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**Marx at the Margins:
On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies
By Kevin B. Anderson**

Review by George Karavas

Reprints of Marx's writing couldn't fill the shelves of some bookstores fast enough as the Global Financial Crisis in 2008 raised doubts about the prospects of global capitalism. The renewed interest in Marx has emerged alongside an increasingly visible impact of industrialisation in the non-Western world, where migration from rural to urban areas and the transition from peasantry to wage labour has been occurring on an unprecedented scale (Hudis 2010: 76). It is against this backdrop that Kevin Anderson presents a work of recovery on some of Marx's lesser-known writings, suggesting that the revolutionary theorist had some prescient and rarely acknowledged insights on the spread of capitalism throughout the non-Western world. The key argument is deployed in two parts. Firstly, from the 1850s onwards there is a clear change in Marx's thinking regarding the trajectories of development for non-Western societies as the prominence of multilinear rather than unilinear accounts gradually develops in his writing. Secondly, Marx did not focus solely on class, neglecting other forms of discrimination but dedicated considerable thought towards theorising the dialectical relationship between class, race, ethnicity and nationalism.

The nuance that Anderson brings to these arguments is through a much wider reading of Marx's work, in which changes in his thoughts and opinions become more clearly discernable. The book offers an extensive selection of Marx's lesser-known writings that have only recently emerged in published form since the end of the Cold War. This includes journalistic writing, documents from Marx's activism in the First International, letters as well as texts and notebooks from the historical and sociological literature Marx consulted in his later years. The two sets of writings that Anderson engages with include works on non-Western societies such as India and China in relation to capital and writings on national movements in Poland, Ireland and North America with regards to the American Civil War. Given that the broader argument here is that Marx changed his mind over time, Anderson appears to have let a loose chronology order the sequence of these works, allowing for changes between the early 1850s and the publication of *The Communist Manifesto* to be discernable by the 1870s when Marx began revising *Capital* to include new thoughts on multilinear development trajectories.

The key themes of the book clearly speak to those portrayals of Marx as the ethnocentric product of the Enlightenment or as a dispenser of grand narratives overly concerned with economic forms of exclusion. Anderson does not set out to wholly refute some such claims and recognises the problematic aspects of Marx's work in writings such as *The Communist Manifesto* – "disturbing as it is in its ethnocentrism and implicit unilinearism" (Anderson 2010: 9). However, it is precisely by exploring Marx's later writings that Anderson claims that a multiulinear view clearly develops. These writings reveal an interest in non-Western societies in Java, India, China and

South America as part of an attempt to account for the differences in forms of social organisation. Marx was arguing that it appeared that different trajectories of development were evident in Europe and Asia and that a deterministic approach needn't be essential. Communal forms of property relations in non-capitalist societies became a subject of interest as it became evident that other societies contained unique approaches to resisting bourgeois forms of property ownership and the possibility for a direct transition to communism. Marx developed the view that not all societies necessarily had to pass through a capitalist phase of development and that not all pre-capitalist societies needed to be understood as uniformly feudal. Anderson argues that eventually Marx "was explicitly attacking those who maintained the 'feudal' interpretation" (Anderson 2010: 211). Essentially Marx was "above all against simply carrying over concepts of social structure drawn from the Western European model into Indian or Asian social relations" (Harstick [1977: 13] cited in Anderson 2010: 211). The fact that Marx's view changed on these topics and he attempted to develop a more dialectical perspective demonstrates that Marx was not simply content with developing "formalistic and abstract universals" (Anderson 2010: 244).

This argument develops further by demonstrating Marx's a clear reluctance to support colonialism and any related notion that it possessed progressive characteristics. This stronger anti-colonialist position was demonstrated by Marx's support for independence movements in China and India and evident in his support for the Chinese resistance against the British during the Second Opium War and the Sepoy uprising in India; "Marx again and again singles out resistance to the British, showing sympathy for the various Maratha, Mughal, Afghan, and Sikh forces arrayed against them" (Anderson 2010: 217).

Anderson shows that Marx was clearly concerned with race and nationalism as he developed a larger dialectical concept of race, ethnicity and class through writings on Poland, Ireland and the American Civil War. In his work on the Civil War, slavery came to be seen as connected to the labour movement. This was further demonstrated in the connection drawn between supporting the Polish independence movement and the Northern cause in the Civil War that led to the creation of the First International. From here the movement became involved in the Irish independence movement, with Marx demonstrating clear support for independence based on a view of the "constructive role played by nationalism" (Anderson 2010:151).

However, despite unpacking the aforementioned arguments, there is a limited engagement with specific critics of Marx with the exception of Edward Said. As outlined in *Orientalism*, Said argues that Marx exemplified a reproducer of Orientalist knowledge who presented a "homogenising view of the Third World" (Said 1978: 325). In a similar vein Said describes Marx's ethnocentric assumptions about non-Western societies as displaying the "[t]he idea that regenerating a fundamentally lifeless Asia is a piece of pure Romantic Orientalism" (Said 1978:154). Despite this claim, Anderson argues that such a position appears less tenable upon considering that Said's views are based largely on the article "The British Rule in India" published in the *Tribune* on June 25, 1853, which contrasts significantly with Marx's later theorising on multilinear paths of development.

For some readers, the selectivity of addressing one theorist critical of Marx may demonstrate a weakness by failing to engage arguments from postmodern and postcolonial approaches that reflect similar conclusions to Said's. This book may not also rescue the Marxist tradition from the margins of International Relations theory on account of its perceived limitations to adequately account for nationalism, the state

and war (Linklater 1990). Another concern might be that while Anderson raises the issue of new insights impacting upon existing perspectives of global capitalism, it is only in the very final pages that this point is engaged with. However, despite these avenues suggesting further exploration is necessary, they are perhaps beyond the scope of the tasks set within the book and more likely the subject of another project.

To the extent that this book confronts some of the major contemporary criticisms of Marx, one of its key strengths lay in the implications of Anderson's argument for such existing conclusions. This recovery of Marx's work offers excellent insight into how his theory of social development and revolution changed in light of continuing research. It also relocates questions of social transformation in the non-Western world in response to capitalism and in relation to resistance struggles and social movements, within the Marxist field of inquiry. Whether this has implications for postcolonial approaches in their treatment on the relevance of Marx remains to be seen. If there has been one enduring tradition among Marxist approaches, it has been to find an enduring relevance in Marx's work and Anderson offers us another window into the mind of a theorist seeking to account for a world changing dramatically under capitalism.

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