capable of building their own states. On the other side, however, was the German

6 The excellent English translation of Rosdolsky’s work by John-Paul Himka (1986) is from the second edition published in Berlin and Vienna by Olle & Walter in 1979, while most contemporary references as well as the Spanish translation (1980) refer to the first German edition in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* (1964). While according to Himka, the second edition is “a photographic reprint of the first” (1986, Introduction, 10), it includes some revised notes by Rosdolsky’s widow. Also, the English translator went through the painstaking task of checking and correcting all citations against original sources, as well as referring to standard English translations of the works of Marx and Engels. Consequently, wherever possible I refer to the first German edition (1964), to the Spanish translation (1980) and to the revised second edition translated into English (1986).

bourgeoisie, which felt as much at home in the Slavic lands of the monarchy as it did in Germany itself, since it inhabited the cities of these lands and commanded their trade and industry. Because of its whole class situation, the German bourgeoisie was as little capable of renouncing its privileged position as the Hungarian or Polish nobility was of renouncing the exploitation and domination of its subjects (*Hintersassen*)⁷ who spoke a foreign tongue.

This situation of clear cultural and political domination by the German bourgeoisie over territories inhabited by national communities of Slavic descent and culture made the acceptance of any form of national emancipation of the latter (meaning national-territorial state sovereignty) by the German bourgeoisie an impossible situation. In this sense, Rosdolsky argues that to ask the German bourgeoisie to voluntarily give up its hegemonic position in these Slavonic countries was tantamount to questioning the ability of the German bourgeoisie to participate in the revolution. So, according to Rosdolsky, Marx and Engels found themselves in an acute dilemma: if they supported the emerging national communities this would certainly alienate the German bourgeoisie, the “most advanced class at the time” and the very basis of the 1848 revolutionary fervor. Thus, Marx and Engels had “no other choice” but to support the “progressive bourgeoisie,” even if this meant encouraging harsh and savage national repression of the “non-viable” national communities. “The Czech provinces were, according to Rosdolsky who quotes Marx in *Herr Vogt*, “in the middle of Germany,” and in a language that is more in tune with a reactionary and nostalgic “*völkisch*” nationalist rhetoric than the analytical wit of a distinguished Marxist scholar, he argues that if the Slavic national communities were to constitute national states, they would have represented “*Einem Dorn in Fleische des künftigen grossdeutschen Reiches bilden*” (“A thorn in the flesh of the future Great German Reich”) (Rosdolsky, 1964, 93; 1980, 16; 1986, 26). If this was not enough, there was, according to Rosdolsky, a second major problem: the “underdevelopment” of the Szechs and other “Southern Slav” national communities *vis-à-vis* the Ger-

7 The word *Hintersassen* has no precise English equivalent; in the English translation it has been translated as “subject.” According to Garcia Pelayo, it is a juridical term of medieval origin that designates all those who did not have property rights and were in a servile relation to feudal landlords. At a later period, the term was used to designate the lower and poorer classes that only had restricted rights to citizenship and property. The term was used up to the nineteenth century.

man bourgeoisie. For the Czechs and the South Slavs were “neither mature, nor strong enough” to establish independent national states; had states been formed, these could all too easily have become “bounty of Czarism” (*Beute des Zarismus*) and “vanguard positions” (*Vorposten*) of the latter in Central Europe.

By posing the problem in these terms, Rosdolsky is falling into the same *paradigmatic trap* that made the Marxian analysis so insensitive to the plight and national awakening of national communities which did not conform to the pattern of national development of West European national states. In this sense Rosdolsky is repeating Marx’ epiphenomenal analysis by arguing that a) every national movement exists to build a national state; and b) national awakening is only progressive where there is a strong bourgeoisie. Rosdolsky, however, qualifies his analysis by arguing that the danger of counterrevolution would have been kept under control if these national communities had achieved autonomy and equality of rights at the cultural, linguistic, and political levels. But he asks the rhetorical question, “What could have moved the German bourgeoisie to unilaterally resign their privileges?” To suggest a program of national cultural autonomy, as was suggested 50 years later in the Brno (Brünn) congress of the “All Austrian” (*Gesamtpartei*) Socialist Party, was a utopian solution.

Rosdolsky concludes his analysis by arguing that given the conjunctural relations of forces, the German revolution could only give power to the German bourgeoisie and to the Hungarian and Polish aristocracy, its junior partners. This argument leads Rosdolsky to the conclusion that the victory of the revolutionary forces would have had to coincide with an even greater oppression of the so-called “non-historical” nations. He attempts a critical defense of the German left and of Marx and Engels when he argues (1964, 194; 1980, 133; 1986, 131) that it was impossible for them “to identify objectives that went beyond this objective ‘barrier’ of the revolution.”

Consequently, “the left” was unable to reconcile the antagonisms which, according to Rosdolsky, were “irreconcilable” at that particular historical period. In this situation, Rosdolsky argues, the left had “no other option” but to take, positions “in favour” of the “progressive” bourgeoisie and to declare as their “natural enemies” the populations that resisted the political hegemony of the German bourgeoisie and the Polish and Hungarian nobility. In other words, the German left had to declare entire

national communities “counterrevolutionary.” This posed a theoretical problem:

This unusual distinction between nations and not between social classes had to be explained, this is to say, deduced, from the history or from the *nature* of these nations. In this situation it seemed “natural” for the revolutionary “left” to recur to the traditional Hegelian doctrine of “historical” and “non-historical” peoples (*Völkern*) as a mechanism for self deceit, escaping to the terrain of historical mythology to cover for the fatal objective difficulties of the revolution. The Hegelian reminiscences of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* were very useful for this purpose. (1964, 194; 1980, 133; 1986, 131.)

Rosdolsky’s arguments can be summarised as follows. a) The “objective” conditions did not allow for the emancipation of the “South Slavs”; even had it been possible for them to gain some form of national emancipation, they were too “backward” to constitute modern nations. b) The revolutionary “left” had no alternative but to oppose the demands of these unfortunate national communities, even if they were struggling against a vicious form of oppression. The victory of the bourgeoisie was supposed to pave the way for the eventual emancipation of humanity as a whole in the form of the impending proletarian revolution. If in order to achieve this goal whole national communities were culturally and politically obliterated, the left had to shrug its shoulders and wonder about “the heavy price” paid for “progress.” So the “mistakes” of the revolutionary left were conditioned by historical circumstances and were in this sense, unavoidable. Thus, one must not judge them in terms of our “contemporary perceptions of the national question,” but in terms of the historical circumstances of the period in question (1964, 240ff; 1980, 184ff; 1986, 180ff).

Rosdolsky’s conclusions are problematic in a number of ways: First, the theory of “nations without history” was applied, as Rosdolsky is well aware, not only to the small Slavonic national communities. They were also applied to a variety of nations, both large and small, which in Marx’ and Engels’ judgment were not capable of a revolutionary transformation of their societies (the Welsh, the Scots, the Quebecois and the Mexicans are but a few examples). The widespread use of the theory denotes a more systematic conceptualization than the conjunctural explanation proposed by Rosdolsky appears to indicate.

Second, it seems that Rosdolsky also falls into the paradigmatic trap which leads logically to the theory of “non-historical nations.” This is clear from Rosdolsky’s argument that historical circumstances were not yet “ripe” for the emancipation of the “Southern Slav” national communities. By sustaining this argument, he implicitly accepts the teleological model of social evolution behind the Hegelian theory of “non-historical” peoples. This considerably weakens his case against Marx’ and Engels’ abusive attitude towards the “South Slavs.”

Third, Rosdolsky fails to see the link between his well-documented section on Marx’ and Engels’ evaluation of the national question and the overall theory of evolution developed by them. Rosdolsky argues that the “revolutionary left” could not overcome the “objective” circumstances in which the struggle for the emancipation of the Southern Slav national communities was taking place, and it therefore had to oppose their struggle for national emancipation to prevent further delays in the development of a “revolutionary” class (the bourgeoisie). The problem in this argument is not the “objective” conditions, but the use of epistemological constructs which lead to a concept of the lack of maturity of the “objective” conditions. Rather than the “objective” circumstances, it was the numbing effect of the epiphenomenalist epistemology that prevented the German “left” from conceptualizing the national problem in a way that takes into account the national development of the “South Slavs.” Marxist epistemology required the definition of a developmental continuum in which the national state must be historically located to function as a vehicle for the crystallization of bourgeois power. National communities that do not follow this developmental path cannot “fit” the theoretical model, and are declared “deviant exceptions” to be rectified at the best possible opportunity. This is perhaps the single most important explanation for the lack of a sensitive analysis of the national phenomenon in the works of Marx and Engels, as well as in subsequent generations of Marxists discussing the national question.

Conclusion

Contrary to the assertions of Bloom, Davis, Löwy, Rosdolsky, Haupt and Weill, and other analysts and commentators on the

work of Marx and Engels on the national question, it has been argued that their work can be understood as a coherent corpus of literature, even if the theoretical arguments which sustain their discussions have not been explicitly conceptualized. The “modern nation” is a clearly defined and historically located political phenomenon. It represents a mechanism for consolidating and securing the conditions of existence of the bourgeoisie. The theory of the “non-historical nations” is not a curiosity, a slip of the tongue, an *ad hoc* argument, or a regrettable mishap. It is rather the result of the formulation of the rigid and dogmatic universal laws of social evolution that define the precise historical location of the “modern nation” and by default render obsolete national communities that cannot fulfill this rigid Eurocentric political criterion. All this gives meaning to the evolutionist epiphenomenalism that colored Marx’ and Engels’ analysis of the national question.

The analytical parameters outlined in the introduction inform the conceptual requirement that every “modern nation” must form a national state to further the development of the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, the formation of a national state is a *sine qua non* functional requirement for the survival of a national community in a capitalist mode of production. National communities incapable of forming national states are hindering the development of the progressive centralization and uniformization of humanity, and must therefore, assimilate to more “vital” and “energetic” nations capable of forming national states with democracy “as compensation.” The national state is the condition for a mature bourgeoisie and the requisite for the final contradiction that will render both the nation and the state historically obsolete. The “model” for national development is that of the “large” Western European nations, particularly France, but also British England, which is considered a “successful case” of assimilation of the Celtic fringe, with the important exception of Ireland — a “historical” nation.

This perception of the national community is the nucleus of the misleading heritage of European Marxism. It informed the main debates in the Second and Third Internationals, and formed the framework in which subsequent generations of Marxists thought the national question. The epistemological requirement locating the national phenomenon within a hierarchical, universal and developmental continuum must be seriously challenged, if the Marxist tradition is to provide a more sensitive

discussion of the multi-dimensionality of the national arena. Only those Marxist theories capable of breaking with the abortive rigidities of the above-mentioned parameters managed to provide a more sensitive analysis of the national phenomenon. The work of Otto Bauer is perhaps the single most important exception to this misleading analytical stance.

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