

Marx in the Colonies: The Case of India

By

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Abstract

This thesis will address the claim that Marx and Engels held pro-colonialist views, using their writings on India as a case study. It will address both the issue of support for colonialism as a political project, and the issue of whether they had Eurocentric/"Orientalist" ideas of India. I will argue they began as reluctant supporters of British colonialism in India, conceptualizing it as an exploitative but progressive force, but then moved towards anti-colonialism later on. Additionally, I will argue that Marx and Engels reproduced Eurocentric/"Orientalist" stereotypes about Indian's stagnation, but that they did not explain this stagnation as a product of racial inferiority. I will argue Marx's late notebooks present a less Eurocentric view of India. Finally, I will locate my work in the discussion of decolonizing philosophy, drawing out potential implications for the Marxian project, and the nuances of Marx and Engels's legacy.

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Chapter One: Marx' Disputed Indian Legacy

1.1. Introduction

In this study, I will attempt to shed light on a deceptively simple question: Did Karl Marx and Frederick Engels support colonialism? This question is important, because Marx and Engels, as two of the most important political thinkers of all time, continue to have a strong influence on how we see our world. It is therefore important to understand how they came to terms with the question of colonialism, as they no doubt continue to influence how we see this most destructive of practices.

I will focus my attention on their work on India, because time and space constraints make it impractical to cover everything they wrote about colonialism, and because their writings on India are a frequent point of discussion for debates on how they view this subject. The question, of whether they supported colonialism in India, will be divided into two parts. The first part is the rather straightforward question of whether they supported the British colonial project in India. The second part, which is somewhat more involved, is whether their conceptualizations of India fell into the traps of Eurocentrism/"Orientalism". For the purposes of this study, I will operate under the assumption that it is not a good thing to be pro-colonialist. I will also concentrate my efforts on detailed examinations of Marx and Engels's own texts, on the view that the best way to do justice to the questions under discussion will be to reconstruct the

arguments of Marx and Engels themselves. This will allow me to represent them as fairly as possible, and also leave the reader with a clear idea of what they thought. This focus will mean that I won't really be able to address the questions of what sources Marx and Engels used to build their arguments, or how historically accurate their analyses turned out to be. These are worthwhile questions, but they would need studies of their own to answer. I will leave it to further research to address these important questions. Finally, I will leave the question of sorting out possible differences between Marx and Engels to further research, as this too is a significant task in its own right.

In this chapter I will begin by laying out the case for seeing Marx and Engels as pro-colonialist, and Eurocentric/"Orientalist." Next I will introduce the concept of Eurocentrism, as set out by Samir Amin, who was one of its founding fathers. I will then briefly discuss common European stereotypes about India in the 19th century, and briefly go over Hegel's comments on India, simply to give a sample of the intellectual milieu in which Marx and Engels were working. Next I will lay out some arguments made by the defenders of Marx and Engels. Finally, I will layout my plan for this study, and briefly discuss what positions I plan to defend.

1.2. The Case Against Marx

In his famous 1978 work, *Orientalism*, Edward Said presents an influential critique of Marx's alleged pro-colonialism, based on his 1853 journalistic articles on

India. He argues that Marx, while he saw the “rapacity, and outright cruelty” (Said 153) of British colonial rule, and “was able to sense some fellow feeling, to identify even a little with poor Asia” (ibid 155), he ultimately adopted “the idea that even in destroying Asia, Britain was making possible there a real social revolution” (ibid 153). In what he sees as a “Romantic Orientalist vision,” (ibid 154) he argues that Marx saw Britain as having a two part mission for “regenerating a fundamentally lifeless Asia” (ibid 154). The first part was the destruction of an old, fundamentally stagnant India, mired in backwardness, superstition, slavery, and caste oppression, without any internal mechanisms for change. The second part was the creation of a material foundation for a Western society to emerge in Asia (ibid 153-154).

Said then asks how it is possible for someone “who could not easily forget the human suffering involved” to come to such a pro-colonialist stance (ibid 154), and how the “moral equation of Asiatic loss gets skewed back towards the old inequality between East and West?” (ibid 154) Ultimately, the question for Said is how Marx’s “human sympathy” could be replaced by a pro-colonialist “Orientalist vision” (ibid 154)? The answer, for Said, lies in Marx’s adherence to a 19th century tendency to “conceive of humanity either in large collective terms or in abstract generalities,” rather than as individuals (ibid 154). For Orientalists, people were “races, mentalities, nations, and the like” divided up by intellectual classifications (ibid 155). The great plurality of human existence was rammed into “the age-old distinction between ‘Europe and ‘Asia’ or ‘Occident and ‘Orient’...reducing it in the process to one or two terminal, collective abstractions” (ibid 155). This system of definitions, according to Said, took Marx’s “pre-

collective, pre-official" identification with Asian "individuality" and acted as a "lexicographical police," censoring his sympathy with "lapidary definitions" taken from "Orientalist science. "The very vocabulary" ...[Marx]..."found himself forced to employ" drove him to the conclusion that "those people...don't suffer – they are Orientals and hence have to be treated in other ways than the ones you've just been using" (ibid 155). Ultimately, for Said, Marx's writings on India were a case study on how "non-Orientalist's human engagements were first dissolved, then usurped by Orientalist generalizations" (ibid 156).

To fully grasp Said's arguments with regards to Marx, it is necessary to understand what he means by "Orientalism". For Said, 'the essence of Orientalism is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority (Said 42). Orientalism created a distinction between "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different' ...["Orientals" and]..."rational, virtuous, mature 'normal [Europeans]'"(ibid 40). The Orientalist's vision of Eastern inferiority was eternal, meaning that the inferior "Oriental" was destined to be ruled by their Western superiors, presumably for all time. In addition to being a theory of Western supremacy on a descriptive level, Orientalism also functions as an instrument for its maintenance. Through the process of describing and classifying "Orientals" in a particular way, colonial administrators are better able to manage and pacify their subject population. And because, as the rulers of the subject population, it is the colonizers who study and classify the subject population, they are the ones who study and classify, allowing them to accumulate even more knowledge, which in turn will assist the pacification and subjection process. Orientalist knowledge

and Western colonial power were seen to work together in a mutually reinforcing feedback loop (ibid 40-44).

There are two additional features of Said's conception of Orientalism that are important for understanding his reading of Marx. Firstly, Orientalism had what Said called a "textual attitude," meaning that it tended to privilege knowledge gained from books, against knowledge gained from observing and interacting with the world. This allowed Orientalists to construct a complex system of knowledge about the "Orient," complete with complex systems of classification, which carried significant intellectual authority and prestige, but had at best a tenuous relationship to actually existing Asia. It is thus not surprising that this system of knowledge went into crisis in the 20th century (ibid 92-110). To put it simply "Orientalism overrode the Orient" (ibid 96). The second important thing to note is that this largely self-enclosed system of knowledge "assumed an unchanging Orient, absolutely different (the reasons change from epoch to epoch) from the West" (ibid 96), making all the essentialist observations about an inferior "Orient" from colonial administrators inevitable (ibid 96).

The political element of Said's charges against Marx is easy enough to understand. Marx, according to Said, supported British colonialism, because he believed it would, despite its brutality, clear away India's backwards and stagnant "Asiatic" society and create the conditions for a modern Western one to be built in its place. Said's explanations for why Marx adopted a pro-colonialist stance are more complex. To begin with Marx saw the suffering of the Indian population under British colonial rule and was moved to sympathize with it. However, because he was immersed in a 19th

century European cultural and intellectual climate that thought about the “East” in certain ways, and because he was forced to use “Orientalist” sources to write about India, his thought was soon caught up in the system of knowledge which defined the “Orient” as backwards and unchanging, incapable of transforming on its own, with people who simply aren’t as intelligent, moral, or rational as Europeans. For this reason, Said sees Marx as coming to believe that “India” was unable to modernize on its own, and that its people were inferior, and didn’t suffer in the same way as Europeans anyways. From this highly racist standpoint, Said sees Marx as supporting European colonialism as the only way to drag Asia into the modern world. Said’s charges against Marx can thus be summarized in the following way:

1. Marx supported British colonization in India as the only way to lead it towards modernization.
2. Marx believed that India was stagnant, backwards, mired in superstition and ancient forms of slavery and caste oppression.
3. India’s population was racially inferior, and didn’t suffer in the same way as Europeans. This presumably mitigated the effects of the brutality of the British, and perhaps suggests that Marx thought this brutality was in part necessary when dealing with “Orientals.”
4. Marx adopted these regressive attitudes because his thought became entangled in an “Orientalist” system of knowledge that hijacked his ability to think outside the boundaries of colonialist misconceptions about “Asia.” A big part of the

problem, according to Said, can thus be attributed to the sources Marx used to develop his views on India.

Said's critique of Marx on India, while influential, is somewhat limited by his exclusive focus on Marx's 1853 writings on India. Thus, while a good starting point, Said's critique cannot be taken on its own as a comprehensive critique of the alleged pro-colonialism of Marx and Engels.

Shlomo Avineri, in his article "Marx and Modernization," seeks to refute the notion that Marx had a simplistic, one-size fits all model of modernization (Avineri 174), and to achieve this task explicates Marx's views on Asia in some detail, drawing largely from his writings on India. His article takes a much more politically agnostic attitude towards Marx's positions than Said, but he still lays out a case for seeing Marx and Engels as pro-colonialist, drawing on a much larger variety of sources. He points out that for Marx and Engels "in The Communist Manifesto it is the bourgeois, Western expansion that is credited with modernizing the 'barbaric' societies of the non-European world" (ibid 180). This pronouncement comes from fairly early in their careers, however, Avineri sees them developing a more detailed pro-colonialist position later on, based on Asia following a fundamentally different, if ultimately abortive, development path from Europe.

According to Avineri, Marx does not see Asia as undergoing the same process of development that occurs in Europe, suffering instead from stagnation. For all the invasion and conquests that India has undergone, Marx sees India as an unchanging society with no real history (ibid 181). For Avineri's Marx, Europe and Asia followed

fundamentally different paths of development. In Europe, he sees a progression from Ancient, to feudal, to bourgeois “modes of production” “constitut[ed] in a dialectical series, where over time, each form grows out of its predecessor and creates, in its turn, the conditions for its own transcendence” (ibid 180). Asia, in contrast, is characterized by an Asiatic mode of production which does not seem to change into any of the forms that define European history (ibid 180).

For Avineri’s Marx, “Asiatic societies...[are]...stagnant, unchanging, nondialectical, particularistic, limited, and devoid of societal mechanisms for change” (Avineri 181). The main features of this Asiatic society are:

1. Absence of private property in land.
2. The state appears as the ultimate proprietor of land: on the local level land is held in common by the villagers. The village commune is thus the “solid foundation of Oriental despotism.”
3. Land rent and taxes are identical.
4. Agriculture and manufacture are integrated into a closed system of an autarchic village economy.
5. A centralized state, quite independent of the economic factors of society, provides for public works, mainly irrigation and roads.
6. This combination of highly integrated autarchic localism with a centralized bureaucracy accounts for the stagnant and non-changing nature of Oriental society (ibid 181-182).

Avineri's Marx considers two possibilities for change in Asian societies. The first is change through internal mechanisms within these societies; the second is change through outside intervention from Europeans. For Avineri, Marx's answer to this question is clear, "if the description of the Asiatic mode of production is historically adequate, then there is no chance for internal change whatsoever" (ibid 183). The reasons for this lack of internal mechanisms for change are that societies with an Asiatic Mode of Production have no private property, claims to individualism, or pressures for an autonomous civil society – which are pre-conditions for modernization (ibid 183). From this analysis, Avineri's Marx draws the following political conclusion:

Left to themselves, the societies based on the "Asiatic mode of production" do not, according to Marx, have the means – or the institutional urge – to change and modernize. Yet since Marx's vision of a socialist order of society is predicated upon a prior universalization of capitalism, the phenomenon of European colonial expansion assumes a further dimension in Marx's thought: while European overseas expansion is caused by the intrinsic necessities of capitalist market economy striving towards universalization, it also becomes a precondition for the achievement of a socialist transformation of society. Like capitalism, colonialism is a dialectical necessity which has to be overcome (ibid 184).

However, while they saw European colonialism as historically necessary, Marx and Engels did not morally justify it, and indeed condemned the motives behind colonialism in very strong terms (ibid 185).

Avineri, like Said, argues that Marx and Engels saw India, and by extension the rest of Asia, as stagnant and lacking in internal dynamism, incapable of modernization without the external colonial interference from Europe. Unlike Said, Avineri locates the explanation given by Marx and Engels of India's backwardness within their own theoretical framework, as a product of a specific Asiatic Mode of production, which due to its lack of private property relations, lacked a mechanism for internal dynamism. This explanation places the arguments of Marx and Engels firmly on their own terms. Unlike Said, Avineri's position does not presume, at least not explicitly, that Marx and Engels saw Indians as inherently inferior.

In her book, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Gayatri Spivak lays out her own critique of Marx's conception of the Asiatic mode of production. She argues that Marx had a universalistic conception of human nature as Species-being, in which man conceives himself as a universal free being, who will overcome the difference brought about by history through gaining access to self-determination (Spivak 78). When confronted with an Asia that is different from Europe, Marx tried to explain away this difference with the notion of the Asiatic mode of production (ibid 72), even if the "Asia' in this formulation soon lost any resemblance to any empirically recognizable space" (ibid 73). Ultimately the operation sought to "remove difference after taking it into account. Thus the exigency of accounting for difference lies at the heart of Marx's system" (ibid 79). Spivak argues that Marx accomplishes this task by locating the Asiatic mode of production in pre-history – alongside primitive communism (ibid 83) – as a stage in which all property is concentrated in the hands of a despotic ruler (ibid 80),

before the procession of Roman and German forms that eventually lead to European feudalism, and eventually capitalism (ibid 80-81). This allows Marx to maintain his universalist historical narrative, in which the capitalist mode of production spreads throughout the world, leading to the universal emancipation represented by socialist revolution, and the annulment of class differences created by capitalism (ibid 79-80).

While quite abstract in some ways, Spivak's critique drives right into the heart of Marx's system. The pro-colonialist narrative of Asian inferiority is implied by the placing of Asia in a primitive pre-historical state. However, unlike Said and Avineri, Spivak places these conceptions right at the heart of Marx's system, which she reads as being too universalistic to account for Asian difference without banishing it to the realm of the primitive (Spivak 83). This operation, while empirically dubious, allows Marx to incorporate Asia into his historical theory, while maintaining the struggle between labour and capital, and the eventual victory of socialism, as universally applicable. It is not that hard to draw an analogy between this alleged theoretical homogenization and the forcible incorporation of colonized societies into the capitalist order through their colonization by European nations, particularly since this incorporation into the universal course of capitalist history is pulling them out of primitive backwardness.

From this discussion of Avineri and Spivak's comments on the Asiatic mode of production; we can summarize some additional charges against Marx and Engels as follows:

1. Marx and Engels believed that India was stagnant, lacking internal dynamism, and backwards because it was saddled with an Asiatic mode of production that

lacked the necessary pre-conditions for effective class struggle. For that reason, modernization could only come from outside, in the form of European colonization. India, in order to participate in the universal march towards socialism needed to go through a period of colonization, even if Marx and Engels readily admitted the process was in many ways vile.

2. Asia represented a society with a fundamentally different social structure and history, which caused serious problems for Marx's alleged universal historical narrative.
3. In order to solve this conflict, Marx shunted Asia into the primitive lands of pre-history, allowing his narrative of the universal unfolding of capitalist expansion leading to a final conflict between labour and capital and eventually socialism to remain untouched.
4. The price was creating an utterly distorted picture of Asia, while rendering its difference neutralized by reducing it to a primitive moment in Marx's universal historical narrative.

In some ways, Spivak's charges are the most serious, in that if true, they cannot be attributed to something like bad sources on the East, and they would implicate Marx and Engels's system in Eurocentrism at the level of its internal logic, by suggesting that its universalism requires making Europe the model of historical development to remain operative. We thus have a pretty significant list of charges against Marx and Engels on the grounds of pro-colonialism. But before we can go on to lay out the defense's case for Marx and Engels, we first need to take a couple short detours, first to explicate the

concept of Eurocentrism, which will be of critical importance for our discussion, and second, to briefly touch on the issue of European conceptions of 19th century India. This second detour, while somewhat unflattering to Europe, will help us detect Eurocentric conceptions which may be lurking within Marx and Engels's texts on India.

1.3. On Eurocentrism

In order to conceptualize the case against Marx and Engels, it will be very helpful to explicate the concept of Eurocentrism, drawing on Samir Amin's important book, *Eurocentrism*. At heart of Eurocentrism was the "invent[ion]" ..[of]...an eternal West, unique since the moment of its origin. This arbitrary and mythic construct has as its counterpart an equally artificial conception of the Other (the Orient), likewise constructed on mythic foundations (Amin 165). The common conception of "Western" history as a progression from Ancient Greece and Rome, through the feudal Christian middle ages, to European capitalist modernity, is a product of Eurocentrism (Amin 166). For Amin, Eurocentrism is not a "social theory," so much as a "prejudice that distorts social theories" (ibid 166). Eurocentrism has four basic components, which can be "combined in different ways at different times" (ibid 166), which are as follows:

1. Ancient Greece is removed from its original context, with its connection to the "Oriental" world, and post-hoc assimilated into Europe, transforming Hellenism into a chapter of European history. This move allows for the construction of a narrative, which explains Europe's rise to world hegemony in the age of

capitalism in part from Europe's supposed unique predilection towards rationality inherited from its Hellenistic heritage. Hellenism is seen as a bastion of free thought and reason, while the Oriental contribution to this tradition is sidelined. This image of Ancient Greece was originally a construction of the Renaissance, as a means of constructing a self-identity for bourgeois citizens freed from medieval religious prejudices. This particular element of Eurocentrism is less prominent in our current era (ibid 166-168).

2. The 1500 year separation between Ancient Greece and the Renaissance created a problem for those trying to draw a line of historical continuity between the two. In order to overcome this apparent problem, a system of biological racism was invented in the 19th century, which attributed the different paths of social evolution to the supposed existence of innate psychological differences between different peoples. Much of this classification was done through linguistics, which constructed a distinction between Indo-European and Semitic language groups. Claims of all kinds flew around, for example, people from Indo-European language groups were seen as innate liberty lovers, logical, and free thinking, while Semitic speakers were seen as servile and lacking in rigor. This form of reasoning not only constructed a dichotomy between "Europe" and its "Oriental" Other, but a system of classifications within Europe as well, with some countries being more "European" than others. Finally it should be noted after the rise of Hitler, biological racism became seen as less acceptable, and was replaced by a form of cultural racism, which was more flexible and allowed

peoples from different ethnic backgrounds to become assimilated to European culture (ibid 169-172).

3. After World War Two, with biological racism becoming less respectable, Europe increasingly turned to Christianity for the source of its supposed historical exceptionalism. According to this narrative, Christianity was defined by a unique “Promethean” approach to nature. While other religions, such as Hinduism are supposed to have reduced humanity to a component of nature in order to deal with human impotence in its face, Christianity, along with Judaism and Islam, separated man from nature, which was seen as something soulless, which could be subjected to human action. This view of nature opened up the possibility of a project to systemically domesticate nature. Both Islam and Judaism share a similar conception of nature; however, Christianity placed a special emphasis on individual moral responsibility, which it turned into a universalist ethics. These two unique characteristics of Christianity are supposed to have made Europe uniquely disposed towards progress and development (ibid 172-174).
4. Eurocentrism constructs a mythical image of the “Orient” to go along with its image of an exceptional Europe. This image is simply Europe’s opposite. Amin cites Said as having already described Europe’s image of the Orient in detail. Recalling Said, this would make the Orient predisposed to stagnation, in direct opposition to Europe’s dynamism (ibid 175)

Amin locates the development of Eurocentrism in a key contradiction that developed within the European worldview during the capitalist era. On the one hand, the

imposition of capitalism as a world system, and the enlightenment, both created a strong push towards universalism. On the other hand, this universalism was confronted with the question of why Europe had developed to a level not yet achieved by the rest of the world. Unable to answer this question within existing ideological coordinates, culturalist explanations and racism were conjured up in order to fill in the explanatory gap. Europe, so the story goes, had exceptional traits which enabled it to achieve capitalist development, while the Orient was weighed down with cultural traits that prevented its development (ibid 177-179). In this view, Europe is seen as the bastion “of the scientific spirit, rationality, and practical efficiency”(ibid 180), and “tolerance, diversity of opinions, respect for human rights and democracy, concern for equality – at least the equality of rights and opportunities – and social justice”(ibid 180). Progress thus becomes Europeanization, with non-Europeans who refuse this process being condemned to stagnation and backwardness. Westernization becomes humanist universalism triumphant (ibid 180). Unsurprisingly, Eurocentrism provides a strong rationalization for colonialism, in the name of spreading Europe’s superior culture, values, and civilization (ibid 180). In contrast, the West is seen as having very little to learn from the rest of the world, with its own developments being seen as the driving force for the development of humanity (ibid 181).¹ In essence, Eurocentrism constructs an image of Europe as both uniquely constituted to enable progress and development,

¹Amin goes on to provide his own explanation of the difference in development between Europe and the rest of the world, based on his understanding of capitalism as a system which systematically develops some parts of the world, and leaves others underdeveloped. He argues that this division between rich and poor nations in the capitalist world-system represents one of its primary contradictions. As a remedy he advocates underdeveloped countries “de-link” from the international capitalist order to pursue their own independent development projects (Amin 182-188). To assess Amin’s particular brand of political economy is beyond the scope of this project. However, one can accept the basic outlines of Amin’s important discussion on Eurocentrism without adopting his political economy, or his Maoist influenced third-worldist politics.

as well as the universal model for human societies. In contrast, the Orient is constructed as deviant, encumbered by cultural, or even racial, defects that prevent it from following Europe's universal model. The Orient, and non-European societies in general, to the extent that they differ from Europe, are therefore defective in some way. European colonialism is often conceived in this worldview as a justifiable means of saving non-European societies from their own aberrance.

Amin's concept of Eurocentrism is useful for conceptualizing the claims that Marx and Engels were pro-colonialist, by bringing them under a unifying scheme. Said's, Avineri's, and Spivak's reading of Marx and Engels all capture different elements of Eurocentrism. For Said, who was a direct influence on Amin, the focus is on the racist conception of Orientals as inherently inferior, as well as on the stereotyped image of an East that is constructed as inherently different and inferior from Europe; for Avineri, the concentration is on the differing paths of development, with a contrast between a dynamic Europe and stagnant Asia that suggests Marx and Engels replicated Eurocentric narratives about Asia's stagnation resulting from an internal flaw that predisposed it to stagnation. Both of these readings have Marx and Engels defending colonialism as a means to pull Asia out of its stagnation. Finally, Spivak's reading of Marx draws our attention to the question of universalism in Marx and Engels, and whether their project unduly privileges European history as a universal mode, at the expense of having to misunderstand Asia by shoehorning it into their model, thus reducing it to a stagnant backwater.

With a working conception of Eurocentrism, we can now conceptualize a composite case against Marx and Engels as involving two questions. Firstly, did Marx and Engels support the European colonial project, in at least some capacity? Secondly, can Marx and Engels be justly accused of Eurocentrism, and if so, to what extent? The question of Eurocentrism carries with it a number of parts. Firstly, there is the question of whether Marx and Engels contrasted a stagnant despotic Asia to a dynamic liberal Europe. Secondly, there is the question of whether Marx and Engels essentialized Asia and Europe as eternally different to each other, making “Asia’s” alleged backwardness an inherent part of its cultural and/or racial characteristics. Thirdly, there is the question of whether Marx and Engels treated Europe as a universal model which all human societies should follow, while treating deviation from this model as essentially pathological? Finally, there is the question of whether Marx and Engels developed a form of universalism, in their vision of socialist emancipation, which made them unable to account for non-European difference without doing violence to the facts by erroneously relegating it to the realm of pre-history?

1.4. On European Sources for India in the 19th Century

To provide a detailed account of European understandings of India during Marx’s time would be a research project in itself. However, it will be useful to present a short outline of what Europeans thought about India, in order to have a fuller idea of what

kind of stereotypes to look for when discussing Marx and Engels's writings on India. European writing of Indian history began in the late 18th century, motivated by both a sense of curiosity and the need for the East India Company to understand their subjects. Most of those leading these historical efforts were officers of the East India Company. They saw themselves as rediscovering a lost Indian history, by using modern European techniques (Thapar, "The Theory of Aryan Race and India: History and Politics" 3-4), and stereotyped Indians as having no concept of history (Ojha 232). A broad spectrum of opinion existed among these early European scholars of Indian history, ranging from hardline utilitarians to sentimental romantics. Utilitarians saw traditional Indian society as backward, stagnant, and unscientific, while romantics tended to see it as harmonious, with an absence of tension that gave a glimpse into mankind's idyllic past. Max Muller even suggested that in some parts, India was heaven on Earth. However, both the utilitarians and the romantics held to a similar series of stereotypes about India, and both supported British colonialism (Ojha 229-230). The romantics and utilitarians tended to favour different methods of ruling the empire. Utilitarians tended to prefer direct rule, the creation of a rationalized scientific administration, and the establishment of clear property rights for Indian peasants, while the romantics preferred indirect rule, preserving traditional Indian institutions (Zastoupil 35-39). However, both factions shared a similar set of stereotypes that can be categorized in the following way:

1. The image of an unchanging, stagnant East, characterized by "Oriental Despotism." According to this stereotype, while the West is vigorous and dynamic, people in the East are passive, take the present state of affairs as a

given, and are adverse to change. Governments are generally ruled by monarchs whose power is not bound by legal limitations.

2. India is a country pre-occupied with religion and metaphysics. According to this stereotype, Indian society, law, government, its values and ideals, are all pervaded by religion. Hindu society is thus an extreme form of theocracy, where the whole society, even its customs of everyday life, is captured by divine prescription.
3. Society in the East is fragmentary, and does not evolve over time. According to this stereotype, the caste system, while antithetical to social equality and harmony, kept society in a rigid stratification that held everyone in the position of their birth, and society in a state of frozen animation, outside history.
4. Finally, as previously mentioned, India was stereotyped as having no sense of history. Some attributed this supposed characteristic to a pre-occupation with religion and metaphysics, where life was treated as a dream or an illusion (Ojha 231-233)

These conceptions of India in many ways conform to typical Eurocentric/"Orientalist" stereotypes about "the East." India is seen as stagnant and backwards, without the dynamism, or even real history of the "West." A dichotomy, like the one Said and Amin observed, was drawn between a normal "West," and an "India whose anomalous characteristics kept it in a supposedly backwards state. While different factions had differences in how they wanted to approach India, all seemed to agree that India needed to be guided by British hands, rather than left to rule itself. This follows the

Eurocentric/"Orientalist" tendency to see "Oriental" societies as needing to be led by "Western" societies into the modern world, rather than be left to run their own affairs.

That said, there are some elements of Europe's ideas on India that are more unique to that subcontinent. Most immediately, there is the combination of fragmentation and rigidity, produced by a social structure that was frozen by the caste system. Additionally, there is the idea of a historyless India which is heavily pre-occupied by religious and metaphysical concerns, and is thus extremely theocratic. This too seems to be a stereotype that is somewhat unique to India.

To attempt a detailed account of the sources which influenced Marx and Engels's views on India would be a study in itself. Rather than attempting such a task, I will focus on examining the writings of Marx and Engels themselves, on the premise that before we can sift through their sources for origins of Eurocentrism/"Orientalism," it is first necessary to answer the question of whether they were guilty of these failings in the first place. For this purpose, it seems to me that the ideal method is to closely examine their own texts. However, in order to gain an idea of the intellectual milieu in which Marx and Engels were working, it will be useful to briefly look at what Hegel had to say about India. While there are debates about the extent of Hegel's influence on Marx's conception of India, with thinkers like Ahmad arguing that he took many of Hegel's views on India as his own, at least in 1853 (Ahmad, *In Theory* "Marx on India: A Clarification"), and others, like Anderson arguing that while Marx was heavily influenced by Hegel, his own work on India was no mere copy of Hegel's (14-15), it is generally

accepted that he was a significant influence on Marx's understanding of India. For this reason, he makes a good sample for our purposes.

Hegel begins by stating "India, like China, is a phenomenon antique as well as modern; one which has remained stationary and fixed, and has received a most perfect home-sprung development. It has always been the land of imaginative aspiration, and appears to us still as a Fairy region, an enchanted World" (Hegel, *Philosophy of History* "Part 1: The Oriental World"). He sees "a state of Dream, as the generic principle of the Hindoo Nature" (ibid) As a result:

The dreaming Indian is therefore all that we call finite and individual; and, at the same time – as infinitely universal and unlimited – a something intrinsically divine. The Indian view of things is a Universal Pantheism, a Pantheism, however, of Imagination, not of Thought. One substance pervades the Whole of things, and all individualizations are directly vitalized and animated into particular Powers. The sensuous matter and content are in each case simply and in the rough taken up, and carried over into the sphere of the Universal and Immeasurable. It is not liberated by the free power of Spirit into a beautiful form, and idealized in the Spirit, so that the sensuous might be a merely subservient and compliant expression of the spiritual; but [the sensuous object itself] is expanded into the immeasurable and undefined, and the Divine is thereby made bizarre, confused, and ridiculous. These dreams are not mere fables – a play of the imagination, in which the soul only revelled in fantastic gambols: it is lost in them; hurried to and fro by these reveries, as by something

that exists really and seriously for it. It is delivered over to these limited objects as to its Lords and Gods (ibid).

This India of Hegel's, trapped in its dreams, fell into a kind of strange unreality, where even the Spirit's opposite, the sensuous, became part of its expansiveness. As a result, the Divine seemed to consume everything. Hegel sees a kind of Pantheism in this dream world, permeated by a kind of religiosity, which mirrors the general European stereotypes about a society in a dream state preoccupied by religion. It is perhaps unsurprising that Hegel thought that "the spread of Indian culture is prehistorical" (ibid).

Hegel summarizes his understanding of India as such:

In the second phase [of "Oriental" society, the first stage being China] – the Indian realm – we see the unity of political organization – a perfect civil machinery, such as exists in China – in the first instance, broken up. The several powers of society appear as dissevered and free in relation to each other. The different castes are indeed, fixed; but in view of the religious doctrine that established them, they wear the aspect of natural distinctions. Individuals are thereby still further stripped of proper personality – although it might appear as if they derived gain from the development of the distinctions in question. For though we find the organization of the State no longer, as in China, determined and arranged by the one all-absorbing personality (the head of the State) the distinctions that exist are attributed to Nature, and so become differences of Caste. The unity in which these divisions must finally meet, is a religious one; and thus arises Theocratic Aristocracy and its despotism. Here begins, therefore, the

distinction between the spiritual consciousness and secular conditions; but as the separation implied in the above mentioned distinctions is the cardinal consideration, so also we find in the religion the principle of the isolation of the constituent elements of the Idea; – a principle which posits the harshest antithesis – the conception of the purely abstract unity of God, and of the purely sensual Powers of Nature. The connection of the two is only a constant change – a restless hurrying from one extreme to the other – a wild chaos of fruitless variation, which must appear as madness to a duly regulated, intelligent consciousness (ibid).

We see here that Hegel saw India as a despotic society, fragmented and rigidified by the Caste system. This system embodies the domination of nature and religion, under “theocratic aristocracy.” Even individuality is stripped away by naturalized distinctions of Caste. It goes without saying that his image of a theocratic, historyless India, if it did indeed influence Marx, would have made it more likely for him to adopt Eurocentric/“Orientalist” conceptions, as well as conform to typical 19th century European stereotypes about India.

1.5. In Defense of Marx

In his book, *In Theory*, Aijaz Ahmad provides a forceful defense of Marx from Said’s accusations of Orientalism. He suggests that Said has failed to make an in depth

engagement with Marx – arguing that this is “In keeping with Said’s characteristically cavalier way with authors and quotations” (Ahmad, *In Theory* “Marx on India: A Clarification”). He attacks Said on his own ground, drawing on the 1853 writings Said used to construct his critique. Ahmad concedes that the Marx of 1853 saw India as a stagnant and “vegetative place, and that this was a common, if ultimately erroneous view, in Marx’s time (ibid).

In contrast to the idea that Marx’s harsh critique of pre-colonial Indian society was motivated by racial or Eurocentric bias, Ahmad argues that Marx’s attacks on India’s pre-colonial past were no more brutal, than his attack on Europe’s own past, with its feudalism, rural ignorance, and absolute monarchies. According to Ahmed, Marx’s attacks on the narrow and backwards form a life in India’s villages, with their caste oppression and parochial prejudices, mirrors his attacks on rural life in Europe on the one hand, and Indian reformists’ attacks on the Caste system on the other (ibid).

For Ahmad, Marx’s 1853 writings on India were not motivated by racism, “Orientalism,” or Eurocentrism. Instead, he sees Marx as attempting to place Asia in his universalist project for human liberation. This, amongst other things, involved trying to figure out what were the necessary pre-conditions for social revolution in Asia, a question that was to be posed repeatedly throughout the 20th century (ibid).

For Ahmad the progressive role Marx attributed to colonialism in 1853 was analogous to the progressive role he attributed to capitalism. In this context, calling Marx a pro-colonialist for seeing a progressive role for British colonization in India would be like portraying him as pro-capitalist for wanting to see capitalist development occur

in Germany as quickly as possible (ibid). Ahmad argues that while Marx's 1853 judgements on colonialism's "progressive" role in India appear extremely misguided from today's standpoint, from the perspective of the 1850s, things were less clear, because the historical record of colonialism did not really exist in the form it does today (ibid). He argues that Marx's 1853 speculations proved erroneous, and that he later abandoned the claim that colonialism was playing a progressive role (ibid).

In discussing the role of Indian reformers in challenging the caste system, Ahmad raises the question of internal power dynamics within class societies. One of the many critiques he launches against Said is that in jettisoning Marxism, he ends up propping up a form of anti-imperialism that ignores issues of class, and acts in the interests of more privileged elements within colonized societies, at times even spuriously blaming the internal problems of colonized societies on the colonizers. In India, this tendency sometimes goes to the point of treating the caste system as a fabrication of colonial records (Ahmad, *In Theory "Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Metropolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said"*). Erica Benner, in her discussion of Marx's early writings on India, argues that in 1853, Marx saw resistance to British colonization as coming largely from traditional elites, who engaged in a "form of identity based resistance [that] was ultimately self-defeating" and would fail to improve the welfare of India's population (Benner 178-179). Benner argues that Marx and Engels were looking at the internal as well as the external politics of India, and therefore worried that without a progressive political outlook, an anti-colonial rebellion could end up being a

futile exercise, since it would replace the oppression of colonial rulers with the oppression of indigenous elites.

In his discussion on Marx's writing on India, Irfan Habib argues that Marx, in his 1853 writings on India, raises the possibility not only of Indian independence, but independence gain through India's own struggle for self-liberation, possibly even before the outbreak of proletarian revolution in England. In considering this possibility Marx is seen as unusually progressive by European standards in 1853 (Habib, *Karl Marx on India* liv). While these claims are not necessarily in compatible with the claims that Marx was pro-colonialist, or even Eurocentric, if true, they do contextualize his positions in a way that nuances the discussion, because they would show that Marx had developed a critical understanding of colonialism in India that was in advance of the prevailing tendencies of his society.

Kevin Anderson, in his discussion on Marx's 1853 writings on India, lays out the analogy Ahmad draws between the alleged progressive role of colonialism with that of capitalism in greater detail. He argues that Marx predicted that British capitalism would face a dual crisis, from the inside at the hands of its own proletariat, and from the outside at the hands of an Indian national liberation movement. Thus while capitalism and colonialism both brought some important forms of development, they also created the subjects that would destroy them. In the case of capitalism, the revolutionary subject was the proletariat, in the case of British colonialism in India it was an Indian nation now capable of regenerating itself through the struggle for independence. In the event of victory, both the Indian nation and the proletariat would retain the

achievements of capitalist modernity, even as they liberated themselves from it (Anderson 24).

Anderson's discussion of Marx's 1853 views on India forms a piece of his larger discussion on Marx and the Non-European world, in his book *Marx at the Margins*. Anderson argues that Marx's thought underwent an evolution, starting in 1840 with a unilinear conception of history, "sometimes tinged with ethnocentrism," which argued that non-Western societies would be drawn into the global capitalist orbit, and modernized through colonialism. By the late 1850s, Anderson sees Marx as moving towards a more multi-linear view of history, in which the future development of societies becomes an open question. By 1881-82, Marx is considering the possibility that Russia could skip the capitalist stage altogether if a peasant revolution linked up with a proletarian revolution in the West (ibid 2-3). The book covers a wide range of subjects, but for our purposes Anderson's discussions on India and his discussion about how Marx conceptualized Asian societies on a theoretical level are the most relevant.

Anderson sees the coverage Marx and Engels gave of the 1857-1858 Sepoy revolt in India as a major turning point, marking a shift towards a more anti-colonialist position (ibid 37).² Marx, in Anderson's version, starts off by arguing that while the British used divide and rule to maintain control of India with relatively small – compared to the population – indigenous army, the creation of the sepoy army had the effect of creating a national consciousness (Anderson 38). In the beginning, Marx did not believe the rebels would hold out for very long, however, the rebellion had deep roots in the

²Anderson also cites their coverage of the Second Opium War and the Taiping Rebellion in China as turning-points towards anti-colonialism. See Anderson (28-37) for his discussion on these events. For our purposes, his discussion on India is more relevant and will be our focus.

population, representing a deeply held hatred for British rule; Marx considered the rebellion to be not so much a military mutiny as a “national revolt” (Anderson 38-39).

According to Anderson, when stories of atrocities committed by the Sepoys appeared – with much fanfare and indignation – in the British press, Marx, while certainly not condoning them, contextualized the violence committed by the Sepoys, arguing that they are characteristic of insurrections, national, and religious wars, and that they were in essence blowback in concentrated form of England’s own brutal conduct in India. Marx also pointed out that European history offers no shortage of its own blood curdling atrocities to compare with those committed by the Sepoys (ibid 39-40). In addition, when covering forms of torture routinely used in India by the British, Marx suggests that the Indians might be justified in attempting to expel foreign conquerors who have so badly abused them (ibid 40). In addition, in a letter to Engels, Marx refers to India as their “best ally” while contrasting the Sepoy rebellion with the turn of events in Europe (ibid 41).

It should be noted that not everyone share’s Anderson’s reading of Marx and Engels on the Sepoy rebellion. Erica Benner argues that Marx and Engels had a more ambivalent reaction to the Sepoy rebellion, seeing even their more aggressive actions against the British as justified, while distrusting the xenophobic elements in the revolt, making them unwilling to grant the movement their unqualified support (Benner 183). Irfan Habib, argues that Marx and Engels were sympathetic to the rebellion, seeing it as both justified and a true expression of national sentiment, while also doomed to failure

because it represented the old classes in India, and lacked any real modernizing elements (Habib *Karl Marx on India* xlvi-xlix).

If Marx's stance on the Sepoy rebellion marks, for Anderson, a major shift in Marx's political attitude towards colonialism, the drafting of the *Grundrisse* in 1857-1858 marks a shift towards a more multilinear view of history. He begins his discussion by setting out the four modes of production outlined in Marx's Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*, the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, and the capitalist modes of production. He argues that two more modes of production are implied in Marx's work, resulting in a six mode schema that goes as follows: "(1) Early stateless, (2) Asiatic, (3) ancient, (4) feudal, (5) capitalist, (6) socialist" (Anderson 155). He argues that while some have read this as a unilinear schema, most have accepted more multilinear readings, arguing that the unilinear reading unduly simplifies Marx's thought (Anderson 155-156). In the *Grundrisse*, Marx deals with the development of property relations in pre-capitalist societies. Early property relations and social organizational structures were all communal for Marx. He identifies three communal forms, Asiatic, Greco-Roman, and Germanic (ibid 156). The Asiatic forms are seen as evolving out of a clan based society that engaged in pastoralism and other types of nomadic formations, defined by the temporary communal appropriation and use of land. Eventually, a higher entity tends to make itself owner of the land, with the villages reduced to hereditary possessors of the land. This creates a system of small communes, where manufacturing and agriculture are combined, and tribute is paid in the form of surplus product to the owner of all the land. Clan structures in these societies are maintained. Marx, who saw

caste as originating in clan and tribal structures, sees the persistence of clan based structures as the explanation for India's caste system. This type of system is seen as existing not only in Asia, but also in Mexico, Peru, and Romania (ibid 156-158). The Greco-Roman form also began life as a clan based system, but because of the high level of warfare between different communities, a different system arose as war became the great communal labour of the community. Public land existed, but unlike in the Asiatic form, labour, apart from warfare, was not communal, and property in land existed for Roman citizens. Although Greco-Roman society was highly urbanized, agriculture was considered the proper task of citizens, and commerce, which was stigmatized as dishonorable was left to freedmen and noncitizen foreigners. Additionally, while Asiatic societies maintained a lot of their clan structures, Greco-Roman societies were structured around localities (ibid 156-158). Finally, the Germanic system, because of the distances involved in the forests, was based primarily on individual property, with the commune only coming together periodically at communal meetings. This system was the basis of European feudalism (ibid 158). Anderson sees these forms not as discreet stages which all societies must pass through, but as different ways out of primitive stateless forms of society, with India and Rome representing different forms of early class society. Anderson also suggests that Marx was beginning to see more virtues in ancient communal village life, and was becoming less convinced of capitalism's progressive role in history (ibid 161-162).

Anderson's reading of Marx on Asia during this period is not shared by everyone. We have already seen Spivak and Avineri present quite different readings on the Asiatic

mode of production. In addition there is Tu Chenglin, who reads Marx's late 1858 reflections as part of a unilinear universal history, heavily influenced by Hegel. According to this reading, Marx followed Hegel's schema, of seeing the childhood of history in the Orient, its adolescence in Greece, its manhood in Rome, and its old age in the German world (Tu 7). For Tu, the Asiatic mode of production is a stage in historical development, out of which the Greco-Roman and German forms later evolved. History goes through a series of stages, with the Asiatic mode of production being an earlier one, whose continued existence in the East represented primitive leftovers from a bygone era (Tu 9-10). Tu argues that Marx later abandoned this theory in the 1870s, when, after studying Russia, he begins to see revolutionary potential in the Russian agricultural commune (Tu 10-11). Marx's basic wager was that if a peasant revolution in Russia could join up with a proletarian revolution in the West, Russia could skip capitalism all together (Tu 10). In this context, Marx made some revisions to *Capital Volume One*, in order to specify that his model applied to Western Europe, not the world as a whole. By this time Marx had abandoned his universalistic view of history for a particularist vision of how societies with the Asiatic mode of production might follow their own development path (Tu 12-13).

Anderson describes how Marx turned to the study of non-European agrarian societies in the last decade of his life, in part because of the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871. He divides these writings into three different strands. The first strand was Marx's revisions to the French edition of *Capital*, from 1872-1875 (Anderson 196). He argues that Marx not only revised his text to explicitly state that his model of

capitalist development did not provide a universal history, but described the future of Western Europe only (ibid 171-180). The second strand covers Marx's investigation into the possibility that a socialist revolution could begin in the Russian agricultural commune, provided it linked up with a socialist revolution in the technologically developed West (ibid 196-197).³

The third strand of Marx's studies on non-European agrarian societies concerns his 1879-1882 excerpt notebooks. These contain excerpts of various writings from different authors on a variety of different subjects, the most relevant for our purposes being India, interspersed with Marx's commentary (ibid 196). According to Anderson, these notebooks contain evidence that Marx significantly changed his views on a number of important aspects of Indian society. To begin with the Marx of the notebooks presents a more complex picture of rural Indian communal forms than he had previously entertained. He sees these forms as occurring in three stages. In the first stage he sees clan based societies working the land in common, in the second stage there are villages of greater differentiation with land being allotted partly on kinship, but where kinship no-longer binds the whole village together; in the third stage village communities are not organized around kinship and communal land is periodically re-divided on an equal basis. Even in the last stage, with land being doled out in individual shares within the village community, private property still did not exist. Anderson argues that Marx no longer saw Indian society as static, as this village system contained a contradiction between the older forms of kinship based organization, and the more

³A full interrogation of Marx's late writings on Russia is beyond the scope of this project. However, they often play a critical role in discussions about the nature of the late Marx's theory of history. To the extent that these writings raise relevant questions about Marx's theory, they will need to be addressed.

egalitarian organization of the broader base of the village system. In addition, Marx now saw an internal mechanism for the breakup of the communal village system in the code of Manu. According to Anderson, Marx saw the Brahmin priests as being instrumental in breaking up communal lands, because they needed to make land alienable in order to be able to receive it as a gift. In this regard, Marx saw similar processes leading to the breakup of communal lands in the Germanic and Roman worlds (ibid 209-210). When Marx covers the destruction of these communal forms under British colonialism, he takes a hostile stance towards colonialism and capitalism, and a somewhat sympathetic stance toward these communal structures. In addition he sees their contact with capitalist modernity as posing a “danger” to the social order (ibid 212-213). Finally, when it came to the British invasion of India, Marx described the British in vitriolic language, calling them “dogs,” and “blockheads.”(ibid 216).

The case for the defense of Marx and Engels has two main parts. In the first part, dealing mostly with their earlier writings on India, it complicates and contextualizes their claims that the British were playing a progressive role in India. It is usually admitted that Marx was operating off some erroneous 19th century conceptions about Indian society, however; Eurocentric/“Orientalist” myths are not seen as the driving forces in Marx and Engels’s thought. Instead, they are seen as universalists who are trying to fit Asia in their project for worldwide liberation. The progressive role of colonialism is seen as something analogous to that attributed to capitalism, with both seen as brutal systems that also bring a certain level of development, and create their own grave diggers. In addition, the question of viable alternatives is raised, suggesting

that Marx and Engels worried that an anti-colonialism led by traditional elites would reproduce old exploitative social relations, and fail to create viable states that could defend themselves. Finally, the first part of the defense will often emphasize what they see as Marx's unusually progressive stance on independence, by claiming that Marx was ahead of his time in thinking that Indian independence was a real possibility that could be brought about by Indians' own self-activity.

The second part of the defense argues that Marx and Engels moved away from their pro-colonial stances as their careers progressed. These arguments rest both on the claim that they came to oppose British colonization in India, and that they adopted a more multilinear view of history. The argument that Marx and Engels had a multilinear view of history is important because, to the extent that it doesn't simply dismiss non-European historical paths as defective, it acts as a potentially strong defense against the charge of Eurocentrism. Indeed, a fully multi-linear Marx and Engels could represent a powerful counter narrative to Eurocentrism, at least in some respects, because it would suggest that the European path of development is just one possible course of development, toppling Europe from its place as the barer of universal human progress.

1.6. Conclusion

With the cases of Marx's critics and defenders set out, it is time to stake out a place for this study. In Chapter two, I plan to argue that firstly, Marx and Engels were

pro-colonialists in 1853, seeing colonialism as a brutal but progressive force that would clear away India's old stagnant society and lay the foundations for a new modern society in its place. I will argue that many of the things Marx lauded colonialism for were things that he saw as assisting the creation of a viable Indian nation state. I will argue that he was indeed unusually progressive for his time in entertaining the possibility of Indian self-emancipation. I will also make it clear that Marx and Engels had no illusions about the brutality of British rule in India. However, while largely agreeing with the defense, I will also argue that they tend to down play the significance of Marx's Eurocentric conceptions of India in 1853. I will then discuss Marx and Engels's coverage of the Sepoy rebellion, and argue that the qualified support they gave it marked a major turning point away from their previous pro-colonialist stances. However, I will suggest that their transition to anti-colonialism was not yet complete during this time period. Finally I will cover Marx's 1881 letter to Nicolai Danielson, and argue that it presents a much more firmly anti-colonial position, and that also marks movement away from a Eurocentric reading of Indian society.

For Chapter three, I will begin by covering the understanding Marx and Engels progressively developed of the exploitation of nation by nation under capitalism, and argue that it explains a lot of their shift towards an anti-colonial stance. Next I will discuss the Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP), and argue for three positions. Firstly, I will argue that Marx and Engels had a multi-linear theory of history, and, secondly, that the AMP did represent a Eurocentric understanding of Indian society as backwards and

stagnant. Thirdly, I will argue that this Eurocentrism is heavily mitigated in the *Ethnographic Notebooks*.

Finally, for Chapter four, I will layout my conclusions, discuss some limitations of my study, and then speculatively argue for the potential usefulness of Marxism to a project of de-colonizing philosophy, based on its understanding of the exploitation of nation by nation, the idea, which is hinted at in the late Marx, that development contains a dialectic of progress and barbarism, and the claim Marxism manages to be universalistic while maintaining the capacity to account for historical specificity.

Chapter Two: The “Dual Mission” to the “Bleeding Process”

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will examine the more politically charged texts Marx and Engels wrote on India, consisting mostly of journalistic articles from the 1850s. However, I will also examine an excerpt from a letter Marx wrote to Nicolai Danielson in 1881, as it will be useful for examining how he thought about India in the late stages of his career.

I will begin by examining Marx and Engels’s 1853 writings on India. I will argue that while critical of many of the exploitative and corrupt aspects of British colonialism in India, they still ultimately argued that colonialism will play a progressive role, both in clearing away what they view as a stagnant and backwards “Asiatic” society, and in laying the foundations for a new modern society to be built in its place. For this reason, the accusation of being pro-colonialist is not unjust. In addition, in their view of India as a stagnant society lacking internal mechanisms of change, these articles betray an understanding of Indian society that lines up with 19th century Eurocentric/“Orientalist” stereotypes. However, this picture is complicated by the fact Marx explicitly raises the possibility of Indian independence through a process of self-emancipation, which shows that he rated Indian’s capacity for agency at a much higher level than most colonialists of his era. For this reason, while he did at times engage in racist modes of thought, this failing does not appear to have risen to the level of racism that would consign India’s

population to eternal inferiority under British rule, nor does it suggest he thought that “they don’t suffer” the way Europeans do. Finally, the analogy between how Marx and Engels viewed Europe’s past and India’s present, as well as how they saw colonialism producing its own gravediggers in a similar way to how they thought capitalism was producing its own gravediggers, further mitigates the charges of Eurocentrism/ “Orientalism.”

Next, I will examine Marx and Engels’s writings on the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857-1858. I will argue that while they sometimes engaged in racist stereotyping of the Indian population, and had some doubts about the social content of the rebellion, the balance of evidence suggests they supported it in a somewhat qualified way. I will argue that this support represents a major milestone in their thought, in that it represents a willingness to support an actual, as opposed to a hypothetical, independence movement, even when its social content was far from perfect by their standards. For this reason, these writings represent a significant shift in the direction of anti-colonialism.

Finally, I will examine Marx’s 1881 letter to Danielson. I will argue that this letter demonstrates a much darker view of British colonialism in India. In this letter, the colonial project is presented as a purely exploitative enterprise, with seemingly no upsides at all. Even the railways, which in 1853 Marx saw as one of colonialism central contributions, are dismissed as “useless.” Additionally, Marx alludes to the potential for uprisings against the British in the near future, showing that by this time he attributes significant potential for political action to India’s indigenous population.

2.2. Marx and Engels on India 1853

2.2.1. Explication

In this section I will present Marx's 1853 articles on India written for the *New York Tribune*. They were occasioned by the British parliament's debates surrounding the renewal of the East India Company's Charter and represent Marx's first significant discussions on the topic. Up to this point in his career, Marx had remained largely ignorant of "Eastern" societies, a situation he began to remedy in 1853 (Anderson 13). These articles, because they were written for an American newspaper, had an audience that was not directly implicated in the colonial project in India, either as colonizer or colonized. For this reason, and because of polemical constraints placed on him by the position he held at the paper, Marx refrained from making direct prescriptive statements about concrete political action (Benner 172-173). These articles are important not only because they represent Marx's first major statements on India, but also because they are frequently cited by his critics as proof of his Eurocentrism (Anderson 11).

In his article, "The East India Company – Its History and Results," Marx lays out a history of East India Company rule up to 1853. He claimed that "the true commencement of the East India Company cannot be dated from a more remote epoch than the year 1702, when the different societies, claiming the monopoly of the East

India trade, were united together in one single company” (Marx, *Karl Marx on India* 21). It was under the reign of William III, with the Whigs acting as “the farmers of revenue for the British Empire...that the existence of an East India Company was recognized by Parliament” (ibid 21). This recognition coincided with the birth of the bank of England, the firming up of the balance of power in Europe, and the consolidation of protectionism (ibid 21). Marx’s assessment of this era is unflattering:

[This] era of apparent liberty was in reality the era of monopolies not created by Royal grants, as in the times of Elizabeth and Charles I, but authorized and nationalized by the sanction of Parliament. This Epoch in the history of England bears, infact, an extreme likeness to the epoch of Louis Philippe in France, the old landed aristocracy having been defeated, and the bourgeoisie not being able to take its place except under the banner of moneyocracy, or the *haute finance*. The East India Company excluded the common people from the commerce with India, at the same time that the House of Commons excluded them from Parliamentary representation. In this as well as in other instances, we find the decisive victory of the bourgeoisie over the feudal aristocracy coinciding with the most pronounced reaction against the people (ibid 21).

The bourgeoisie, under the leadership of high finance, excluded the common people from political power, and used their power in parliament to grant themselves monopoly privileges, in contradiction to their liberal pretensions. Apart from acting as yet another means for certain well placed members of the bourgeoisie to horde the benefits of the

India trade by preventing competition from less exalted sectors, this state of affairs produced an orgy of corruption:

So early as 1693...the annual expenditure of the East India Company, under the head 'gifts' to men in power, which had rarely amounted to above 1.200 [pounds] before the... [glorious] ... revolution... [of 1688] ... reached the sum of 90,000[pounds]... Besides these direct briberies, rival Companies were thrown out by tempting Government with loans of enormous sums at the lowest interest, and by [the] buying of rival Directors (ibid 22).

The company, born by sin, also lived by sin:

The power the East India Company had obtained by bribing the Government, as did also the Bank of England, it was forced to maintain by bribing again, as did also the Bank of England. At every epoch when its monopoly was expiring, it could only effect a renewal of its Charter by offering fresh loans and by fresh presents made to the Government (ibid 22)

It is important to note that Marx saw the corruption involved in maintaining the company's existence as endemic of 'the union between the Constitutional Monarchy and the monopolizing moneyed interest'(ibid 22), a combination of "the liberal interests and a liberal dynasty" brought together "by the force of corruption, that first and last moving power of Constitutional Monarchy" (ibid 22). In sum, the East India Company was a corrupt institution, maintained by a corrupt system of liberal oriented Constitutional monarchy that represented the interests of an ascendant bourgeoisie, with high finance taking a leading role.

“The events of the Seven Years War transformed the East India Company from a commercial into a military and territorial power....[laying]...the foundation of...the...British Empire in the East (ibid 22). The Company’s stock soared, but its control faced a political challenge, as “it was alleged that the Company’s territory had been conquered by the aid of British fleets and British armies, and that no British subjects could hold territorial sovereignties independent of the Crown” (ibid 22). The British government wanted a share of the colonial loot, and “the Company only saved its existence by an agreement made in 1767 that it should annually pay 400,000 [pounds] into the National Exchequer” (ibid 22). The East India Company, instead of paying the Exchequer, ended up “appeal[ing] to Parliament for pecuniary aid” (ibid 22). With the Company continuously losing money, various attempts at reform were made, but they were ineffective, and after a considerable controversy in 1784, when “the Oligarchy absorbed all of...[the Company’s]... power it could assume without incurring responsibility” (ibid 22-23). This power, combined with the fact the British public were distracted by other things when the Company charter was up for renewal in 1813 and 1833, accounted for how the Company managed to escape serious political trouble after 1784 (ibid 22-23), until the controversy over the charter’s renewal in 1853, which Marx was then covering.

Marx observed that when the East India Company’s operations began under Queen Elizabeth, it was allowed “to export 30,000 [pounds] in silver, gold, and foreign coin [and] that this was an infraction against all the prejudices of the age” (ibid 25). In order to justify these violations:

“Thomas Mun was forced to lay down ... the foundations of the ‘mercantile system,’ admitting that precious metals were the only real wealth a country could possess, but...that their exportation might be safely allowed provided the balance of payments was in favor of the exporting nation. In this sense, he contended that the commodities imported from East India were chiefly re-exported to other countries, from which a much greater quantity of bullion was obtained than had been required to pay for them in India (ibid 25).

Marx then added, “it may be noted as a curiosity, in this strange Indian history, that the Indian monopolists were the first preachers of free trade in England” (ibid 25). Here Marx demonstrates his skepticism of the free traders of his day, by connecting the rise of their doctrine with the rise of a trading monopoly which represented everything they claimed to oppose.⁴ Additionally, it hints at an interest-based flexibility in the economic doctrines of the Company’s partisans.

In the late 17th, and for most of the 18th century, Marx saw parliamentary intervention on Company matters as being mostly pushed by the industrial class, “when the importation of East Indian cotton and silk stuffs was declared to ruin the poor British manufacturers ... Parliament did then interfere ... [on behalf]... of the afterward so ‘enlightened’ British manufactures ... and thus, during the greater part of the 18th century, Indian manufactures were generally imported into England in order to be sold on the Continent, and to remain excluded from the English market itself” (ibid 25-26).

⁴ Marx’s views on Free Trade will be discussed in more depth in chapter 3.

The company's monopoly over the India trade was challenged by merchants in London, Liverpool, and Bristol, with the result that restrictions on private merchants, apart from the case of the monopoly on trade with China, were removed in 1813. In 1833 "the Company [was] forbidden to carry on any trade at all" (Marx, *Karl Marx on India* 26). For Marx, the results of these shifts in policy were that:

during the whole course of the 18th century the treasures transported from India to England were gained much less by comparatively insignificant commerce, than by the direct exploitation of that country, and by the colossal fortunes there extorted and transmitted to England. After the opening of the trade in 1813 the commerce with India more than trebled in a very short time. But this was not all. The whole character of the trade was changed. Till 1813 India had been chiefly an exporting country, while it now became an importing one ... India, the great workshop of cotton manufactures for the world, since immemorial times, became now inundated with English twists and cotton stuffs. After its own produce had been excluded from England, or only admitted on the most cruel terms, British manufactures were poured into it at a small and merely nominal duty, to the ruin of the native cotton fabrics once so celebrated (ibid 26-27).

As the influx of British textiles destroyed India's once important native industry, it created a hugely important market for British manufacturers. "In 1780 ... [Britain's] ... Indian trade[']s total value] amounted to only 1/32 of the entire foreign trade. In 1850 the total exports to India from Great Britain and Ireland ... amounted to ... more than 1/8 of [the] whole export, more that ¼ of the foreign cotton trade. But the cotton

manufacture also employed now 1/8 of the population of Britain and contributed 1/12 of the whole national revenue” (ibid 27), and as trade with India grew more important after each commercial crisis, “the East Indian continent became actually ... [the manufacturers’] ... best Market” (ibid 27).

The deluge of British cottons flooded India’s market so severely that it began to negatively impact its capacity to absorb them. “You cannot continue to inundate a country with your manufactures, unless you enable it to give you some produce in return. The industrial interest found that their trade declined instead of increased ... They found out that the power of consuming their goods was contracted in India to the lowest possible point” (ibid 27). Thus, Marx reasoned “the more the industrial interest became dependent on the Indian market, the more it felt the necessity of creating fresh productive powers in India, after having ruined her native industry” (ibid 27). Driven by a desire to get raw cotton from India, as well as the difficulties in investing capital in an India ruled by corrupt authorities, the manufacturers became partisans “for the destruction of the whole ancient fabric of Indian government, and for the final eclipse of the East India Company” (ibid 27-28). This put them in opposition to the “moneyocracy and oligarchy” (ibid 27). Marx concludes the article by observing that Britain’s national debt suggests that it could be in a bind, where India becomes a burden to keep, while its loss might also prove ruinous (ibid 28).

From this history, one might expect Marx to be a staunch opponent of British rule in India. For India, Company rule meant exploitation, and the ruin of its native industries. For Britain, India is a constant drain on its treasury as well as one of its most

important markets, making its benefits somewhat ambiguous. Additionally, Marx's generally derisive portrait of the British ruling class as corrupt and self-serving quashes any notion that he might have seen them as a benevolent, "civilizing" force. However, his attitude towards the British colonial project in India was significantly more ambiguous. To see why, we need to turn to what are perhaps Marx's two most cited works on the subject, "The British Rule in India" and "The Future Results of British Rule in India." Marx sees the history of India pre-British colonization as fragmentary:

Just as Italy has, from time to time, been compressed by the conqueror's sword into different national masses, so do we find Hindostan, when not under the pressure of the Mohammedan, or the Mogul, or the Briton, dissolved into as many independent and conflicting States as it numbered towns, or even villages. Yet, in a social point of view, Hindostan is not the Italy, but the Ireland of the East. And this strange combination of Italy and of Ireland, of a world of voluptuousness and of a world of woes, is anticipated in the ancient traditions of the religion of Hindostan. That religion is at once a religion of sensualist exuberance, and a religion of self-torturing asceticism (ibid 11).

As a result of this fragmentation and the resulting history of being conquered by foreign powers, Marx sees it as not a great mystery how the British managed to gain control of India:

The paramount power of the Great Mogul was broken by the Mogul Viceroy's. The power of the Viceroy's was broken by the Mahrattas. The power of the Mahrattas was broken by the Affghans and while all were struggling against all,

the Briton rushed in and was enabled to subdue them all. A country not only divided between Mohammedan and Hindoo, but between tribe and tribe, between Caste and Caste; a society whose framework was based on a sort of equilibrium, resulting from a general repulsion and constitutional exclusiveness between all its members. Such a country and such a society, were they not the predestined prey of conquest? If we knew nothing of the past history of Hindostan, would there not be the one great and incontestable fact, that even at this moment India is held in English thralldom by an Indian army maintained at the cost of India? India, then, could not escape the fate of being conquered, and the whole of her past history, if it be anything, is the history of the successive conquests she has undergone (ibid 46).

Thus, of India's History Marx states:

Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society. The question, therefore, is not whether the English had a right to conquer India, but whether we are to prefer India conquered by the Turk, by the Persian, by the Russian, to India conquered by the Briton (ibid 46).

Ultimately, for Marx in 1853, India was a stagnant, fragmented society, incapable of defending itself from foreign conquest, or even mustering enough dynamism to change

itself from the inside. In this situation, foreign conquest was inevitable, and thus, India was not really viable as an independent polity.⁵

Marx describes and explains the political structure of these stagnant societies as such:

There have been in Asia, generally, from immemorial times, but three departments of Government; that of Finance, or the plunder of the interior; that of War, or the plunder of the exterior; and, finally, the department of Public Works. Climate and territorial conditions, especially the vast tracts of desert, extending from the Sahara, through Arabia, Persia, India, and Tartary, to the most elevated Asiatic highlands, constituted artificial irrigation by canals and water-works the basis of Oriental agriculture. As in Egypt and India, inundations are used for fertilizing the soil in Mesopotamia, Persia, etc.; advantage is taken of a high level for feeding irrigative canals. This prime necessity of an economical and common use of water, which, in the Occident, drove private enterprise to voluntary association, as in Flanders and Italy, necessitated, in the Orient where civilization was too low and the territorial extent too vast to call into life voluntary association, the interference of the centralizing power of Government. Hence an economical function devolved upon all Asiatic Governments, the function of providing public works. This artificial fertilization of the soil, dependent on a Central Government, and immediately decaying with the neglect of irrigation and drainage, explains the otherwise strange fact that we now find

⁵The question of what viability means in the work of Marx and Engels will be discussed later in this chapter.

whole territories barren and desert that were once brilliantly cultivated, as Palmyra, Petra, the ruins in Yemen, and large provinces of Egypt, Persia, and Hindostan; it also explains how a single war of devastation has been able to depopulate a country for centuries, and to strip it of all its civilization (ibid 13).

Beneath, and dependent on the strong central state responsible for irrigation, Marx saw a system of self-sufficient agricultural villages:

These two circumstances – the Hindoo, on the one hand, leaving, like all Oriental peoples, to the Central Government the care of the great public works, the prime condition of his agriculture and commerce, dispersed, on the other hand, over the surface of the country, and agglomerated in small centers by the domestic union of agricultural and manufacturing pursuits – these two circumstances had brought about, since the remotest times, a social system of particular features – the so-called village system, which gave to each of these small unions their independent organization and distinct life (ibid 14).

Marx characterizes these villages in the following way:

these idyllic village-communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. We must not forget the barbarian egotism which, concentrating on some miserable patch of land, had quietly witnessed the ruin of empires, the perpetration of unspeakable cruelties, the massacre of the

population of large towns, with no other consideration bestowed upon them than on natural events, itself the helpless prey of any aggressor who deigned to notice it at all. We must not forget that this undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life, that this passive sort of existence evoked on the other part, in contradistinction, wild, aimless, unbounded forces of destruction and rendered murder itself a religious rite in Hindostan. We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man to the sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Kanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow (ibid 16).

Marx saw in Indian society, pre-British colonialism, a form of “Oriental despotism.” The basis of this system was the regional geography which created the requirement – at the level of development achieved by Asian societies (Kradner 89) – for a strong central government to build irrigation infrastructure for agriculture. This made society highly dependent on the strength of the central government, and meant that its fall would lead to the collapse of agriculture in a region, causing some areas to be depopulated for centuries. The other side of this system was the isolated villages which combined manufacturing and growing food, and interacted little with the external world. While Marx perhaps saw a certain idyllic charm in these villages, he saw them as

riven with caste divisions, slavery, narrow superstitions, bigotries that could lead to sectarian violence, and a form of religion that degraded man through the worship of the rule of nature and encouraged him to remain in a confined natural state. These villages remain stagnant and unchanging, even as empires rose and fell around them. More than anything, Marx sees this social form as trapping man in a vegetative state of limiting stagnation, denying him the free development of his capacities (Anderson 16).

Marx saw India as lacking private property in land. In a letter to Engels, from June 2 1853, Marx writes: “Bernier rightly sees all the manifestations of the East – he mentions Turkey, Persia, and Hindustan – as having a common basis, namely, the *absence of private landed property*. This is the real *clef* [key] even to the eastern heaven” (Marx, *Karl Marx on India* 263). Engels replied to him on June 6 of the same year: “The absence of landed property is indeed the key to the whole of the East. Therein lies its political and religious history. But how to explain the fact that Orientals never reached the stage of landed property, not even the feudal kind?” He answered this question by saying “this is, I think, largely due to the climate, combined with the nature of the land” before presenting an explanation that closely resembles the climatic and geographical explanation of Oriental despotism featured in Marx’s printed articles (Engels, *Karl Marx on India* 263). From these quotations, it would appear that Marx and Engels, at least in 1853, believed that private property in land had not existed in India prior to British colonialism. In a letter to Engels, written on June 14 1853, Marx writes:

In some of these COMMUNITIES [we’re talking here about how they existed both during and before British rule] the LANDS of the VILLAGE [are] CULTIVATED IN

COMMON, in most of them EACH OCCUPANT TILLS HIS OWN FIELD. Within the same, slavery and the caste system. WASTE LANDS FOR COMMON PASTURE ... So far as the *property question* is concerned, this is a great *bone of contention* among English writers on India. In the broken mountainous terrain south of the Kistna, however, there appears to have been property in Land. In Java, on the other hand, as noted in *history of Java* by a former *English governor, Sir Stamford Raffles*, the sovereign [was] absolute LANDLORD throughout the country 'WHERE RENT TO ANY CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT WAS ATTAINABLE.' At all events, the Mohammedans seem to have been the first in the whole of Asia to have established the principle of 'no property in land' (Marx, *Karl Marx on India* 267).

Here Marx seems to suggest that in some places, the village lands were owned by the sovereign, while in others, it was owned by the village community themselves. However it is important to remember that Marx, like Hegel, drew a distinction between possession and ownership (Kradner 70), which is critically important for making sense of his views. As will become clear in Chapter three when we discuss Marx's more theoretical formulations, there is good evidence to believe that he saw the state as the owner of land in "Oriental" societies – at least until the last years of his life. For this reason, it is better to see his understanding of the various methods of communal land distribution under the rubric of possession instead of ownership.

In describing the British role in India, Marx does not minimize its brutality or its destructiveness. Even compared with previous conquerors, British rule in India was particularly destructive:

All the civil wars, invasions, revolutions, conquests, famines, strangely complex, rapid and destructive as the successive action in Hindostan may appear, did not go deeper than its surface. England has broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing. This loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the Hindoo, and separates Hindostan, ruled by Britain, from all its ancient traditions, and from the whole of its past history (Marx, *Karl Marx on India* 12).

The British destroyed the structure of Indian society without putting anything in its place. The result is both material misery for the population, and the loss of its cultural traditions, which adds to the melancholy. British rule took its toll, both on the material and the cultural/psychic plains. Agriculture also deteriorated because Indian “agriculture [due to its dependence on state infrastructure] ... is not capable of being conducted on the British principle of free competition” (ibid 13). This “oppression and neglect of agriculture, bad as it is, could not be looked upon as the final blow dealt to Indian society by the British intruder, had it not been attended by ... a novelty in the annals of the whole Asiatic world” (ibid 13). “British steam and science ... broke up the Indian hand-loom and destroyed the spinning wheel” (ibid 14), by enabling the British to produce cheap mass produced cottons and flood the Indian market, leading to the destruction of its native industry, and “uproot[ing], over the whole surface of Hindostan, the union between agriculture and manufacturing industry” (ibid 14). Marx put it bluntly, saying “these small stereotyped forms of social organism [the village system

which acted as the basis of Oriental Despotism] have been to the greater part dissolve[d], and are disappearing, not so much through the brutal interference of the British tax gatherer and the British soldier, as to the working of English steam and English free trade" (ibid 16). At its worst, this destruction of Indian industry led to significant depopulation: "The population of Dacca decreased from 150,000 inhabitants to 20,000" (ibid 14).

However, while Marx sees plenty of destruction, brutality, exploitation, and corruption in Britain's colonization of India, there is another side to Marx's argument, which forms the basis of the claim that he was pro-colonial and Eurocentric. With regards to the destruction of the old Indian system of village based production, Marx writes: "by blowing up ... [the villages'] economical basis ... the British] ... thus produced the greatest, and, to speak the truth, the only social revolution ever heard of in Asia" (ibid 16), A little further on, he adds:

England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindostan, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about the revolution (ibid 16-17).

It is thus the very destruction of the old social order which Marx sees as a revolutionary force in India. While this might seem a little strange, considering how much devastation it caused, a few things need to be kept in mind. Firstly, Marx saw the village system as

the basis of despotism, and responsible for keeping those who inhabited it in a narrow, vegetative way of life that encourage parochial bigotry, maintained ancient caste based forms of domination, and stifled rather than developed their human capacities.

Secondly, because this system was so stagnant, to the point where it lacked history, meaning that it lacked the mechanism to revolutionize itself through class struggle, this system needed to be broken from the outside. For this reason, the destruction brought about by British colonization, could be seen as accidentally revolutionary, and even a historical necessity. Thirdly, looking at Asia from the stand point of world history, Marx seemed to be suggesting here that in order for Asia to play its part in the international revolution, its stagnant despotic social order must first be overturned by an external force.

Marx characterizes Britain's role in India in the following way: "England has to fulfill a double mission in India; one destructive, the other regenerating – the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundation of Western society in Asia" (ibid 46). Marx sees the British as able to perform this mission of transforming India where others had failed because:

Arabs, Turks, Tartars, Moguls, who had successively overrun India, soon became *Hindooized*, the barbarian conquerors being, by an eternal law of history, conquered themselves by the superior civilization of their subjects. The British were the first conquerors superior, and therefore, inaccessible to Hindoo civilization. They destroyed it by breaking up the native communities, by

uprooting native industry, and by leveling all that was great and elevated in the native society (ibid 46-47).

As we have seen, Marx believed that the main means by which the “superior” civilization of the British destroyed India’s old society was through its productive and economic power.

While Marx saw “blowing up” the old village-system as useful for ending the stagnation of a “vegetative” “Asiatic” society, this was not the full extent of the progressive potential Marx saw in Britain’s colonization of India. The other side of Britain’s historical mission in India was “regenerative,” the “laying of the material foundation of Western society in Asia.” Some of the regenerative elements introduced by British colonialism, according to Marx, are the following:

The political unity of India, more consolidated, and extending farther than it ever did under the Great Moguls, was the first condition of its regeneration. That unity, imposed by the British sword, will now be strengthened and perpetuated by the electric telegraph. The native army, organized and trained by the British drill-sergeant, was the sine qua non of Indian self-emancipation, and of India ceasing to be the prey of the first foreign intruder. The free press, introduced for the first time into Asiatic society, and managed principally by the common offspring of Hindoos and Europeans, is a new and powerful agent of reconstruction. The Zemindari and Ryotwar themselves, abominable as they are, involve two distinct forms of private property in land — the great desideratum of Asiatic society. From the Indian natives, reluctantly and sparingly educated at

Calcutta, under English superintendence, a fresh class is springing up, endowed with the requirements for government and imbued with European science. Steam has brought India into regular and rapid communication with Europe, has connected its chief ports with those of the whole south-eastern ocean, and has revindicated it from the isolated position which was the prime law of its stagnation. The day is not far distant when, by a combination of railways and steam-vessels, the distance between England and India, measured by time, will be shortened to eight days, and when that once fabulous country will thus be actually annexed to the Western world (ibid 47).

Marx sees Britain creating political unity by raising an Army made up of India's own population along with an educated class of native administrators. These factors, particularly when considered with regards to self-emancipation (more on that later), are described as critical for Indians, if they want to build a modern state that is capable of being defended from invasion. Additionally, there is an introduction of private property in land, another modernizing step away from "stagnant" "Asiatic" society. Finally, there is the introduction of modern transportation, particularly steam ships and railways, which will allow India to escape isolation, a major cause of its stagnation, and eventually become part of the Western world.

Marx attaches particular importance to the railways, stating:

I know that the English millocracy intend to endow India with railways with the exclusive view of extracting at diminished expenses the cotton and other raw materials for their manufactures. But when you have once introduced machinery

into the locomotion of a country, which possesses iron and coals, you are unable to withhold it from its fabrication. You cannot maintain a net of railways over an immense country without introducing all those industrial processes necessary to meet the immediate and current wants of railway locomotion, and out of which there must grow the application of machinery to those branches of industry not immediately connected with railways. The railway-system will therefore become, in India, truly the forerunner of modern industry. This is the more certain as the Hindoos are allowed by British authorities themselves to possess particular aptitude for accommodating themselves to entirely new labor, and acquiring the requisite knowledge of machinery. Ample proof of this fact is afforded by the capacities and expertness of the native engineers in the Calcutta mint, where they have been for years employed in working the steam machinery, by the natives attached to the several steam engines in the Burdwan coal districts, and by other instances. Mr. Campbell himself, greatly influenced as he is by the prejudices of the East India Company, is obliged to avow "that the great mass of the Indian people possesses a great industrial energy, is well fitted to accumulate capital, and remarkable for a mathematical clearness of head, and talent for figures and exact sciences." "Their intellects," he says, "are excellent." Modern industry, resulting from the railway system, will dissolve the hereditary divisions of labor, upon which rest the Indian castes, those decisive impediments to Indian progress and Indian power (ibid 49).

While Marx believed that the British were only constructing the railways to exploit India's population, he still believed that their very act of setting them up would require the British to industrialize India to a certain extent, and transfer skills to the indigenous population. Once these factors are introduced into India, the indigenous population would be very much capable of putting them to good use, for their own benefit. Thus, whatever Marx says about the stagnation of Indian society pre-colonization, he cannot be said to attribute it to any innate incapacity of its population to run a modern society.

Of the Indians benefiting from the regenerative aspects of British colonialism, Marx writes:

The Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie, till in Great Britain itself the now ruling classes shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindoos themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether. At all events, we may safely expect to see, at a more or less remote period, the regeneration of that great and interesting country, whose gentle natives are, to use the expression of Prince Soltykov, even in the most inferior classes, "plus fins et plus adroits que les Italiens," whose submission even is counterbalanced by a certain calm nobility, who, notwithstanding their natural langor, have astonished the British officers by their bravery, whose country has been the source of our languages, our religions, and who represent the type of the ancient German in the Jat, and the type of the ancient Greek in the Brahmin (ibid 49-50).

To benefit from the new elements brought into India by colonization, Marx argues that India will need to gain independence, which he does not see as an immediate possibility, or Britain would need to undergo a proletarian revolution. If we remember that one of the things that Marx lauds colonialism for is creating the political unity, military, and administrative infrastructure needed for the construction of a functional modern state, then it is reasonable to assume that one of the progressive roles colonialism is seen as playing is creating the conditions for Indians to gain independence through their self-emancipation, by laying the material foundations for a viable state. It should also be noted that Marx, while by no means presenting Indians in a wholly negative light, does engage in racial stereotyping with his comments about their submissiveness, and passivity.

Finally, Marx observes: ‘the profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of the bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked’ (Marx *Karl Marx on India* 50). Here, Marx attacks all the pretenses of Britain’s claims to be a civilizing power, seeing that rhetoric as a cover for baser designs. He claims, in fact, that the bourgeoisie’s true brutal nature is revealed most starkly in the colonies, where it is unrestrained by the niceties involved in ruling their own working classes. This emphasizes the meaning of Marx’s rhetorical question “Has the bourgeoisie ever ... effected a progress without dragging individuals and people through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation?” (ibid 49). This shows, that while he saw the British as bringing progress to India in spite of themselves, he entertained few illusions about

their real motives, or about the nature of their rule. Indeed, he thought of it as a particularly egregious example of how the bourgeoisie tended to rule in general.

2.2.2. Discussion

On one level, it is very easy to see why these articles are sometimes characterized as pro-colonialist. To begin with the obvious, there is the claim that Britain had a dual mission in India, in both destroying its old pre-colonial social structures, and creating the foundations for a new Westernized India in their place. This represents, if not an endorsement of colonialism on moral terms, and Marx is very clear about his disgust for the way the British had ruled in India, then at the very least, support for it in historical terms as an agent for progress. As Anderson observes, the destructive element of Britain's mission is largely carried out through the workings of free trade for Marx (15). This is in line with his assessment of the failure of the previous conquerors to change India because they were inferior in terms of their civilization, and so absorbed its culture instead of transforming it. This claim can plausibly be seen as a lapse into Eurocentrism (Anderson 22) because it suggests the superiority of the European civilization of the British conquerors, over India's previous "Asiatic" conquerors.

As would be expected, Marx's admittedly reluctant support of Britain's colonization of India was justified by an account of its society that replicated many of Europe's colonial narratives about "the East." Though Marx did see some attractive

features in the village system, he ultimately saw these villages as riddled with ancient forms of oppression (ibid 16), and ultimately as the basis for “Oriental despotism.” These villages are stagnant, unchanging, and ultimately, without history. Thus, you have both an invocation of the image of India as a stagnant, passive society without internal dynamism, as well as the related notion that it did not have any history. And it is not only these stereotypes that Marx replicates. In seeing Indian history as an endless series of foreign conquests over a divided land, he further reinforces the image of pre-colonial India as a fragmented society, with no history, and a rigidified hierarchical social structure, as we can see in his descriptions of a caste-ridden society of villages acting as the basis for “Oriental despots.”⁶

One particularly interesting question is Marx’s treatment of Hinduism. Anderson observes that “Marx perceived ... [in] ... Hinduism ... [a] ... deep-seated antihumanism ... [that] ... in his view ... [represented the] ... elevation of nature, as symbolized by sacred animals, over human beings” (Anderson 15). This assessment fits well with Marx’s description of “a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Kanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow” (Marx, Karl Marx on India 16). While these lines, on their own, do not provide conclusive evidence that Marx subscribed to some of the extreme descriptions of pre-colonial India as an extreme theocracy, as a land completely pre-occupied with religion and metaphysics, it does suggest that Marx at the very least saw Hinduism as a force degrading humanity, by raising up nature and necessity, and

⁶ See chapter one for a discussion on how India tended to be conceptualized by Europeans in the 19th century.

encouraging humanity to submit to their imperatives instead of taking hold of its own history. This links up quite easily with the vision of Indians as generally passive.

Additionally, there are clear examples of Marx using Europe as the model for the path that India should follow. When raising the possibility of a regenerated India, he suggests that it could become “annexed to the Western world” (ibid 47). Additionally, in his June 14 1853 letter to Engels, Marx states: “The breaking up of the archetypal forms [the village system] was the condition sine qua non for Europeanization” (ibid 267).

What both these quotes suggest, by proposing that India aspire to be transformed into a part of “the West,” and in associating modernization with “Europeanization” is that Europe is the model for development and modernity, which “Oriental” societies like India should strive to emulate. Amin, if we recall, discusses the way in which, in Eurocentric discourse, Europe becomes the embodiment of universalistic Humanism, progress, and scientific enlightenment. He argues that an imbalance develops, where the “West” need not concern itself with learning from the rest of the world, while the rest of the world must follow the “West’s” path, lest it fall into backwardness and stagnation (Amin 180-181). While not saying it outright, in associating progress with “Europeanization” and “annexation” to the “West,” Marx tacitly implies that Europe is the bearer of universal progress, which other parts of the world must come to resemble. In this manner, he replicates the false universalism of Eurocentric thought, rendering some justice to the claim that his thought suffered from at least some significant elements of Eurocentrism. In India specifically, there is a tendency, going back to the beginning of colonial times, to read the country’s history in terms of a “lack, an absence,

or an incompleteness,” a tendency which Dipesh Chakrabraty argues is present in both colonialist and nationalist historians (Chakrabraty 32, 35). Thus, Marx can be seen to be following the line of those who place Europe as an ideal model, against a backwards and inadequate India of “Oriental Despots” and vegetating isolated villages. In a sense, Marx’s description of Indian society in 1853 was an expression of Eurocentric thinking applied to the Indian context.

It would seem that Said’s critique of Marx, at least for his 1853 writings, has a certain level of merit. If we recall, Said argued that Marx saw India as a stagnant lifeless society, lacking the internal dynamism necessary to pull itself out of its backwards condition. For this reason, he argues that Marx saw British colonialism in India as necessary, both to destroy the old stagnant social order, and to create the foundations for a new “European” society in its place (Said 153-154). As we can see, these descriptions of Marx’s position do appear to be accurate, forcing us to conclude that Said was correct on these points.

However, these failings do not tell the whole story. It is worth recalling that even Aijaz Ahmad, one of Marx’s most vigorous defenders, conceded that his conception of India as stagnant and vegetative was a 19th century misconception (Ahmad, *In Theory* “Marx on India: A Clarification”). Additionally, most of Marx’s major defenders like Ahmad (ibid), Kevin Anderson (11-17), and Irfan Habib (I-iv) concede that he saw the

British playing a progressive role in India.⁷ It is when accounting for the reasoning behind Marx's position, that the picture becomes more complicated.

For Marx, in 1853, British colonialism was a way to overcome what he saw as distasteful, backwards social conditions. This would be accomplished through uprooting the old social order, destroying its productive base, largely through the actions of free trade. As a result of British practices, an enormous level of human suffering would be unleashed, up to and including famines, which were in part the result of the British not maintaining the irrigation systems required for growing crops in India's climate. To make matters worse, British rule, in Marx's view, was characterized by an immense amount of brutality and corruption. Any progress brought by the British was caused by the unconscious historical processes they unleashed, rather than anything approximating benevolence. This accounted for the destructive part of Britain's historical mission. For the most part, these lines of thought don't seriously contradict Said's characterizations; although the focus on free trade as the force that would breakdown India's stagnant society does suggest that Marx didn't see Britain's brutal political acts and neglectful attitude toward infrastructure as a necessary part of its "destructive mission."

As discussed previously, the factors that Marx included in Britain's regenerating mission all point to the promotion of development, and the construction of institutions required for it to become a modern, viable nation state. In particular, he pointed to the

⁷ Erica Benner argues that part of the reason that Marx emphasized the supposed progressive aspects of British colonialism in India was to counter the editorial line of the New York Daily Tribune, which she argues tended towards moralistic stances against colonial expansion as a crime. She adds that Marx agreed with the idea that British rule in India was pretty dreadful. However, Benner in formulating this argument is drawing from Marx's June 14th letter to Engels (Benner 177-178), which also contains the suggestion, cited earlier, that India might be Europeanized. Thus it cannot be used as an argument that Marx did not seriously hold to his conclusions about the progressive nature of British colonialism in India. This is the nearest thing to an attempt to argue that Marx was not pro-colonial in his 1853 articles that I have come across.

creation of a unified Indian army, the training of an indigenous administrative class, the introduction of modern education, as well as the railways, which were supposed to not only provide much needed transportation, but also result in skills transfers to the Indian population, who must participate in their operation. Additionally, Marx sees that in exploiting India, Britain will need to construct infrastructure, which will also involve skills transfers to the indigenous population. Indeed, the goals of modernization and the formation of a viable nation state cannot be completely separated. As Marx would clearly have seen, modernization was not only necessary for joining India into his overall socialist political project, it also was important for the creation of a viable nation state, since the productive capacity and social structure of a modern economy were seen as necessary in order to create the capacities for the effective defense of its sovereignty.

When Marx's reasons for seeing colonialism as regenerative are assessed together with his statement that India's indigenous population would only benefit from the new elements brought into India if a proletarian revolution were to occur in Britain, or if India were to self-emancipate itself from British rule, the reading that Marx saw colonialism's progressive role as analogous with the progressive role of capitalism has considerable weight. Capitalism creates a working class which will overthrow it, while colonialism creates a unified nation capable of throwing off its colonial masters (Anderson 24). In both cases, the progressive force brings with it an enormous amount of destruction, exploitation, and suffering, while also creating the conditions for their overcoming, through the self-emancipation of the very populations they are exploiting.

Further developing the parallel between capitalism and colonialism Ahmad states:

it is equally true that Marx's denunciation of pre-colonial society in India is no more strident than his denunciations of Europe's own feudal past, or of the Absolutist monarchies, or of the German burghers; his essays on Germany are every bit as nasty. His direct comments about the power of the caste system in the Indian village – 'restrain[ing] the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath the traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies' – are, on the one hand, a virtual paraphrase of his comments on the European peasantry as being mired in 'the idiocy of rural life,' and remind one, on the other hand, of the whole range of reformist politics and writings in India, spanning many centuries, but made all the more sharper in the twentieth century, which have always regarded the caste system as an altogether inhuman one (Ahmad, *In Theory* "Marx on India: A Clarification").

For Ahmad, Marx's denunciations of pre-colonial India's social system, rather than representing an undercurrent of racism, are the product of an antipathy towards pre-modern societies generally, including those in his own country, because of their limiting and oppressive features, as well as an opinion on the caste system that mirrors those of India's own progressive forces. Marx is thus seen as being driven by a dislike of oppressive backwards systems generally, as well as an understandable reaction to a

system of Caste that many Indians find equally objectionable. Neither of these motives need represent racism, Eurocentrism, or an “Orientalist” bias. Rather, for Ahmad:

Marx raises towards the end of that passage [which discusses the alleged social revolutionary rule of colonialism in India] – ‘can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia?’ – may be objectionable to the postmodern mind because of its explicit belief, inherited from the more decent traditions of the Enlightenment, in the unity, universality and actual possibility of human liberation, but it is surely not generated by the kind of racism Said ascribes to Marx, as we shall soon see. It is also worth recalling that those particular questions – Is human liberation possible without the liberation of Asia? What transformation will have to take place within Asian societies in order to make that liberation possible? – have been posed again and again in our own century: most doggedly in China, Korea, the Indochinese countries, but also in those revolutionary enterprises which were defeated so many years ago that barely a memory now remains – in Malaya, Indonesia, the Philippines, India (ibid).

Thus, Marx is attempting to find a place for Asia in a universalist project of human liberation, and figure out what transformations India must undergo in order to join this project. Ahmad sees Marx as incorporating India into a worldwide project, which while offensive to some post-modern sensibilities, is representative of the best parts of the Enlightenment. The search for these possibilities is very far from the kind of racism that

Said sees in Marx, when he claims that Marx believed Orientals don't suffer like Europeans (Said 155). As to the pro-colonial nature of this enterprise, Ahmad states:

The idea of a certain progressive role of colonialism was linked, in Marx's mind, with the idea of a progressive role of capitalism as such, in comparison with what had gone before, within Europe as much as outside it. In context, any attempt to portray Marx as an enthusiast of colonialism would logically have to portray him as an admirer of capitalism as well, which is what he wanted Germany to achieve, as quickly as possible (Ahmad, *In Theory* "Marx on India: A Clarification").

Thus, from this perspective colonialism is good only in that it is an exploitative system that creates the pre-conditions for a better society.

In the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels describe the historical role of capitalism in the following way:

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society...All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind (Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* 6).

Additionally, they add:

In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature (ibid 7).

Of capitalism's effects on rural life, they argue: "The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life" (ibid7). We see here an important number of similarities between Marx and Engels's description of capitalism's effects on pre-capitalist Europe, and Marx's description of what British colonialism was doing in India. In both cases, these forces uprooted a society that was seen as being defined by rural seclusion, narrow ancient prejudices, stagnant ossified social forms, and highly limited, narrowly particular forms of life, defined either as the "idiocy of rural life" or "vegetative." In both cases, these societies are swept away by a modernizing force that promised increased dynamism, technological development, and liberation from the stultified traditions of the past, and a broader, more cosmopolitan form of culture.

In response to Marx's passage raising the possibility of Indian independence, Irfan Habib enthuses:

If there is one man in modern history who does not stand in need of adjectives, that is Karl Marx; and what eulogy, in any case, can be adequate for this

passage? [the passage that raises the possibility of Indian independence] In 1853, to set colonial emancipation, not just colonial reform, as an objective for the European socialist movement; and, still more, to look forward to a national liberation ('throw[ing] off the English yoke.')

attained through their struggle by the Indian people, as an event that might even precede the emancipation of the European working class – such insight and vision could belong to Marx alone (Habib, *Karl Marx on India* liv).

Habib's argument for Marx being uniquely progressive on India, by the standards of 1853, rests not only on the fact he raised the possibility of Independence, but on how that independence would come about. Had Marx simply raised the possibility of independence, his position could perhaps be assimilated into a line of colonialist thinking that saw independence as an eventual outcome, after a long tutelage of European rule, during which the colonialists taught the colonized how to be modern. The colonized would then adopt a liberal system based on free trade that would maintain their ties with the metropole after independence (Chandra 278). Indeed, some of Marx's comments about modernization and the opening of India to trade with the "West," to which it might even be "annexed" too, point in this direction. However, Habib's observation about how Marx thought India could gain independence shows a fatal flaw in this reading. Under the colonialist scheme, independence would be the product of a long tutelage, in which a basically benevolent colonial power trains the colonized in the art of being modern. Independence is eventually gained, on the colonizers' terms, but the relationship is highly paternalistic. In Marx's conception, it is

the Indians themselves who gain independence through their own struggle for self-emancipation, against a historically progressive, but ultimately rapacious colonialism. The agency of the colonized population is significantly greater in Marx's scheme, and the colonizer is reduced to the status of a vicious, even barbarous exploiter, who only ever helps the colonized in spite of themselves. Thus, it is fair to argue that Marx's willingness to entertain the possibility of Indian self-emancipation from colonialism significantly mitigates his Eurocentrism.

One possible objection to my reading of Marx in these passages is that it is contradictory to argue both that Indians are by nature passive and submissive, while also acclaiming their ability for self-emancipation. Passivity and submissiveness seem like they would be exactly the kind of characteristics that would predispose a population to continued subjugation. However a predisposition, while suggesting a certain outcome, does not necessarily lead to that outcome in a predetermined manner. In many cases it can be a tendency which pushes towards a certain outcome, but which can be countervailed in opposing forces. If we recall, in the very passage that Marx describes Indians as passive and submissive, he also describes them as having "calm nobility," and comments on their bravery (Marx, *Karl Marx on India* 49-50). Thus, it seems that it is most likely that while Marx believed Indians tended to be passive and submissive, he also saw them as brave and noble. This second group of positive attributes countervailed the passivity and submissiveness, for Marx, and gave the Indian population the capacity for self-emancipation.

Finally, it seems like Marx's support for colonialism in India was at least partly based on a quite specific reading of the situation as he saw it in 1853. Erica Benner argued that in 1853, Marx saw resistance to British colonization as coming largely from traditional elites, who engaged in a "form of identity based resistance [that] was ultimately self-defeating" (Benner 178-179). Ultimately: "The real work of building a self-determining society must go beyond a separatist politics of identity, and concern itself with advancing the freedom and material welfare of people who, before the colonial era, had been demeaned and exploited by their own rulers" (ibid 179). Thus, one of the reasons Marx supported the British colonial project in India, was what he thought were a lack of progressive nationalist options (Anderson 20), that would not simply reproduce old forms of indigenous oppression, even if they managed to expel the colonizers. Indeed as Benner notes, viability was one of the criteria that Marx and Engels used to determine if nationalist movements were worth supporting. Viability, as they conceived it, sometimes verged into problematic discussions of "non-historic nations"(Benner 162-165), but it's most simple definition was "the feasibility of drawing boundaries so as to give a new state effective independence from foreign control, and a population free from national divisions significant enough to jeopardize the process of democratic reform" (ibid 160-161). From this viability criteria, we see that for Marx and Engels, it would make no sense to support a traditionalist anti-imperialist movement in India, because they did not believe that pre-colonial India had had the ability to maintain independence from foreign control, and thus a return to a pre-colonial past would not create a viable Indian state, even if they were prepared to support a national

liberation struggle that brought the old ruling classes back into power. While this position was perfectly compatible with Marx's Eurocentric perspective on pre-colonial India, it also shows the fairly narrow limits of Marx's pro-colonialism, as can be seen from the fact he would likely have been willing to support a progressive national liberation movement in India. It also reinforces Ahmad's contention that Marx's contempt for pre-colonial Indian social structures was the result of a general dislike of traditional modes of society, rather than racialized contempt for "Orientals."

Between Marx's willingness to see Indians as agents in their own self-emancipation, his generalized disdain for traditional societies explaining much of his negative assessment of pre-colonial India, the general orientation in his arguments towards the goal of a viable Indian nation state, as well as his pragmatic concerns about the results of traditionalist uprisings, we can conclude that many of the more extreme elements of Eurocentrism and Orientalism simply do not apply in Marx's case. In their stronger forms, "Orientalism" and Eurocentrism imply a highly essentialist vision of East and West, in which the inferior peoples of the East are destined to be ruled by the West forever.⁸ While Marx is by no means free of essentialist stereotyping, he rates the Indian population's capacity for agency too highly to be guilty of this kind of racism. Ahmad is surely correct that when Said attributes the idea that "they don't suffer like we do" to Marx, he is seriously exaggerating his level of racism. Indeed, there is a paradox, best captured by Victor Kiernan when he observed "if Marx felt little respect for Indian history, he had no contempt for Indians, believing them perfectly able to learn to run

⁸See Chapter One's discussion of Said and Amin.

their own country” (163). This paradox, of a contempt for Indian’s social structures without extending this same contempt to its people, points to perhaps the most important difference between Marx and more typical Eurocentric and pro-colonial thinkers, namely that while he accepted much of their characterization of Indian society as stagnant and lacking in internal dynamism, he did not explain this characterization by reference to some theory of inherent inferiority.

It is also worth noting that Marx seems at times to almost invert the implied hierarchy between civilizations with the way he used the concept of barbarism to refer to bourgeois society, particularly when he suggests that its true barbaric face is most clearly shown in the colonies (Anderson 23). This inversion appears as a common trope in Marx’s work, and I will argue in Chapter three that it carries serious theoretical weight. For now, the most important thing to note is that it represents a subtle attack on the hypocrisy of colonialist self-conception, by suggesting that the ugly traits it attributes to colonized peoples are embodied in its own rule. The implication is that the colonialists, who justify themselves by their superior civilization, are themselves barbarians, undermining much of their claim to legitimacy.

However, even with these mitigating factors, Marx, in 1853, cannot be fully absolved of the charge of Eurocentrism/”Orientalism”. For one thing, he clearly agreed with Eurocentric and “Orientalist” thinkers that India was a stagnant society lacking internal dynamism, and does so to a degree that pushes him to see British colonialism as a progressive modernizing force. Furthermore, his tendency to draw tight parallels between societies as disparate as Egypt, India, and China, suggests a tendency to

collapse particular societies in to broad essentializing categories like “East” and “West,” another trait of “Orientalist” thought which Said identifies. Ahmad concedes the point that Marx’s view of Indian society as stagnant and vegetative was an erroneous 19th century position, but he fails to draw out the full Eurocentric implications of this view, particularly since it played a large role in justifying colonialism. Additionally, it shows a significant limitation in the analogy he draws between Marx on India and Marx on pre-modern Europe. While it is true that Marx saw both of these societies as inherently backwards, as we will see in chapter three, Marx saw Feudal Europe as more developed than pre-colonial India, suggesting that Eurocentric notions of backwardness were still playing a role in shaping his thinking on India. In addition, it is plainly obvious, from the very fact that Marx believed Medieval Europe eventually produced capitalism that he did not attribute the same level of stagnation to both Medieval Europe and India, as it would not have been possible for capitalism to arise out of Europe if it did not have some internal dynamism. This distinction is brought into particularly stark relief when we consider that Marx, following the European stereotypes about India at his time, argued, echoing Hegel, that it lacked any real history. In a sense, this sentiment is the logical conclusion of viewing India as lacking internal mechanisms for change, since stagnation precludes large scale social changes. This shows that there existed a significant contrast between the ways Marx viewed India, compared with pre-modern Europe, which he never dismissed as lacking history.

2.3. The 1857 Sepoy Rebellion

2.3.1 Explication

The 1857 rebellion in India, led by mutinying indigenous soldiers in the British colonial army (Anderson 37), marks an important point of development in how Marx and Engels viewed India. As seen in the last chapter, there is a certain amount of disagreement about the attitude Marx and Engels took towards the uprising. In this section I will seek to present a plausible reading of their writings on the subject, with the hope of shedding light on the issues under discussion.

Marx's first article on the rebellion, "The Revolt in the Indian Army," appeared in the *New York Daily Tribune* on July 15, 1857. He begins by describing how divide and rule "was the great rule by which Great Britain, for about one hundred and fifty years, contrived to retain the tenure of her Indian empire. The antagonism of the various races, tribes, castes, creeds and sovereignties, the aggregate of which forms the geographical unity of what is called India, continued to be the vital principle of British supremacy" (Marx, *Karl Marx on India* 60). The end result of this process was that "all warlike native tribes were subdued, all serious internal conflicts were at an end"..."hence a great change in the position of the East India Company. It no longer attacked one part of India by the help of another part, but found itself placed at the head, and the whole of India at its feet" (Marx, *ibid*). However, this unification of India

brought about a situation where “the allegiance of the Indian people rests on the fidelity of the native army, in creating which the British rule simultaneously organized the first general center of resistance which the Indian people was ever possessed of” (ibid 60). This army, which the British depended on, also created a locus of resistance to their rule. As for the loyalty of this army, Marx observed:

How far that native army may be relied upon is clearly shown by its recent mutinies, breaking out as soon as the war with Persia had almost denuded the Presidency of Bengal of its European soldiers. Before this there had been mutinies in the Indian army, but the present revolt is distinguished by characteristic and fatal features. It is the first time that sepoy regiments have murdered their European officers; that Mussulmans and Hindoos, renouncing their mutual antipathies, have combined against their common masters (ibid 60).

In a later article, “The Indian Revolt,” published on September 16 1857, Marx pushed the theme of a colonial army functioning as a site of resistance even farther:

There is something in human history like retribution; and it is a rule of historical retribution that its instrument be forged not by the offended, but by the offender himself ... The Indian revolt does not commence with the Ryots, tortured, dishonoured and stripped naked by the British, but with the Sepoys, clad, fed, petted, fatted and pampered by them (ibid 89).

We see here a dialectical process, with the very development of colonialism producing the agents that will bring it to its down fall (Anderson 40). This dialectic occurs as the colonial army, which is needed for maintaining order in the colony, becomes a major

flash point for resistance, with the potentiality to assist in the unification of India under a national banner, as regional and religious identities come to take second place to a new national identity, encouraged by the national army acting as a melting pot, and by the presence of a common enemy in the form of the British.

Marx's next article, "The Revolt in India," published on August 4, 1857, begins by assessing the chances of the Sepoys of holding onto Delhi:

Just a month had passed since Delhi fell into the hands of the revolted Sepoys and the proclamation by them of a Mogul Emperor. Any notion, however, of the mutineers being able to keep the ancient capital of India against the British forces would be preposterous. Delhi is fortified only by a wall and a simple ditch, while the heights surrounding and commanding it are already in the possession of the English, who, even without battering the walls, might enforce its surrender in a very short period by the easy process of cutting off its supply of water. Moreover, a motley crew of mutineering soldiers who have murdered their own officers, torn asunder the ties of discipline, and not succeeded in discovering a man upon whom to bestow the supreme command, are certainly the body least likely to organize a serious and protracted resistance (Marx, *Karl Marx on India* 63).

However, Marx did not think the fall of Delhi would be the end of trouble for the British:

With all that, the news of the fall of Delhi may be daily expected; but what next? If the uncontested possession by the rebels during a month, of the traditionary center of the Indian Empire acted perhaps as the most powerful ferment in

completely breaking up the Bengal army, in spreading mutiny and desertion from Calcutta to the Punjaub in the north, and to Rajpootana in the west, and in shaking the British authority from one end of India to the other, no greater mistake could be committed than to suppose that the fall of Delhi, though it may throw consternation among the ranks of the Sepoys, should suffice either to quench the rebellion, to stop its progress, or to restore the British rule. Of the whole native Bengal army, mustering about 80,000 men — composed of about 28,000 Rajpoots, 23,000 Brahmins, 13,000 Mahometans, 5,000 Hindoos of inferior castes, and the rest Europeans — 30,000 have disappeared in consequence of mutiny, desertion, or dismissal from the ranks. As to the rest of that army, several of the regiments have openly declared that they will remain faithful and support the British authority, excepting in the matter in which the native troops are now engaged: they will not aid the authorities against the mutineers of the native regiments, and will, on the contrary, assist their “bhaies” (brothers). The truth of this has been exemplified in almost every station from Calcutta. The native regiments remained passive for a time; but, as soon as they fancied themselves strong enough, they mutinied...In the Punjaub, open rebellion has only been prevented by disbanding the native troops. In Oude, the English can only be said to keep Lucknow, the residency while everywhere else the native regiments have revolted, escaped with their ammunition, burned all the bungalows to the ground, and joined with the inhabitants who have taken up arms. Now, the real position of the English army is best demonstrated by the fact

that it was thought necessary, in the Punjaub as well as the Rajpootana, to establish flying corps. This means that the English cannot depend either on their Sepoy troops or on the natives to keep the communication open between their scattered forces (Marx, *Karl Marx on India* 64-65).

Thus, if the Sepoys were poorly equipped militarily, they had the advantage of having a broad base of support. His analysis of this support sharpened, as it became clear that Delhi would not fall nearly as quickly as he'd originally thought, "by and by there will ooze out other facts able to convince even John Bull himself that what he considers a military mutiny is in truth a national revolt" (ibid 72).⁹

Marx further develops his analysis of the uprising as a national revolt, arguing:

It is evident that, by dint of weakness, vacillation, and direct blunders, the British generals have contrived to raise Delhi to the dignity of the political and military center of the Indian revolt. A retreat of the English army, after a prolonged siege, or a mere staying on the defensive, will be regarded as a positive defeat, and give the signal to a general outbreak. It would moreover expose the British troops to a fearful mortality, from which till now they have been protected by the great excitement inherent to a siege full of sorties, encounters, and a hope of

⁹ In a letter to Engels, written on August 15, 1857, Marx writes the following:

"As to the Delhi affair, it seems to me that the English ought to begin their retreat as soon as the RAINY SEASON HAS SET IN in real earnest. Being obliged for the present to hold the fort for you as the *Tribune's* military correspondent, I have taken it upon myself to put this forward. NB, ON THE SUPPOSITION that the REPORTS to date have been true. It's possible that I shall make an ass of myself. But in that case one can always get out of it with a little dialectic. I have, of course, so worded my proposition as to be right either way. The persistent rumours about the fall of Delhi are being circulated throughout India by the government in Calcutta, no less, and are intended, as I see from the Indian papers, as the chief means of preventing unrest in Madras and Bombay PRESIDENCIES (Marx, *Karl Marx on India* 270)."

This letter suggests Marx was hedging his bets when he argued earlier that Delhi would rapidly fall. His uncertainty was based on his suspicion that the reports coming from the government and newspapers in India were distorted for propaganda purposes, in order to discourage the rebels. It also betrays more than a whiff of cynicism in Marx's approach, based on a concern for not appearing to be wrong. Thus, his dialectic, between the superior discipline of the British forces and the national character of the revolt must be read with a certain amount of caution.

soon wreaking a bloody vengeance on their enemies. As to the talk about the apathy of the Hindoos, or even their sympathy with British rule, it is all nonsense...In the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay, the army having not yet pronounced, the people of course do not stir. The Punjaub, at last, is to this moment the principal central station of the European forces, while its native army is disarmed. To rouse it, the neighboring semi-independent princes must throw their weight into the scale. But that such a ramification of conspiracy as exhibited by the Bengal army could not have been carried on such an immense scale without the secret connivance and support of the natives, seems as certain as that the great difficulties the English meet with in obtaining supplies and transports – the principal cause of the slow concentration of their troops – do not witness to the good feelings of the peasantry (ibid 78-79).

Marx's passages here demonstrate not only that he believed the revolt had a broad reach within the army, but within the broader peasantry as well. The Sepoys, it seemed, could count on the support of a significant part of the population, who shared their antipathy to British rule. It would appear the British were in a difficult situation, regardless of how purely military considerations played out, because of the hostility the population seemed to harbor for their rule.

While characterizing the Sepoy uprising as a national revolt, Marx's thoughts on its deeper social character are somewhat ambiguous. Irfan Habib argues that while Marx and Engels were generally sympathetic to the rebellion they ultimately saw it as a reaction against the destruction of old ways of life by the old classes, and that the

rebellions lacked any kind of modernizing element (Habib, *Karl Marx on India* xlviix-xlix). This reading does have some basis in Marx's texts. In the same article where he outlined the rebellion's national character and popular support, he also claimed that:

The princes, like true Asiatics, are watching their opportunity. The people in the whole Presidency of Bengal, where not kept in check by a handful of Europeans, are enjoying a blessed anarchy; but there is nobody there against whom they could rise. It is a curious quid pro quo to expect an Indian revolt to assume the features of a European revolution (Marx, *Karl Marx on India* 78).

In addition, in his article "The Revolt in India" published on November 14, 1857, Marx presents the following picture of Sepoy rule in Delhi:

The Mogul specter himself, like the merchants of Delhi, had become averse to the rule of the Sepoys, who plundered them of every rupee they had amassed, the religious dissensions between the Hindoo and Mohammedan Sepoys, and the quarrels between the old garrison and the new re-enforcements, sufficed to break up their superficial organization and to insure their downfall (ibid 115).

Finally, as an example of how Marx and Engels judged the military capacity of the Sepoys in direct combat, there is this passage from Engels in his February 1, 1858 article, "The Relief of Lucknow:"

The character of the whole engagement is that of an attack by well-disciplined, well-officered European troops, inured to war and of average courage, upon an Asiatic rabble, possessing neither discipline nor officers, nor the habits of war, nor even adequate arms, and whose courage was broken by the consciousness

of the double superiority possessed by their opponents, as soldiers over civilians and as Europeans over Asiatics (Engels, *Karl Marx on India* 132).

It would appear from these sections that those who see Marx and Engels as skeptical about the success of the rebellion were correct, firstly, because the scene of Sepoy rule degenerating into plunder and ethnic conflict suggests a failure to present a program for reform (Benner 183), and secondly, because they thought the Sepoys had neither the military training nor infrastructure to actually face the British in head to head combat. Additionally, there are clear racist overtones in Engels's mention of the superiority of "Europeans over Asiatics."¹⁰

However, these statements must be considered alongside the evidence for sympathy with, or even support for, the rebellion on the part of Marx and Engels. To begin with, sometime after chastising the idea that the Indian revolt would follow the pattern of a European revolution, Marx argued the following with regards to the position of the British army in India:

The examination of these events forces the conclusion upon us that., in the north-west provinces of Bengal, the British forces were gradually drifting into the position of small posts planted on insulated rocks amid a sea of revolution. In lower Bengal, there had occurred only partial acts of insubordination at Mirzapore, Dinapore and Patna, beside an unsuccessful attempt made by the roving Brahmins of the neighborhood to recapture the holy city of Benares. In the Punjaub, the spirit of rebellion was forcibly kept down, a mutiny being

¹⁰In *Marx at the Margins* Kevin Anderson discusses the role of racist notions in the writings of Engels, within the context of Russia and Eastern Europe. He notes that Engels had a greater tendency towards using race based argumentation, as compared to Marx, but observes that Marx tended to describe Russians in a problematic manner (49-50).

suppressed at Sealkote, another at Jelum, and the disaffection of Peshawur successfully checked. Emeutes had already been attempted in Gujerat, at Punderpoor in Sattara, at Nagpore and Saugor in the Nagpore territory, at Hyderabad in the Nizam's territory, and, lastly, as far south as Mysore, so that the calm of the Bombay and Madras Presidencies must be understood as by no means perfectly secure (Marx, *Karl Marx on India* 88).

Not only do we see that Marx here is willing to grant that the conditions in India were in some sense revolutionary, although perhaps not in the European mode, we see here that he thought the British were in a precarious position because he believed the rebellion had a large base of popular support. The strength of the Sepoy rebels as an army was not, for Marx, the main source of the rebellion's strength. That source instead came from the fact the rebellion was an expression of a mass discontent against British rule in India, and thus, that it had a real social base to draw upon and represent. This point is made explicit when Engels stated, in the context of praising the military skill of the English General Colin Campbell that "the strength of a national insurrection does not lie [in] lit pitched battles, but in petty warfare, in the defense of towns, and in the interruption of the enemy's communications" (Engels, *Karl Marx on India* 137). Later, in his article "How Lucknow was Taken" published on May 25, 1858, Engels, states "but even in the best of cases, a long and harassing guerrilla warfare is before them [the British] – not an enviable thing for Europeans under an Indian Sun" (ibid 164).

Because Marx and Engels saw the main strength of the rebellion in its base of popular support, and in the ability to conduct guerrilla warfare, the fact they did not

believe the Sepoys could match Europeans in direct combat does not prove they saw the rebellion as hopeless. Indeed, the framing of the rebellion as a national revolt is arguably evidence that they saw it in a sympathetic light. If the revolt was national, as opposed to simply a mutiny, it shows that it had significant support amongst the population, and points to widespread discontent with British rule in India. This support in turn confers a certain amount of legitimacy on the revolt, as it suggests that its grievances, and even aims, were widely supported, and not just the ravings of a few malcontents. While this on its own cannot conclusively prove that Marx and Engels supported the rebellion, it does suggest at least some level of sympathy. There is however, additional evidence to support the view they either supported, or were at least very sympathetic to the rebellion. In his “The Indian Revolt” published September 16, 1857, Marx discusses the atrocities that were committed by the Sepoys, and contextualizes them within the context of Britain’s own behaviour in India (Anderson 39):

The outrages committed by the revolted Sepoys in India are indeed appalling, hideous, ineffable — such as one is prepared to meet only in wars of insurrection, of nationalities, of races, and above all of religion; in one word, such as respectable England used to applaud when perpetrated by the Vendéans on the “Blues,” by the Spanish guerrillas on the infidel Frenchmen, by Servians on their German and Hungarian neighbors, by Croats on Viennese rebels, by Cavaignac’s Garde Mobile or Bonaparte’s Decembrists on the sons and daughters of proletarian France. However infamous the conduct of the Sepoys, it

is only the reflex, in a concentrated form, of England's own conduct in India, not only during the epoch of the foundation of her Eastern Empire, but even during the last ten years of a long-settled rule. To characterize that rule, it suffices to say that torture formed an organic institution of its financial policy (Marx, *Karl Marx on India* 89).

With regard to Britain's conduct in China, Marx writes:

The English soldiery then committed abominations for the mere fun of it; their passions being neither sanctified by religious fanaticism nor exacerbated by hatred against an overbearing and conquering race, nor provoked by the stern resistance of a heroic enemy. The violations of women, the spittings of children, the roasting of whole villages, were then mere wanton sports, not recorded by Mandarins, but by British officers themselves (ibid 89).

Even with regards to British conduct during the rebellion, Marx observed:

Even at the present catastrophe it would be an unmitigated mistake to suppose that all the cruelty is on the side of the Sepoys, and all the milk of human kindness flows on the side of the English. The letters of the British officers are redolent of malignity...One exulting officer writes: 'Holmes is hanging them by the score, like a "brick"'. Another, in allusion to the summary hanging of the a large body of natives: 'Then our fun commenced.' A third: 'We hold court-martials on horseback, and every nigger we meet we either string up or shoot' (ibid 89-90).

Finally, Marx observes the difference between how Sepoy and British atrocities were covered in the British press, and places the actions of the Sepoys in comparison to the British and European historical record:

And then it should not be forgotten that, while the cruelties of the English are related as acts of martial vigor, told simply, rapidly, without dwelling on disgusting details, the outrages of the natives, shocking as they are, are still deliberately exaggerated. For instance, the circumstantial account first appearing in *The Times*, and then going the round of the London press, of the atrocities perpetrated at Delhi and Meerut, from whom did it proceed? From a cowardly parson residing at Bangalore, Mysore, more than a thousand miles, as the bird flies, distant from the scene of action. Actual accounts of Delhi evince the imagination of an English parson to be capable of breeding greater horrors than even the wild fancy of a Hindoo mutineer. The cutting of noses, breasts, & c., in one word, the horrid mutilations committed by the Sepoys, are of course more revolting to European feeling than the throwing of red-hot shell on Canton dwellings by a Secretary of the Manchester Peace Society, or the roasting of Arabs pent up in a cave by a French Marshal, or the flaying alive of British soldiers by the cat-o'-nine-tails under drum-head court-martial, or any other of the philanthropical appliances used in British penitentiary colonies. Cruelty, like every other thing, has its fashion, changing according to time and place. Caesar, the accomplished scholar, candidly narrates how he ordered many thousand Gallic warriors to have their right hands cut off. Napoleon would have been ashamed to do this. He preferred dispatching

his own French regiments, suspected of republicanism, to St. Domingo, there to die of the blacks and the plague.

The infamous mutilations committed by the Sepoys remind one of the practices of the Christian Byzantine Empire, or the prescriptions of Emperor Charles V's criminal law, or the English punishments for high treason, as still recorded by Judge Blackstone. With Hindoos, whom their religion has made virtuosi in the art of self-torturing, these tortures inflicted on the enemies of their race and creed appear quite natural, and must appear still more so to the English, who, only some years since, still used to draw revenues from the Juggernaut festivals, protecting and assisting the bloody rites of a religion of cruelty (ibid 90-91).

Marx's discussion of the Sepoys's atrocities is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, Marx draws strong parallels between the atrocities the British and Europeans committed throughout their histories, and the actions of the Sepoys (Anderson 39). However, in laying out this parallel, he goes further in defending the Sepoys, arguing that their actions were blowback from the systematic abuse of the British regime in India. While not justifying the Sepoy's violence, he renders it a natural reaction to the regime that they are fighting, making it at the very least intelligible. Marx, who was by no means naïve about the nature of political revolutions, would no doubt have seen the kinds of excesses committed by the Sepoys as unsurprising. In addition, he observes, that the British were rather brutal themselves, suggesting that the Sepoys' actions must be seen within the context of a vicious civil war, not as senseless acts of barbarism.

These modes of contextualization counter the narrative presented by the British press, which attempted to paint the Sepoys's actions as uniquely horrific, by instead placing them in a context which renders their opponents at least as guilty, thereby undercutting the partisan outrage against them. This naturally indicates sympathy, because this shift in the narrative has the effect of softening the sting of the Sepoys's excesses, while also turning the tables on the British by denying them the moral high ground. Additionally, Marx undercuts the British press by observing their hypocrisy in sensationalizing Sepoy violence, while downplaying Britain's own. This has the effect of further breaking down the anti-Sepoy narrative, by undermining the outrage stirred up against them.

In contrast, in his article "Investigation of Torture in India," published September 17, 1857, on the question of the use of torture in the collection of taxes, Marx argues that "the universal existence of torture as a financial institution of British India is thus officially admitted, but the admission is made in such a manner as to shield the British Government itself" (ibid 93). From this grim assessment, Marx draws the following conclusion:

We have here given but a brief and mildly-colored chapter from the real history of British rule in India. In view of such facts, dispassionate and thoughtful men may perhaps be led to ask whether a people are not justified in attempting to expel the foreign conquerors who have so abused their subjects. And if the English could do these things in cold blood, is it surprising that the insurgent

Hindoos should be guilty, in the fury of revolt and conflict, of the crimes and cruelties alleged against them? (ibid 96).

Prompted by Britain's systemic exploitation and abuse of power, Marx suggests that the Indian push to drive the British out of India is justified. While not cast in the most unequivocal terms, Marx's statement here amounts to an at least tacit endorsement of the rebellion. However, this endorsement is not the only important part of this passage. Perhaps of equal importance is that Marx's narrative of Sepoy violence as blowback for British violence has now crystalized into a contrast between the cold systemic violence of the regime, versus the hot fury of the revolting Sepoys. This is important, because this style of contrast has become something of a trope amongst those who wish to continue defending revolutions, when their protagonists no longer have clean hands.¹¹ The fact Marx deployed this style of argumentation, when we consider how it is often used, is evidence of support for the rebellion.

In addition to contextualizing Sepoy excesses and suggesting that the drive to kick the British out of India might be justified, Marx questioned the value of India to Britain, in his article "British Incomes in India" September 21, 1857. Early on he concludes:

In prosecuting its conquests hitherto, and building up its establishments, the East India Company has contracted a debt of upward of £50,000,000 sterling, while the British Government has been at the expense, for years past, of transporting

¹¹One classic expression of this line of reasoning is found in CLR James's classic history of the Haitian Revolution *The Black Jacobins*. After describing the considerable violence inflicted by the revolting slaves on their masters in the early stages of the revolution, James states: "And yet they [the revolting slaves] were surprisingly moderate, then and afterwards, far more humane than their masters had been or would ever be to them. They did not maintain this revengeful spirit for long. The cruelties of property and privilege are always more ferocious than the revenges of poverty and oppression. For the one aims at perpetuating resented injustice, the other is merely a momentary passion soon appeased" (James 88-89).

to and front and keeping up in India, in addition to the forces, native and European, of the East India Company, a standing army of thirty thousand men. Such being the case, it is evident that the advantage to Great Britain from her Indian empire must be limited to the profits and benefits which accrue to individual British subjects. These profits and benefits, it must be confessed, are very considerable (Marx, *Karl Marx on India* 97).

Thus, for all Britain's brutality and viciousness in India, it was not even clear that it benefited from holding India. At the end of the article he concluded that "Add[ed] to this [cost of various nearby wars] the career of endless conquest and perpetual aggression in which the English are involved by the possession of India, and it may well be doubted whether, on the whole, this dominion does not threaten to cost quite as much as it can ever be expected to come to" (Marx, *Karl Marx on India* 100). Added to everything else, Marx casts a heavy air of futility over the whole colonial project.

2.3.2 Discussion

In some ways, the analysis Marx and Engels applied to the Sepoy rebellion appears as the realization of the analysis offered in Marx's 1853 articles. The Indian army, formed to enable British rule, did indeed become the locus of the rebellion. In addition, the rebellion, at least in the beginning, managed to unite Indians against the British. Additionally, we again see the same emphasis on the barbarism of the British, as

showing the hypocrisy of Western claims to superiority. Finally, as a popular rebellion, it represented the self-activity of the Indian masses against British colonization.

However, it would be incorrect to see the Sepoy rebellion as simply the fruit of the dynamics outlined in 1853. To begin with, according to Marx himself, the modernization he expected had failed to penetrate the army, let alone Indian society in general. The character of the rebellion reflected this fact, in that to the extent that Marx saw any political program in it, it was the restoration of the Mughal Empire, and not the creation of a modern Indian nation state. For this reason, from Marx's own position, with his modernizing vision of emancipation, it would make a certain amount of sense that he would be somewhat skeptical of the traditionalist aspects of the rebellion, and thus be reluctant to fully support it. As we shall see in chapter three, there is little evidence to suggest that Marx had abandoned his conception of "Oriental Despotism" during this period in his career, suggesting that a major part of the justification of his pro-colonialist position on India remained in place. The continuing belief in "Oriental Despotism" and the traditionalist character of the rebellion, together represent the strongest argument for seeing Marx and Engels as sympathetic but not ultimately supportive of the Sepoy rebellion. To recall, it must be remembered that it is the question of support, and not sympathy, which is controversial in discussions of this topic.

However, while some of the evidence which can be cited in favour of the position that Marx and Engels supported the Sepoy rebellion could also be credibly read as simply expressing sympathy for their legitimate grievances without actually

supporting the rebellion, there are a couple pieces of evidence that point more directly to support. The first is that Marx explicitly raised the possibility – albeit in somewhat non-committal terms – that the Indian claim to independence might be justified. While he had considered this possibility in 1853, suggesting that independence might be justified in an actual rebellion holds a greater significance, because the stakes are much more immediate. Secondly, Marx suggests that India might not be worth the cost for Britain. In itself, this statement does not do much to defend the grievances of the rebelling Sepoys – however it does undermine the case for hanging onto India as a colony. Finally, there is the way Sepoy violence is contextualized. It would be one thing if it was merely rendered understandable as a product of British abuse. However, in contrasting cold British violence with the hot violence of Sepoy revolt, Marx is presenting a rhetorical structure that implies that the Sepoys held the moral high ground.

Thus, while it would seem that Marx and Engels were more skeptical of the social content of the Sepoy rebellion than Anderson suggests, he is correct in arguing that they did ultimately side with it. And for that reason, while Marx and Engels maintained a Eurocentric conception of India as a land of “Oriental Despotism,” and even engaged in a considerable amount of racist stereotyping, their coverage of the Sepoy rebellion, as Anderson argues, represents a major turning point in their thinking on British colonialism in India, because it shows them supporting an anti-colonial rebellion, and an anti-colonial rebellion with what they saw as questionable politics at that. However, while this apparent support marks a transition towards anti-colonialism, a couple notes

of caution must be struck. The first is while, on the balance of probabilities, it seems unlikely that Marx and Engels would have gone so far as to say things like the calls for independence might be justified if they didn't support the rebellion, it is the case that the textual evidence involved is too conflicted to devise an answer that is 100 percent certain. The second note of caution is that the main locus of unification for the Sepoy rebellion was the army created by the British, suggesting Marx and Engels may still have entertained the idea that it was colonialism that was creating the conditions for a modern Indian nation state to develop. Thus, while their writings on the Sepoy rebellion mark an important shift towards an anti-colonial position, it would be hasty to conclude that Marx and Engels had fully abandoned their pro-colonial notions in 1857-1858.

2.4. Letter to Danielson 1881

2.4.1. Explication

Before moving onto Marx's denser theoretical works, it will be illuminating to briefly take a look at Marx's 1881 letter to Nicolai Danielson. In this letter, Marx presents the following assessment of India under British rule:

In India serious complications, if not a general outbreak, is in store for the British government. What the English take from them annually in the form of rent,

dividends for railways useless to the Hindus; pensions for military and civil service men, for Afghanistan and other wars, etc., etc. – what they take from them without any equivalent and quite apart from what they appropriate to themselves annually within India, speaking only of the value of the commodities the Indians have gratuitously and annually to send over to England – it amounts to more than the total sum of income of the sixty millions of agricultural and industrial labourers of India! This is a bleeding process, with a vengeance! The famine years are pressing each other and in dimensions till now not yet suspected in Europe! There is an actual conspiracy going on wherein Hindus and Mussulmans co-operate; the British government is aware that something is “brewing,” but this shallow people (I mean the governmental men), stultified by their own parliamentary ways of talking and thinking, do not even desire to see clear, to realise the whole extent of the imminent danger! To delude others and by deluding them to delude yourself – this is: parliamentary wisdom in a nutshell! Tant mieux!(Marx, “Marx to Nikolai Danielson”)

A few things are important to note here. Firstly, Marx seems to reverse his position on the railways, now seeing them as useless to the indigenous population. This is particularly significant, because in 1853, Marx had placed much emphasis on the benefits of the railways. Secondly, Marx makes a point of describing the economic relationship between India and Britain as a bleeding process,¹² with the colonizer draining the colony of resources. Finally, Marx sees the development of anti-colonial

¹²Irfan Habib reads this bleeding process as an example of primitive accumulation (he uses the term primary accumulation), where India's non-capitalist economy is subject to direct extraction by the British, with the result that their resources were being syphoned off to support British industrialization (Habib, *Karl Marx on India* xli-xlii).

resistance in India, with the general outbreak of rebellion a distinct possibility. It would seem that not only had Marx abandoned some of the planks that had backed up his earlier “pro-colonial” argument, he’d also come to the conclusion that India was getting robbed blind, and that India was ripe for rebellion. It is not only that Marx’s description of the British role in India was purely negative, but that he’d also abandoned many of the claims that had once propped up his pro-colonialist arguments. It would seem that by the end of his life, Marx had arrived upon an anti-colonialist reading of the British role in India.

2.4.2. Discussion

A full discussion of how Marx in the last years of his life came to view India’s social structure and historical evolution will have to wait until chapter three. However, this segment of Marx’s letter provides some interesting insights for the questions we are discussing. Firstly, it demonstrates a clear break with his previous pro-colonialist positions. The faith that colonialism will modernize India appears to be replaced by a view that it is simply bleeding India dry. The exploitation remains, but the supposed benefits are gone. This view of colonialism pushes against the Eurocentric idea that European capitalism could be a model for the rest of the world, because European capitalism’s wealth, in the gains it makes from the bleeding process, is implicated in the exploitation of the non-European world. Secondly, it suggests that he has abandoned his

view of India as stagnant, at least to a certain extent, because he anticipates rebellion throughout the country. This suggests at least a softening of his Eurocentric conceptions of Indian society, since he clearly sees greater amounts of dynamism within it.

2.5. Conclusion

The main conclusions I have tried to defend in this chapter can be summarized as follows:

1. In 1853 Marx and Engels believed that colonialism was playing a progressive role in India. In addition, they held to a Eurocentric/"Orientalist" vision of India as a stagnant place lacking history and internal mechanisms for change. However, they did not attribute the supposed backwardness of Indian society to some notion of the inherent inferiority of its indigenous inhabitants, and also foresaw the Indian population gaining Independence through their own self-emancipation. For this reason, they cannot be said to be guilty of the more extreme, essentializing forms of Eurocentrism/"Orientalism," as they rated the Indian population's capacity for agency too highly for those notions to apply. Finally, it should be noted that Marx and Engels had no illusions about the brutal nature of British colonialism in India.
2. While the evidence is not without ambiguity, it is most likely the case that Marx and Engels supported the Sepoy rebellion. While it would be hasty to conclude

that Marx and Engels had completely abandoned their pro-colonialist positions, the Sepoy rebellion marks a major transition point towards a more anti-colonialist position.

3. By the end of Marx's career, he had abandoned many of the previous claims that had propped up his pro-colonialist positions in 1853, and had adopted an almost completely negative view of Britain's role in India. He'd also abandoned, or at least softened his Eurocentric/"Orientalist" ideas about India being a stagnant place with no history.

Chapter Three: Plunder, Stagnation, and the Many Lives of the Asiatic Mode of Production

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will investigate Marx and Engels's more theoretical writings as they are relevant to the topics of Eurocentrism/"Orientalism." I will begin by addressing the question of the exploitation of nation by nation under capitalism. I will argue that Marx and Engels, from near the beginning of their careers, had developed and understanding of the way nations were exploited by other nations under capitalism. I will argue that this notion developed over the course of their careers, and that it may of contributed to a shift away from Eurocentric/"Orientalist" positions, as the wealth of Europe became increasingly implicated in the exploitation of the colonized world.

Next, I will discuss the question of the Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP). I will argue that Marx and Engels's conception of the AMP can justly be described as Eurocentric/"Orientalist," at least for most of their careers, because it reproduced stereotypes about India being a stagnant society with little internal dynamism. I will also argue that Marx and Engels had a multilinear theory of history, starting in the late 1850s at the latest. I will argue that the AMP was a persistent feature of Marx and Engels's work, but that near the end of Marx's life, he came to a much less Eurocentric conception of Indian society, abandoning many of his claims about its stagnation and

lack of history. However, some Eurocentric echoes still remained because he still placed India at a fairly primitive stage of development.

3.2. The Exploitation of Nation by Nation Under Capitalism

3.2.1. Explication

In order to gain a fuller understanding of how Marx and Engels understood colonialism, it will be useful to briefly discuss how they understood the exploitation of nation by nation under capitalism. Earlier in his career, on January 9, 1848, Marx delivered a “Speech on the Question of Free Trade.” In response to the doctrine of comparative advantage, he argued that:

We have shown what sort of fraternity Free Trade begets between the different classes of one and the same nation. The fraternity which Free Trade would establish between the nations of the earth would not be more real, to call cosmopolitan exploitation universal brotherhood is an idea that could only be engendered in the brain of the bourgeoisie. Every one of the destructive phenomena to which unlimited competition gives rise within any one nation is reproduced in more gigantic proportions in the market of the world. We need not pause any longer upon Free Trade sophisms on this subject, which are worth

just as much as the arguments of our prize essayists Messrs Hope, Morse, and Greg.

For instance, we are told that Free Trade would create an international division of labor, and thereby give to each country those branches of production most in harmony with its natural advantages.

You believe perhaps, gentlemen, that the production of coffee and sugar is the natural destiny of the West Indies.

Two centuries ago, nature, which does not trouble itself about commerce, had planted neither sugar-cane nor coffee trees there. And it may be that in less than half a century you will find there neither coffee nor sugar, for the East Indies, by means of cheaper production, have already successfully broken down this so-called natural destiny of the West Indies.

And the West Indies, with their natural wealth, are as heavy a burden for England as the weavers of Dacca, who also were destined from the beginning of time to weave by hand.

One other circumstance must not be forgotten, namely that, just as everything has become a monopoly, there are also nowadays some branches of industry which prevail over all others, and secure to the nations which especially foster them the command of the market of the world. Thus in the commerce of the world cotton alone has much greater commercial importance than all the other raw materials used in the manufacture of clothing. It is truly ridiculous for the Free Traders to refer to the few specialties in each branch of industry,

throwing them into the balance against the product used in everyday consumption, and produced most cheaply in those countries in which manufacture is most highly developed

If the Free Traders cannot understand how one nation can grow rich at the expense of another, we need not wonder, since these same gentlemen also refuse to understand how in the same country one class can enrich itself at the expense of another. (Marx "Speech on the Question of Free Trade" 464-465).

Marx here distinguishes himself from the free trade proponents in some important ways. Firstly, he sees the specialization of different nations in the international division of labour as a product of historical circumstance, and not the result of natural destiny. This means that there is no fixed law which states that a nation must be consigned to producing one kind of thing for eternity, implying historical contingency in the international division of labour, and even historical agency in some cases. Secondly, working from what he sees as a tendency towards monopoly formation in capitalism, Marx argues that specialization based on market relations, far from creating an equitable relationship between nations, will cause key industries to be monopolized in a select few countries, while the rest are left to a few niche specializations. Thirdly, Marx draws out the implications of this imbalance caused by market relations, explicitly stating that some nations end up growing rich at the expense of others, and drawing a parallel between the exploitation of less developed nations by more developed nations, with the exploitation of the working class by the bourgeoisie. Interestingly, after

spending the whole of his speech castigating the Free Traders,¹³ Marx ends up giving a qualified endorsement of free trade:

Moreover, the Protective system is nothing but a means of establishing manufacture upon a large scale in any given country, that is to say, of making it dependent upon the market of the world; and from the moment that dependence upon the market of the world is established, there is more or less dependence upon Free Trade too. Besides this, the Protective system helps to develop free competition within a nation. Hence we see that in countries where the bourgeoisie is beginning to make itself felt as a class, in Germany for example, it makes great efforts to obtain Protective duties. They serve the bourgeoisie as weapons against feudalism and absolute monarchy, as a means for the concentration of its own powers for the realization of Free Trade within the country.

But, generally speaking, the Protective system in these days is conservative, while the Free Trade system works destructively. It breaks up old nationalities and carries antagonism of proletariat and bourgeoisie to the uttermost point. In a word, the Free Trade system hastens the Social Revolution. In this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, I am in favor of Free Trade (Marx, "Speech on the Question of Free Trade" 465).

Marx's argument here contains two parts. Firstly, that protectionism, in developing the nation towards manufacturing, actually ends up rendering it dependent on the world

¹³See Radhika Desai's article, "Marx, List, and the Materiality of Nations," for a discussion of Marx's general skepticism towards free trade.

market, which in turn creates an interest in free trade. In addition, it encourages market competition within the nation's borders. For these reasons, it actually acts to consolidate dependence on the world market and bourgeois rule. In contrast, Marx sees a positive role in free trade's destructive capacities with regards to old national divisions, and backs it as a means of accelerating the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. He seems to think this will be accomplished because old national divisions will no longer stand in the way of class consciousness.¹⁴

In chapter 15 of *Capital Volume One* Marx described the effects of machinery on the global division of labour:

On the one hand, the immediate effect of machinery is to increase the supply of raw material in the same way, for example, as the cotton gin augmented the production of cotton. On the other hand, the cheapness of the articles produced by machinery, and the improved means of transport and communication furnish the weapons for conquering foreign markets. By ruining handicraft production in other countries, machinery forcibly converts them into fields for the supply of its raw material. In this way East India was compelled to produce cotton, wool, hemp, jute, and indigo for Great Britain. By constantly making a part of the hands "supernumerary," modern industry, in all countries where it has taken root, gives a spur to emigration and to the colonisation of foreign lands, which are thereby converted into settlements for growing the raw material of the mother country; just as Australia, for example, was converted into a colony for

¹⁴Marx's logic seems to be a bit one-sided here. Even if we grant the premise that Free Trade breaks up old nationalities, the imbalances created by free trade, in Marx's account, would surely erect new ones?

growing wool. A new and international division of labour, a division suited to the requirements of the chief centres of modern industry springs up, and converts one part of the globe into a chiefly agricultural field of production, for supplying the other part which remains a chiefly industrial field. This revolution hangs together with radical changes in agriculture which we need not here further inquire into. (Marx, *Capital Volume One* Chapter 15).

Machinery in the capitalist world market has a dual function. Firstly, in the nations where it develops, a huge demand is created for raw materials. This demand creates an incentive for the industrialized nations to colonize non-industrialized nations to convert them into colonies for raw materials. In addition, by flooding their markets with cheaper manufactured goods, trade between industrialized and non-industrialized countries has the effect of destroying the handicrafts of the non-industrialized nation, turning it into a supplier of raw materials. Because of these dynamics, Marx sees multiple factors pushing towards the creation of a division of labour between the developed manufacturing nations and underdeveloped raw material producing nations, which in Marx's time would to a large extent be formal colonies.¹⁵

Marx deals with the origins of industrial capital in chapter 31 of *Capital Volume One*, stating in a famous passage that:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for

¹⁵This division between raw materials producing colonies or semi-colonies, and imperialist industrial powers, became a common theme in Marxist theories of underdevelopment in the 20th century. See Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* as an example.

the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of primitive accumulation. On their heels treads the commercial war of the European nations, with the globe for a theatre. It begins with the revolt of the Netherlands from Spain, assumes giant dimensions in England's Anti-Jacobin War, and is still going on in the opium wars against China, &c (Marx, *Capital Volume One* Chapter 31).

In this passage Marx explicitly links the exploitation and looting of the East Indies, the transatlantic slave trade, and the enslavement in mines of the indigenous populations of the Americas, to the rise of capitalism through their role at the forefront of primitive accumulation. In this way, Marx explicitly implicates capitalism in some of the worst atrocities of the modern era, and moreover, makes them critical for its coming into being. Moreover, this brutal primitive accumulation isn't reserved for the past, as Marx sees it continuing up to his own day in the form of the Opium wars.¹⁶

Finally, Engels's 1892 preface to the English edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England* contains some interesting reflections on the economic position of the British Empire. During the time of Britain's industrial dominance, Engels characterizes its position in relation to the rest of the world as follows:

England was to become the 'workshop of the world'; all other countries were to become for England what Ireland already was — markets for her manufactured

¹⁶The extent to which Marx believed primitive accumulation was an ongoing part of capitalism is subject to some debate. Glen Sean Coulthard, for example, critiques Marx for placing primitive accumulation in the past, thereby ignoring its continued persistence (9). Habib, on the other hand, at least with regards to the relationship between the capitalist and the non-capitalist world, argues that Marx saw primitive accumulation as an ongoing process (Habib, *Karl Marx on India* xli-xlii). It would seem from the passage under discussion that Habib's position is closer to the truth.

goods, supplying her in return with raw materials and food. England, the great manufacturing centre of an agricultural world, with an ever-increasing number of corn and cotton-growing Irelands revolving around her, the industrial sun. What a glorious prospect! (Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class of England 1892* Preface English Edition)

This position of dominance, as well as its ambition to transform the rest of the world into economic colonies producing its raw materials, would not last forever for Britain:

The Free Trade theory was based upon one assumption:

that England was to be the one great manufacturing centre of an agricultural world. And the actual fact is that this assumption has turned out to be a pure delusion. The conditions of modern industry, steam-power and machinery, can be established wherever there is fuel, especially coals. And other countries besides England — France, Belgium, Germany, America, even Russia — have coals. And the people over there did not see the advantage of being turned into Irish pauper farmers merely for the greater wealth and glory of English capitalists. They set resolutely about manufacturing, not only for themselves, but for the rest of the world; and the consequence is that the manufacturing monopoly enjoyed by England for nearly a century is irretrievably broken up (Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class of England 1892* Preface English Edition).

As industrialization spread, England's industrial monopoly was challenged. The economic dominance created by monopolized imperial hegemony created strong

incentives for less developed but independent powers to build up their own industrial capacities, in order to protect themselves from being reduced to something like semi-colonial status. In this sense, Britain, in the very act of asserting its industrially based hegemony, also generated the forces that would challenge its dominance, particularly when the fact it had already created the technology needed for its rivals to industrialize is taken into account. Thus, while capitalism creates a hierarchy between nations, this hierarchy is ultimately unstable, since in generating hegemons, it also generates the forces that challenge these hegemons.¹⁷ Both the rise of England's trade monopoly and its fall naturally had a significant impact on the state of class struggle in England:

The truth is this: during the period of England's industrial monopoly the English working-class have, to a certain extent, shared in the benefits of the monopoly. These benefits were very unequally parcelled out amongst them; the privileged minority pocketed most, but even the great mass had, at least, a temporary share now and then. And that is the reason why, since the dying-out of Owenism, there has been no Socialism in England. With the breakdown of that monopoly, the English working-class will lose that privileged position; it will find itself generally — the privileged and leading minority not excepted on a level with its fellow-workers abroad. And that is the reason why there will be Socialism again in England (Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class of England* 1892 Preface English Edition).

¹⁷ Immanuel Wallerstein argues that world hegemony, by its very nature is self-undermining, although the mechanisms he cites are not quite the same as those discussed by Engels (xxiii-xxiv).

The English working class was seen as benefiting from England's dominant position in the world market. However, these benefits were for most, fairly small. Unfortunately, they appear to have been enough to have had a significant conservatizing effect on the British working class. This passage is of particular importance because it demonstrates that Engels was by this time thinking through the question of the relationship between imperialism and class struggle in the imperial metropole. It also suggests the rather depressing conclusion that an imperial ruling class does not actually need to be that generous to buy off its working class.

3.2.2. Discussion

To begin with, Marx's speech on Free Trade is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates pretty clearly that even in his earlier years, he did not believe that capitalism would bring equality between nations because it was a system of exploitation on both the intra and international level. If he sees capitalism as flattening out old national orders, he sees it also creating new divisions, through an international division of labour which benefits a few wealthy nations at the expense of the rest. As a result, even nations where capitalism has taken hold do not follow a single, uniform trajectory. Anibal Quijano implicitly critiques Marx, or at least certain readings of Marxism, by arguing that far from imposing a uniform set of social relations upon the world, thereby flattening out differences between different parts of the world,

capitalism actually created a stratified world system, with a racialized division of labour. In his scheme, the division of labour between the imperial metropole and the colonies, and between different racial groups ended up reproducing modes of extracting surplus value – slavery, wage labour, serfdom – associated with different eras simultaneously. The picture that emerges is a much more heterogeneous world system, than most traditional narratives would allow (Quijano 218-220). Chakrabarty, in *Provincializing Europe*, explicitly links the kinds of stageist thinking associated with the traditional narrative with colonialism, in the form of a critique of what he calls “historicism.” For Chakrabarty, “historicism” is the idea that all societies go through a uniform series of stages. In this scheme Europe is the furthest along on the path of development, while non-European societies are relegated to backwardness. These “historicist” narratives were used to justify colonialism on the grounds that non-European societies were not ready for self-government, and thus must be guided by Europeans into civilization before gaining independence. Chakrabarty argues that Marx and his method were not always immune to this error, even if he saw his emancipatory project as having great importance for any post-colonial project (Chakrabarty 7-8, 30-31). While Marx at times lent himself to a “historicist” reading, even in his fairly early theorizing, his willingness to see capitalism as creating a stratified world order provides a useful counter to colonialist conceptions of uniform historical development, since it suggests that capitalism will not produce the same results in the colonies as it does in the metropolises.

This understanding of the stratification of nations under capitalism, at first inspection, seems to fit somewhat uncomfortably with Marx’s early pro-colonial stance

in India, since if capitalism creates stratification between nations, colonization would appear to simply be a way to maintain India's supposed backwardness. However, there are other elements of the speech which are more in line with his 1853 stance on India. After all, Marx ends up siding with the free traders, mainly because he saw in free trade the capacity to dissolve old national barriers, and bring the class conflict between capitalists and workers to a high pitch. Obviously, this acceleration of the contradictions did not apply in the same way to India, but it is interesting to note that in India, he saw the destruction of its old social structure as being carried out by free trade. It is also important to remember that while Marx did attribute a regenerating element to British colonialism, he argued that the new elements it introduced into India would only benefit its population if it gained independence or if England had a proletarian revolution. Marx's understanding of the stratification between nations in capitalism, particularly when colonialism was involved, provides a plausible explanation of why he believed independence or proletarian revolution was a necessity for India to benefit from colonialism. The role of colonialism would, under this reading, be to introduce capitalism into India. After it had destroyed the elements in Indian society which kept it in a state of backwardness, colonialism would presumably lose its progressive features, and indeed simply operate to keep it in a subordinate position.

It must be admitted that this reading of Marx's 1853 position shows that while believing that capitalism creates exploitative relations between nations does counter the kinds of "historicist" narratives that lend themselves to seeing colonialism as a benevolent "civilizing" force, it does not necessarily lead to fully anti-colonialist

positions, at least if it is paired with a view of colonized societies that reproduces a significant number of Eurocentric tropes. This is particularly the case, if colonialism is consecrated with positive progressive features, in spite of the recognition of the exploitation of nation by nation in capitalism.

In some ways the analysis found in volume one of *Capital* is an extension of what was found in the speech on free trade. Once again, we see the monopolization of key industries by dominant powers, and the reduction of the colonies to raw materials exporters. However, we now see Marx highlighting the role of machines, both in out-competing the handicraft industries of colonized societies, and in creating incentives for the colonization of potential sources of raw materials. The result is a new international division of labour, oriented towards the interests of the few dominating economic powers. While this does not amount to a fully worked out theory of dependent development, it does show that Marx saw tendencies towards backwardness in the “uneven development” that characterized capitalism (Sayer and Corrigan 82).¹⁸ This development in Marx’s understanding of the international division of labour poses a serious challenge to the kind of “historicist” narratives Chakrabarty attacks because it suggests that far from bringing the progress that will eventually transform the colonies into Europeanized societies, it in fact traps them in a condition of economic subservience to the metropole.

Marx’s discussion of primitive accumulation is also important to understanding his thinking on colonialism during the period in which he wrote *Capital* Volume One. It is

¹⁸The best way to describe the difference between the position in *Capital* from the one in the Speech on Free Trade is that in capital, the role of machinery significantly hardens the international division of labour, making it more difficult to escape.

important to note that the looting which he had been more than willing to describe in his 1853 articles is now given a prominent role in the formation of capitalism itself. Robbery of the colonized becomes more than just an expression of the worst excesses of the bourgeoisie; rather it becomes an imminent part of their rule, something which they may not have been able to do without. This important shift suggests a much more radical critique of the bourgeois international order, by suggesting that capitalism has a basis in plunder, and that the non-European world's impoverishment played an important role in Europe's wealth. As if to further emphasize the point, these descriptions of plunder are no longer accompanied by speculations about missions of regeneration, suggesting that Ahmad was correct in arguing that Marx later abandoned the hopes he had for colonialism's progressive potential in 1853 (Ahmad, *In theory* "Marx on India: A Clarification").

Marx's understandings of primitive accumulation and uneven development, as they relate to the non-European world, carry in them the seeds of a potential counter narrative about the relation of colonized societies and their colonizers. In this narrative, colonization would be seen, not as a force for civilization, but as a force which developed the colonizing society at the colonized's expense, both in the initial stages of capitalist development, and afterwards as a result of the dynamics of trade. This narrative would suggest political and economic independence, as a means of escaping exploitative colonial relationships, and achieving economic development, would be preferable to colonization. While Marx does not necessarily draw out these implications to their fullest extent, his seeming abandonment of his 1853 speculations on

regenerating missions does suggest his understanding of these two issues may have influenced him to move away from his earlier pro-colonialist stance.

However, there are still a couple of limitations with this position. Firstly, on their own, these discussions on political economy say a lot more about the colonizers than the colonized. While exposing the inherent ruthlessness of capitalist colonialists would seriously undermine the ideological justifications for their project, it would not necessarily, on its own, challenge how Europeans viewed the rest of the world pre-colonization.¹⁹ For this reason, it is possible that Marx's critiques could be accepted, while still hanging onto Eurocentric/"Orientalist" visions of what colonized peoples are like. Secondly, if this narrative isn't paired with some kind of understanding of how colonized societies reacted to colonialism, it is possible that it will end up constructing narratives in which the colonized are merely helpless victims. This narrative would rob the colonized of any agency, and in an odd way reproduce old notions of inferiority, by suggesting that the colonized had no way to defend themselves. Drawing from Marx, it would be important to look at Indians' capacity for resistance, both in the Sepoy uprising, and in the Letter to Danielson, in order to counter the possible passive victim narrative. As we shall see in the next section, Marx did begin to challenge his Eurocentric image of India in the last years of his life, however imperfectly.

Finally, Engels's discussion about the shifting position of the British Empire adds two important points for our discussion. The first is that it raises the possibility that even the working class can benefit from colonialism. This complicates the class dynamics in

¹⁹Although in breaking down old narratives about "civilizing missions," this analysis could open up space to question Eurocentric/"Orientalist" conceptions about non-Western societies pre-colonization.

the metropole significantly, because as Engels suggest this can lead to some identification by the working class with their own ruling class, based on some shared benefits from the spoils of colonization. From his point of view, this dynamic would further undermine any notion of colonialism being progressive, since it would not only not bring progress to the colonized society, it would also make the working class in the metropole more conservative, and in the process, actually retard the progress of the class struggle. Secondly, Engels, in ascribing the development of other European powers to their willingness to focus on their own goals, and not Britain's, suggests that capitalist development, far from being brought on by the colonialism of the largest imperial hegemon, is actually the result of powers pursuing an independent economic and political agenda. The capacity to pursue such an agenda is of course predicated on not being a colony, suggesting yet another reason to not see colonialism as a progressive force. Of course, Engels is discussing non-colonized European powers, which were often colonialist themselves, and the textual evidence in the preface does not exist to conclusively prove that he would have believed it was possible to extend his reasoning to the colonized world. However, a view of independence as an important ingredient for development would have clear anti-colonial implications, at least for universalist thinkers like Marx and Engels. For this reason, it is not entirely implausible to think their developing understanding of the exploitation of nation by nation under capitalism might have influenced their later coldness towards colonialism.

3.3. Concerning the Asiatic Mode Production

3.3.1. Explication

Marx's theory of the Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP) holds a central place in discussions of his understanding of Asian societies. The most well-known instance of this concept being mentioned is found in the Preface to Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, where he states:

Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation. In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society. The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production – antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism but of an antagonism that emanates from the individuals' social conditions of existence – but the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation (Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Preface).

There are some things in this description that are worthy of note. Firstly, the Asiatic mode of production is placed in a line of progression at a stage below those of the others, which are in some sense associated with different periods of European history, at least within traditional Eurocentric frameworks. Another important point is that while there is a movement from higher to lower stages, the language – “broad outline,” “*may* be designated as epochs marking progress” – suggest that these categories should be taken as rough estimators, as starting points, rather than as refined theoretical terms. Krader points out that on their own these categories are static and undialectical, not accounting for social dynamism, which Marx saw as a constant in the process of historical development. Marx’s true interests are in uncovering the real dynamic processes in history, not constructing historical schemas. In this regard, Marx’s periodizations are best characterized as a starting point, a means to an end rather than the end in itself. His real goal was to grasp the historical dynamics that would enable him to construct a critique of social relations and processes, and use that critique to change society (Krader 93-95). Finally, while his modes of production are set out in an order of progression, it is not necessarily clear that the progression must have taken that course, but only that Marx thought that it had.

Marx’s comments in his famous Preface, while introducing the concept of the Asiatic Mode of Production, don’t actually say anything about what it is specifically, or how it works. Marx’s comments about Indian landownership in his 1853 articles can be seen as presaging the AMP, with their discussions of communal landownership and

isolated village life. However, the first theoretical discussion of the concept appears in Marx's 1857-1858 notebooks. In the beginning human societies were not settled:

Men are not settled by nature (unless perhaps in such fertile environments that they could subsist on a single tree like the monkeys; otherwise they would roam, like the wild animals). Hence the tribal community, the natural common body, appears not as a consequence, but as the precondition of the joint (temporary) appropriation and use of the soil (Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations* 68).

From this nomadic and communal existence, people settle down. The way their "tribal community" will develop will be determined by "various external, climatic, geographical, physical, etc., conditions as well as their special natural make up – their tribal character" (ibid 68). A "spontaneously evolved tribal community ... [provides] ... the first precondition of the appropriation of the objective conditions of life" (ibid 68). In this state, "men...regard themselves as its [the earth's] *communal proprietors*, and as those of the community which produces and reproduces itself by living labour. Only in so far as an individual is a member – in the literal and figurative sense – of such a community, does he regard himself as an owner or possessor" (ibid 69).

Where these communal relations of production predominate, their "form can realise itself in a variety of ways" (ibid 69). For example, in:

the case..[of]...most Asiatic fundamental forms it is quite compatible with the fact that the *all-embracing unity* which stands above all these small communal bodies may appear as the higher or *sole proprietor*, the real communities only as *hereditary* possessors. Since the *unity* is the real owner, and the real

precondition of common ownership, it is perfectly possible for it to appear as something separate and superior to the numerous real, particular communities ... The despot here appears as the father of all the numerous lesser communities, thus realizing the common unity of all. It therefore follows that the surplus product (which, incidentally, is legally determined in terms...the real appropriation through labour) belongs to this highest unity. Oriental despotism therefore appears to lead to a legal absence of property. In fact, however, its foundation is tribal or common property, in most cases created through a combination of manufacture and agriculture within the small community which thus becomes entirely self-sustaining and contains within itself all the conditions of production and surplus production (ibid 69-70).

In these Asiatic systems of property, "part of ... [the] ... surplus labour belongs to the higher community, which ultimately appears as a *person*" (ibid 70). This surplus "is rendered both as tribute and as common labour" (ibid 70). This type of common property exists in two forms: in the first "the small communities may vegetate independently side by side, and within each the individual labours independently with his family on the land allotted to him" (ibid 70). When these arrangements allowed for the collection and storage of a surplus, they allow for "the domination of lords, in its most primitive sense ... [to] arise ... [for example] ... in the Slavonic and Rumanian communities" (ibid 70). In the second form "the unity can involve a common organisation of labour itself, which in turn can constitute a veritable system, as in Mexico, and especially Peru, among the ancient Celts, and some tribes of India" (ibid

70). Internally, these communities could have “either a more despotic or a more democratic form” (ibid 70). The infrastructure requirements of the community end up facilitating the appropriation of its labour by the higher unity: “Such [things] as irrigation systems (very important among the Asian peoples), means of communication, etc., will then appear as the work of the higher unity – the despotic government which is poised above the lesser communities” (ibid 70-71). Finally the “cities in the proper sense arise by the side of these villages only where the location is particularly favourable to external trade, or where the head of the state and his satraps exchange their revenue (the surplus product) against labour, which they expended as labour funds” (ibid 71).

From these passages we can map out a basic outline of the Asiatic mode. To begin with, production is carried out on communally own land in self-sustaining villages. These villages have a tendency to vegetate independently of each other, in an implied state of stagnation. On top of these villages there is a “higher unity” in the form of an “Oriental Despot” which lives off the tribute collected from the villages. In return for the tribute, the despotic higher unity constructs infrastructure needed to maintain the villages. Marx again refers to what he sees as the necessity of irrigation systems as a key factor in the case of Asiatic countries. Internally, the villages can be organized on either despotic or democratic lines. Surplus extraction can either take the form of taxation in kind, where the agricultural labourer works their allotment and hands over a certain portion to the agents of the state, or the form of direct labour obligations, where subjects are required to perform labour directly for the state. Property is a somewhat more complicated question. The basis of the AMP is tribal or communal property,

however the villages appear as having possession over their common property, while the despotic higher unity appears as the actual owner of this property. Finally, cities in this mode of production exist either in areas that are particularly good for external trade, or where the government and its bureaucracy set up court to exchange tax revenues for other forms of labour.

This description in many ways reads like an elaboration of Marx's 1853 conception of Asiatic societies. The same stagnant villages and Oriental despots make their appearance, as does the same lack of private property. There are a greater variety of examples, and the modes of surplus extraction are diversified, but the overall social structure appears to be very much the same. This description would suggest that the socio-economic conceptions that drove Marx's 1853 analyses were still pretty much intact, which would have played into why he and Engels may have been somewhat hesitant to give unguarded support to the 1857-58 rebellion in India.

As mentioned in Chapter One, there is a debate about whether Marx's conception of history at this point was unilinear or multilinear.²⁰ In order to gain some insight into this question, it is necessary to examine what Marx thought about the evolution of forms that would not be seen as Asiatic in his schema. The first of these would be the "Ancient" form, which appears to be linked to classical Greece and Rome. This form, like the Asiatic, gives "rise to substantial variations, local, historical, etc" (Marx *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations* 71). This form "is the product of a more dynamic historical life, of the fate and modification of original tribes" (ibid 71). "The

²⁰See Chapter One for a discussion of this debate.

basis...[for the ancient mode]...is not the land, but the city as already created seat (center) of the rural population (landowners). The Cultivated area appears as the territory of the city; not as in the other case [AMP], the village as a mere appendage to the land” (ibid 71). The most significant problems for this kind of community “arise only from other communities which have either already occupied the land or disturb the community in its occupation of it. War is therefore the great all-embracing task, the great communal labour” (ibid 71). For this reason:

Concentration of settlement in the city is the foundation of this warlike organisation. The nature of tribal structures leads to the differentiation of kinship groups into higher or lower, and this social differentiation is developed further by the mixing of conquering and conquered tribes, etc. Common land – as state property... – is here separate from private property. The property of the individual, unlike our first case, is here not direct communal property, where the individual is not an owner in separation from the community, but rather its occupier. Circumstances arise in which individual property does not require communal labour for its valorization (e.g. as it does in the irrigation systems of the Orient); the purely primitive character of the tribe may be broken by the movement of history or migration (ibid 72).

In these circumstances the capacity of individual appropriation, combined with the necessity for defense against invaders leads to “the communal character of the tribe ... [appearing] ... as a negative unity as against the outside world” (ibid 72). The end result is that “the community – as a state – is ... [defended by] ... the relationship of these free

and equal private proprietors to each other, their combination against the outside world ... [This] community is based on the fact that its members consist of working owners of land, small peasant cultivators" (ibid 72). "The tendency of this small warlike community drives it beyond its limits, etc. (Rome, Greece, Jews etc.)" (ibid 72-73).

The German mode has a distinctive character of its own:

Among the Germans, where single heads of families settle in the forests, separated by long distances, even on an *external* view the community exists merely by virtue of every act of union of its members, although their unity *existing in itself* is embodied...in descent, language, common past and history, etc. The *community* appears as an *association*, not as a *union*, as an agreement...whose independent subjects are the landowners, and not as a unity. In fact, therefore, the community has no existence as a *state*, a *political entity* as among the ancient, because it has no existence as a city. If the community is to enter upon real existence, the free landowners must hold an *assembly*, whereas, e.g., Rome it *exists* apart from such assemblies, in the presence of the *city itself* and the officials placed at its head, etc (ibid 78)

As for landownership:

The common land or people's land, occurs among the Germans also, as distinct from the property of individuals. It consists of hunting grounds, common pastures or woodlands, etc., as that part of the land which cannot be partitioned if it is to serve as a means of production in this specific form...The *ager publicus* [public land] appears...as a mere supplement to individual property among the

Germans, and figures as property only in so far as it is defended against hostile tribes as the common property of one tribe...At bottom every individual household contains an entire economy, forming as it does an independent center of production (ibid 78-79).

Due largely, it would appear to geographic and population factors, the Germanic mode has some distinctive features of its own. Compared with both the ancient and Asiatic forms, it is the least communal, with the private property of the household being the most important aspect of economic life. Indeed, even the political relations are highly defused, consisting of little more than loose associations. In many ways, the Germanic mode is a clear opposite to the communal despotism of the Asiatic form.

There are a number of interesting comparative remarks that Marx makes about these different forms, for example, on relations of state formation, kinship, and locality, he argues:

Ancient states were constituted in one of two ways, either by *kinship* or by *locality*. *Kinship tribes* historically precede locality tribes, and are almost everywhere displaced by them. Their most extreme and rigid form is the institution of castes, separate from one another, without right of inter-marriage, with quite different status; each with its exclusive, unchangeable occupation. The *locality* tribes originally corresponded to a division of the area into districts...The Roman *kin-groups* (*gentes*) did not consist of blood-relatives; Cicero notes, when mentioning the family name, descent from free men. The members of the Roman gens had common shrines (*sacra*), but this had already

disappeared in Cicero's day. The joint inheritance from fellow-kinsmen who died intestate or without close relatives, was retained longest of all. In most ancient times, members of the *gens* had the obligation to assist fellow-kinsmen in need of assistance to bear unusual burdens. (This occurs universally among the Germans, and persisted longest among the Dithmarschen.) The *gentes* a sort of gild. A more general organisation than that of kin groups did not exist in the ancient world (ibid 76-77).

Marx here argues that state allegiances start off based on kinship, which is later replaced by locality. The caste system in India is, as Anderson argues, an expression of a particularly extreme form of kinship based organization (158). The Roman system appears to be less attached to the older kinship system, but it still existed to a significant degree. The German system is less discussed here, but its kinship relations appear to carry obligations for mutual-aid in exceptional circumstances. The *gentes* also function like guilds, but this seems to be a constant in the ancient world. As for cities, Marx argues the following:

Ancient classical history is the history of cities, but cities based on landownership and agriculture; Asian history is a kind of undifferentiated unity of town and country (the large city, properly speaking, must be regarded merely as a princely camp, superimposed on the real economic structure); the Middle Ages (Germanic period) starts with the countryside as the locus of history, whose further development then proceeds through the opposition of town and

country; modern (history) is the urbanisation of the countryside, not, as among the ancients, the ruralisation of the city (ibid 77-78).

Marx sees the Asiatic form as particularly tenacious in surviving:

The Asiatic form necessarily survives longest and most stubbornly. This is due to the fundamental principle on which it is based, that is, that the individual does not become independent of the community; that the circle of production is self-sustaining, unity of agriculture and craft manufacture, etc. If the individual changes his relation to the community, he modifies and undermines both the community and its economic premises; conversely, the modification of this economic premise – produced by its own dialectic, pauperisation, etc. Note especially the influence of warfare and conquest. While, e.g., in Rome this is an essential part of the economic conditions of the community itself, it breaks the real bond on which the community rests (ibid 83).

The Asiatic form thus retains its characteristic of being somewhat impervious to change. This rigidity is explained by the dependence of the individual upon a fixed communal form, which keeps him locked within a specific social role. A break down in these roles, where the individual tries to redefine his relationship to the community, tends to breakdown its social structure. War and conquest, while the bases for the Roman community, tends to threaten its Asiatic counterpart. As for property forms in the period under discussion, Marx lays out four types, the “Asiatic, Slavonic ancient classical and Germanic forms” (ibid 95). Each form “signifies a relation to the working (producing) subject (or a subject reproducing himself) to the conditions of his

production or reproduction as his own” (ibid 95). Finally, in describing the evolution of property forms, as part of his attempt to explain how the capital/labour relation came about, Marx argues:

A dissolution of the relation to the earth – to land or soil – as a natural condition of production which man treats as his own inorganic being, the laboratory of his forces and the domain of his will. All forms in which this property is found, assume a communal entity whose members, whatever the formal distinctions between them, are proprietors by virtue of being its members. Hence the original form of this property is direct communal property (the oriental form, modified among the Slavs; developed to the point of contradiction in classic antiquity and Germanic property, though still the hidden, if antagonistic foundation) (ibid 97).

The basic form of Ancient property is largely communal, with ownership based on being a member of a specific entity. This relation is most clear in the ‘Oriental’ and Slavonic form, although it is true for the classical and Germanic forms as well. This, amongst other things, suggests that the classical and Germanic forms are more highly developed.

The evidence just presented shows that the question of unilinear versus multilinear readings of Marx is not simple. On the one hand, there is a significant amount of textual evidence to suggest that Marx saw the ‘Oriental’ form as more primitive than the classical and ‘Germanic’ forms. To begin with the classical and perhaps the ‘Germanic’ have made more progress away from the kinship based tribes, while the Asiatic form, particularly the Indian version, is locked into a kinship based

caste system. In addition, while the Asiatic form, in many ways seems to resemble primitive communal forms with a despotic state on top of it, the classical and 'Germanic' forms appear to have moved further away from these original forms, private property becoming a real institution, particularly in the 'Germanic' case where it has essentially become the dominant form of property. In addition, when Marx talks about the ancient form as having been produced by a "more dynamic historical life," with a basis in the city of landowners, he seems to be suggesting a greater level of development, as this would be required to get to this more urban form of life. Finally, his discussion of the persistence of the Asiatic form associates it with stagnation and backwardness. When these factors are combined with the fact that Marx outlined a series of modes of production as marking progress in the development of the productive forces, they present compelling reasons to see the different forms as representing different levels of social evolution, rather than, as Anderson suggests, that they simply represent different paths out of 'primitive' communal forms (162).

However, there are also problems with seeing the 'Asiatic,' ancient, and 'Germanic' forms as simply evolving out of each other, in a unilinear process. While there are good reasons to see these forms as representing different levels of development, they manifest plenty of historical specificity as well. The Asiatic form is seen as existing over a wide variety of areas, from India to Latin America, albeit with variations in its form (Kradner 135-136). However, the necessity for state constructed irrigation Marx attributes to "Oriental Despotism" is locally specific. If we consider the structure of the ancient form, it is not entirely clear why a despotic 'Oriental' Empire,

like say China, must, in order to move to the next stage of development, go through a period in which it becomes a collection of city states bound together by the imperatives of war. This specificity becomes even clearer when we discuss the 'Germanic' form, whose loose political form, rural bias, and heavy emphasis on the self-sufficiency of individual families, is explained as the product of geographical and demographical factors, namely the sparse population living relatively separately in the forests. It is also far from clear why this heavy rural dispersion would play any necessary role in a simple unilinear line of historical progress. Indeed, these factors could even be seen as signs of primitiveness. Additionally, Marx's description of the cities in the different forms – the Asiatic form had cities that were mostly administrative centers, the Ancient cities were political centers, while the cities were dominated by the country side in the 'Germanic' form, until later when this relation was reversed as the modern age approached – makes the unilinear reading even less plausible. One could perhaps attempt to integrate these shifting positions into some kind of dialectic to make this zigzag between town and country fit into a unilinear framework; however, Marx doesn't seem to posit the conflict between the two in these terms, and any proposed mechanism that could drive this type of dialectic would be pretty convoluted. Thus, the zigzagging relations between town and country provides more evidence for seeing these forms as containing a large measure of historical specificity.

When Marx discusses the effects of conquests, it becomes clear that new modes of production can be produced by historical contingency:

Conquests may lead to either of three results. The conquering nation may impose its own mode of production upon the conquered people (this was done, for example, by the English in Ireland during this century, and to some extent in India); or it may refrain from interfering in the old mode of production and be content with tribute (e.g., the Turks and Romans); or interaction may take place between the two, giving rise to a new system as a synthesis (this occurred partly in the Germanic conquests). In any case it is the mode of production – whether that of the conquering nation or of the conquered or the new system brought about by a merging of the two – that determines the new mode of distribution employed (Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* “Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy”)

In this passage, Marx makes it clear that conquest can lead to the creation of new modes of production, through the hybridization of the modes of production of the conquered and conquering society. These modes of production cannot possibly be a product of historical development according to universally existing historical necessity, as they are the product of very particular conditions of war and conquest. The fact that the Germanic conquests ended up in part creating one of these syntheses for Marx is important, since the “Germanic” form discussed earlier is the basis upon which feudalism grew (Hobsbawm 38). Feudalism being the next mode of production in the line from the “Ancient” mode, represents a step up in development, making it an important element in Marx’s chronology, and for that reason, it’s being the product of contingent historical synthesis, at least in part, suggests this next phase in development,

far from being the inevitable product of historical necessity, was actually the product of a history that could have gone differently. The most natural reading, when these factors are considered, is to see modes of production as at least somewhat contingent on specific historical conditions.

While it is important to recognize both the elements of developmental progress, and historical specificity in Marx's accounts of the different forms under discussion, on its own simply recognizing these two factors isn't enough; the question becomes how to reconcile these two factors into a coherent reading? In his review of Marx's *Contribution to The Critique of Political Economy* Engels discusses Marx's critique of political economy as having an underlying method:

Even after the determination of the method, the critique of economics could still be arranged in two ways — historically or logically. Since in the course of history, as in its literary reflection, the evolution proceeds by and large from the simplest to the more complex relations, the historical development of political economy constituted a natural clue, which the critique could take as a point of departure, and then the economic categories would appear on the whole in the same order as in the logical exposition. This form seems to have the advantage of greater lucidity, for it traces the actual development, but in fact it would thus become, at most, more popular. History moves often in leaps and bounds and in a zigzag line, and as this would have to be followed throughout, it would mean not only that a considerable amount of material of slight importance would have to be included, but also that the train of thought would frequently have to be

interrupted; it would, moreover, be impossible to write the history of economy without that of bourgeois society, and the task would thus become immense, because of the absence of all preliminary studies. The logical method of approach was therefore the only suitable one. This, however, is indeed nothing but the historical method, only stripped of the historical form and diverting chance occurrences. The point where this history begins must also be the starting point of the train of thought, and its further progress will be simply the reflection, in abstract and theoretically consistent form, of the historical course. Though the reflection is corrected, it is corrected in accordance with laws provided by the actual historical course, since each factor can be examined at the stage of development where it reaches its full maturity, its classical form (Engels, "Karl Marx, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political economy'").

This statement reveals a lot about Marx's method, and how he thought history moved. To begin with, it shows that he believed tracing the development of conceptual categories could give clues to understanding the evolving economic structures they described. This shows both how he believed ideas and the society that generates them were interrelated with each other. Moreover it shows that he believed historical development had an underlying logic, which tended towards the move from simpler to more complex forms (Kradner 104). This process is also one of individuation, as Marx states, "But man is only individualised through the process of history. He originally appears as a *generic being, a tribal being, a herd animal*" (Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic*

Formations 96). The basic dynamics by which historical change occurs for Marx are summarized as follows:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure (Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* “Preface”).

Humans construct their world in order to live, and the way they do this creates certain kinds of social relationships, which in turn conditions the rest of social life, which develops atop those productive relationships. Certain forms of social relationships serve

the continuation of social evolution well, until development has reached a stage where they start to become an obstacle. At this point, a contradiction develops, which leads to an era of social revolution and eventually a new way of organizing production, and a new form of society. These are the dynamics which underlie the historical process for Marx and Engels. However, it is also important to note that they did not view history as a rigid teleological process, which inevitably follows a pre-determined course. Real history has all kinds of complexities and sideways moves, so its underlying dynamics do not operate in a clear and simple way. Contingent factors can push societies in all kinds of different directions, even if the underlying logic remains the same. Thus while there is a unifying logic to history for Marx and Engels, this logic manifests itself in countless different ways.

In some ways Eric Hobsbawm's reading of the "Asiatic," ancient, and "Germanic" forms is similar to Anderson's in that he believed that they all represented different paths out of 'primitive' communal forms. However, unlike Anderson, Hobsbawm clearly acknowledges that the 'Asiatic' form represented a lower stage of development, and thus unlike Anderson, he is better able to capture the evolutionary elements of Marx's account (36-38). Hobsbawm's account here is useful because of its capacity to unify the evolutionary elements of Marx's account, with his appreciation for historical specificity.

One possible objection to this position would be to argue that it creates too much of a leap between the communal and the more developed ancient and 'Germanic' forms. Under this objection, the Asiatic form would be seen as a universal necessity before societies could reach the more developed ancient and/or 'Germanic' forms.

However, this objection has a significant weakness; it ignores the possibility that local conditions might make it necessary to transition away from communal forms in a more complete manner. It must be remembered that Marx's theory gave a privileged place to revolutionary transformation, and therefore there is no reason to believe he would have thought of these things in smooth evolutionary terms. Local conditions could easily mean that transitions from one form to the other take on different characteristics. These differences could result in the adoption of some more 'advanced' features. An example of this is the effects of demographics and geography on the formation of the 'Germanic' form. It would seem that what Marx saw as the inner core of historical development was not the particular social forms he discussed in his notes, but the progress of certain long term secular tendencies, such as the move away from communal towards private property, or the process of individuation.

One of the questions regarding the AMP is whether Marx and Engels maintained it until the end of their careers. Irfan Habib, drawing on the fact the term seems to disappear from Marx and Engels's later texts, argued that they abandoned the category as they developed a more detailed understanding of India (Habib, *Karl Marx on India* xxxiv-xxxv). Others, like Hobsbawm (52) and Tu (12-13), suggest that Marx and Engels continued to hold onto the AMP. This question is important for our purposes because the AMP, as the main category of analysis of the socio-economic structure of Asiatic societies like India, carries with it the Eurocentric/Orientalist characterizations of India as despotic, stagnant and lacking in internal dynamism. Thus, if Marx and Engels were to abandon it, it would provide evidence of a significant shift in their thinking on 'Asiatic'

societies. In addition, even those like Anderson, who don't really address the concept of the Asiatic mode of production, sometimes argue that Marx made a radical shift in his perspective on Asiatic societies in the last years of his life. To answer both the question of AMP, as well as the broader question of Marx's evolving views on the subject generally, we will now turn to Marx's late writings on India, focusing mainly on his *Ethnographic Notebooks*. I will focus on excerpts from his notes on M.M. Kovalevsky, as these bear directly on the history of Indian social forms, as well as because they are available in an accessible English translation. They consist of Marx's excerpts from Kovalevsky's work, with Marx's own comments interpolated in.

In his notebooks, Marx lays out a theory describing the development of different communal forms in India. He begins by observing that "in no country {is there} such variety ... [in] ... the forms of land relations as in India" (Marx, *The Asiatic Mode of Production* 346). He then lays out the phases of development of communal property forms in India, starting with the first phase, which is "*the oldest form* (which has been maintained): *kin communities*, whose members *live undivided from each other*, work the land together, and satisfy *their wants* from the *general communal income*" (ibid 346).

Eventually:

The indivisible clan property gradually dies out, and a new form of property arises in consequence of the tendency to individualization of the wealth relation within the bounds of particular settlements (villages). The indivisible kin communities disappeared in the majority of the provinces during the period of their acquisition by the English; there remained only the fragments of later

systems of landed property in *these communities, under the condition of use* by individual families of *shares unequal in their extent*, whereby the amount of the share was determined each time *by the degree of kinship* of its owner to the real of fictive ancestor of the community, or through the fact of *working on it*. In *other communities* {the system was maintained} under the *condition of periodic distribution of the common land in equal shares* (ibid 348).

The system of unequal shares seems to have been the general norm; however resistance against this system sometimes led to a different outcome:

“Individuals who demand a new distribution to consist of *equal shares in the parcels of land* are as much *opposed to the system of shares determined by degree of kin relationship* as they are to the system of sanction of de facto possession.” The *equal distribution of common land, repeated in given time periods, often yearly*, therefore appears as a *relatively late form in the history of Indian forms of landed property* (ibid 351).

Finally:

The *rural community* of India in the process of its dissolution also moves forward to the *stage of development* which predominated in *medieval Germany, England and France*, and still does in the *whole of Switzerland*, namely: *cultivated and often hay lands* as well as are found in *private ownership* of different members and only the so-called *appurtenances* remain their *common property*...What {is} *proper to the Indian system*, however, - as a result of its greater proximity to the oldest forms of common property: the citizens of the community who have

become *landless* for one reason or another, take part in what is *common* (ibid 354-355).

From these passages we get a significantly different picture of Indian development than the one we saw in Marx's earlier writings. In place of the image of a stagnant, historyless society (Anderson 214), we get an account of the evolution of property forms. At the highest stage, there is even a preponderance of private property. Granted there are still hints of the old notions of Indian backwardness, with the idea that India's system has a greater proximity to original communal forms than even medieval Europe, but in general the trend is towards a much more dynamic conception, in which Indian property forms proceed through a number of stages. There is even evidence of forms being produced by class struggle, as in the case with communities where land is divided by equal shares. It could be objected that when Marx states the majority of indivisible kinship based communities disappeared during the English possession, he is arguing that this evolutionary process was produced by British colonialism. However, there are a couple of issues with this reading. Firstly, Marx states that most of the communities that had the indivisible kinship forms disappeared under British rule, but that doesn't imply that most of India before British rule was still under that form. His claim for this reason is perfectly compatible with the idea that indivisible kinship forms were no longer existent in much of India before British colonization. It would thus be perfectly reasonable to read Marx as saying that the British finished off most of the indivisible kinship communities that had survived India's previous history. Additionally, there is considerable textual evidence to support the claim that Marx believed that these stages

of development were spurred by factors indigenous to Indian society, even if the impacts of colonialism cannot be denied.

Firstly, already in the 5th and 6th centuries CE, we see that while forms of kin-communities existed, different forms already predominated (ibid 361). One of these forms which was important was “the type of *rural communities* to which {belonged} those where *individual shares* {were} not determined by degree of kinship with the tribal ancestors but by *de facto possession*, in other words, *actual tillage*” (ibid 361-362). In contrast to Kovalevsky, Marx insisted that “[Yet all this can be found in individual shares of land, which are not private property]” (ibid 362). In addition, while still far from the dominant form, the priest caste had created a mechanism for the individualization of family property – unalienable property shared out based on family ties (ibid 363) – which also had the effect of making it alienable:

Thus the effort of the priestly caste {is} on one side: *to make easier and quicker the family divisions*, which have as a consequence the *transition of immovable property into the condition of free alienability*; on the other: the *introduction of special rules into the legislation, which ease the disposition of the family property in the case of gifts made to the caste of priests...*The *family division* in the eyes of the priests’ legislation {is} but one of the means of removing the obstacles which the principles of inalienability of the family property places in the path of *expansion of the property of the Brahmans...The gifts in favor of the priests during the lifetime as well as on the point of death are the oldest kinds of dispositions of family property* is shown based on the fact, affirmed in the

Mitakshara, that *other kinds of dispositions of the estate are put in the form of gift* in order to create for them *the same legal guarantee*. Among other peoples as well, for instance in the Germanic-Roman world (vide Merovingians, Carolingians), the same rank order is also found – *gifts to the priests* first, preceding every other mode of alienation of immovable property (ibid 366-367).

This passage suggests that the Indian code of Manu was “facilitating the breakdown of communal property as such (Anderson 210). The breakdown of communal property served the interests of the Brahman caste by allowing them to gain access to gifts. Marx sees a similar destruction of communal property led by the priests in early medieval Europe linking Indian dynamics to similar processes in European history (Anderson 210). Overall these segments of text show that Marx, in the last years of his life, believed that India was following a dynamic course of development long before the British arrived.

It should be noted that Marx did not simply insert India into a European mold. Kovalevsky argued that the period of Muslim domination was Feudal, a thesis Marx intensely disagreed with. Firstly, he states “According to Indian Law the *ruling power* is not subject to *division* among the sons; thereby a great source of *European Feudalism* {is} *obstructed*” (Marx, *The Asiatic Mode of Production* 376). Here Marx is suggesting that a certain particularity of European law which facilitated the development of feudalism was missing in India. In doing this, he suggests that India cannot be reduced to European forms, because those European forms were dependent on local historical specificities, like the vagaries of European succession. Additionally, with regards to the claim that India was feudal, Marx argues:

Because “benefices,” “*farming out of offices*” [but this is not at all *feudal*, as Rome attests] and *commendation* are found in India, Kovalevsky here finds *feudalism* in the Western European sense. Kovalevsky *forgets*, among other things, *serfdom*, which {is} not in India, and which {is} an essential moment...Of the *poetry of the soil* which Romanic-Germanic feudalism had as its own...as little is found in India as in Rome. The *soil* is nowhere *noble* in India, so that it might not be alienable to commoners!...]...At the close of the Mongolian Empire the so-called *feudalization* was found only in certain districts, in most of the others *common* and *private property* remained with indigenous possessors (ibid 383-384).

Marx believed that India was not feudal because it lacked the key institutions of serfdom and the ownership of land was not restricted to aristocratic lords. Thus, while different property forms co-existed in India, including some forms of private property, the basic underlying economic relations were not those of European feudalism.

Marx’s assessment of the British role in breaking up communal forms of property in India is scathing:

The arbitrary mutilation of the *communal property* by the British “blockheads” had harmful consequences. The *division of the common lands into districts* weakened the *principle of mutual help and support*, which {is} the life-principle of *kin-community associations*. *Populous communities with large amounts of land* are according to the assertion of the “blockheads” themselves especially *suit to meliorated, and often wholly to ward off* the effects of *drought*,

epidemics, and other catastrophes which strike the land at times. Bound to each other by blood ties, neighborly cohabitation and *community of interest* produced just these means, they are able to withstand all possible accidents, succumbing to them only for short periods; the danger once past, they devote themselves with the former energy to the work again. In cases of misfortune each can count on all...the *division of the communal territory in hereditary use* made impossible both the *return of the commune of its temporarily absent members* as well as the *increase in the numerical composition of its settlers on flooded land* (ibid 393).

This description is pretty typical of how Marx viewed the British destruction of communal property forms in India. A combination of social calamity, and agricultural ruin, perpetuated by an ignorant colonial power that failed to understand the local conditions of the society it ruled. It is interesting to note that Marx now sees considerably more value in these old communal forms of property, and does not seem to wish for their destruction (Anderson 216-217), as he did in 1853. Part of the reason for this changing assessment seems to be that Marx had come to see these communal relations as vital to the survival of these communities, particularly in hard times. The hopes for progress are gone, but the emphasis on colonialism's destructive aspects remains.

It is pretty clear that Marx's understanding of India in the last years of his life was transformed. In place of stagnation without history, we have a society with its own dynamics of historical development, which in some ways mirror European forms of development, and in some ways do not. However, most of its property forms are, for

Marx, still communal, so many of the foundations of the AMP remained in place, although it is unclear if Marx still believed that the “Oriental” despot was the real owner of land in India.

In Marx’s First Draft of his 1881 letter to Vera Zasulich, he states:

One debilitating feature of the ‘agricultural commune’ in Russia is inimical to it in every way. This is its isolation, the lack of connection between the lives of different communes. It is not an immanent or universal characteristic of this type that the commune should appear as a *localised microcosm*. But wherever it does so appear, it leads to the formation of a more or less central despotism above the communes (Marx, *Late Marx And The Russian Road* 111).

While Marx is specifically talking about Russia as suffering from something very much like ‘Oriental Despotism,’ judging by the broad manner he applied concepts like ‘Oriental Despotism’ throughout his career, it would be logical to infer that Marx still would have applied the term to India as well.²¹ True, he doesn’t argue that all agricultural communes must suffer from despotism, but he does connect isolated communes and despotism, in a way that is reminiscent of his earlier writings on ‘Oriental despotism.’ The despotic state still sits atop isolated agricultural communes. What this suggests is that while Marx’s conception of the Asiatic mode of production had changed, there is reason to think he still clung to some of its shibboleths. Moreover, in *Anti-Duhring*, written just a few years earlier, in 1877, Engels states:

²¹His broad application of these concepts to radically different contexts could in itself be an expression of Eurocentrism/“Orientalism.”

Where the ancient communities have continued to exist, they have for thousands of years formed the basis of the cruellest form of state, Oriental despotism, from India to Russia. It was only where these communities dissolved that the peoples made progress of themselves, and their next economic advance consisted in the increase and development of production by means of slave labour (Engels, *Anti-Duhring* "Part Two: Chapter Four: Theory of Force (Conclusion)").

From this passage, we see yet another appearance of the typical image of a stagnant "Oriental Despotism," based on the same old agricultural communes.²² Moreover, progress is still linked with their destruction.

One possible reading would be that Marx abandoned the AMP in the last years of his life, somewhere between the time of the publication of *Anti-Duhring*, and his writing of the *Ethnographic Notebooks*. It is certainly true that the conception of the AMP in *Anti-Duhring* is closer to the Marx of the 1850s, than the Marx of the 1880s. However, even when Marx began to move away from a conception of Indian society as stagnant, his image of India was still based on communal agriculture. There is also no evidence that Marx ever abandoned the idea that India was ruled by despotic states. Thus, there is no reason to think that the main elements of the AMP ever disappeared from Marx's thought, even if he came to see more dynamism and value in its

²²It should not be inferred from the persistence of this conception that Engels retained a pro-colonialist stance on India. On British rule in India, Engels states: "It was reserved for the enlightened English to lose sight of... [the need to maintain state supported irrigation]... in India; they let the irrigation canals and sluices fall into decay, and are now at last discovering, through the regularly recurring famines, that they have neglected the one activity which might have made their rule in India at least as legitimate as that of their predecessor" (ibid). Whatever the state of stagnation in India, by this time Engels sees British rule as even more illegitimate than that of previous invaders, who at least maintained the irrigation systems Engels believed were necessary for India's agriculture. Additionally, this focus on irrigation demonstrates that yet another element of the AMP was still in place.

institutions. Therefore, while it is perhaps impossible to be certain, it would not be to unreasonable to guess that Marx still held to the AMP, even if he had abandoned much of his previous fatalism about its inherent stagnation, and no longer thought it was a good idea to have British colonialists smash it to bits from the outside.²³

3.3.2. Discussion

From the material just presented, a few things immediately become apparent. Firstly, Avineri is correct to see Marx's India as largely a stagnant place that is at least resistant to change (Avineri 181-182), at least of the earlier parts of his career. This conception conforms to the Eurocentric/"Orientalist" stereotypes about India that were common in Marx's day. Even the old state funded irrigation system argument is brought out as late as 1877, showing how consistent their basic conception of the AMP remained throughout most of their careers. At least in terms of his description of Indian society, Marx remained within the Eurocentric mold, at least until the last years of his life. However, Avineri's reading is somewhat one sided. The contrast he sees in Marx, between a dynamic dialectical "West" and a stagnant undialectical East (180), appears plausible for his 1853 writings, but after Marx and Engels's cautious support for the Sepoy rebellion, this strict dichotomy needs to be softened, as Anderson is surely right

²³Based on the disappearance of the term "Oriental Despotism" from Marx's drafts of his letters to Vera Zasulich, as well as from Engels's *The Origins of The Family Private Property, and The State*, among other texts, Teodor Shanin argues that Marx finally abandoned the concept at the end of his life (28). However, as we have seen, the elements of the concept still remain in Marx's letters to Zasulich, suggesting he had not abandoned the AMP, regardless of whether he used the terms associated with it.

that Marx was beginning to theorize the self-activity of the indigenous population in India, making them agents in their own history.

This moves us to the second important lesson from what we have just read, which is that an abandonment of the ideas of “Oriental Despotism” and the AMP does not explain the shift towards an anti-colonial position. While the letter to Danielson is from the same period as the *Ethnographic Notebooks*, Engels’s assessment of the British rule in India is distinctly negative by the time we get to *Anti-Duhring*, which was written before the letter to Danielson or the *Ethnographic Notebooks*. By the time we get to *Capital Volume One*, we already have a description of the role of the British in India, similar to that in the Danielson letter, with a description of India being exploited for British gain, while the idea that colonialism might be playing a progressive role is never raised.²⁴ Theoretically, it would be possible to argue that Marx came to believe that capitalism was not really present in India. However Marx is still willing to see capitalism as at least partly introduced into India in the late 1850s. In addition, Marx was still discussing British attempts to privatize Indian land in his *Ethnographic Notebooks*, a clear indication that they were indeed trying to introduce capitalist social relations into India. A more likely explanation for this shift is provided by Kevin Anderson, who argued that by the late 1850s, Marx was becoming disillusioned with capitalism as a progressive force in history (35-36).²⁵ At least when it comes to how capitalism relates to colonized societies, this idea carries considerable weight. While it is true that Marx was theorizing

²⁴ Anderson notes that the references to the progressive effects of colonialism had already disappeared in Marx and Engels’s 1857-1859 writings on China (Anderson 35).

²⁵ It should be noted that for reasons that have to do with the perceived role of colonialism in creating the national army, this disillusionment with colonialism cannot be said to have been completed in the late 1850s.

the exploitation of nation by nation as early as the late 1840s, his later theorizations in *Capital*, the Danielson Letter, and Engels's later theorizations in the English Preface to *The Condition of the Working Class in England* develop these ideas much more fully. To begin with, in *Capital*, Marx extends his analysis of the exploitation of nation by nation beyond the question of monopoly power, to cover the incentives metropolises have to deindustrialize their colonies, and the benefits extracted from the colonies through primitive accumulation. These additions are important because they point to an increasing conception of the problem's scale, increasing their sense that capitalism was retarding the development of the colonies. While it is true that Marx had seen deindustrialization playing a massive role in India in his 1853 writings, the motivation which he now attributed to the British to keep their colonies as raw materials producers, significantly curtailed the ability of capitalist colonialism to lay any foundations for the development of "modern" nation states in the societies it had taken over. In addition, the idea that the development of capitalism was significantly assisted by primitive accumulation in the colonies – essentially in the form of plunder – implicates the wealth of the colonizer societies in the backwardness of their colonies, since it was partly off the spoils of their exploitation that the colonizers grew wealthy. The letter to Danielson brings the point home, with its description of the "bleeding process," where India's resources are sucked out of the country by the British. Under this situation, Indian development is retarded because the bleeding process means its surpluses are not allowed to be recycled back into its own internal economy. Instead, they are funding Britain's wealth. Engels's Preface brings home this point by showing

how even within capitalism it is the nations who were able to set out an economic policy in defiance of Britain's free trade strictures that ended up prospering. Additionally, in discussing the effects that colonialism had on the British working class, Engels suggested that colonialism had regressive effects on the metropole as well as on the colonies.

A second explanation for Marx and Engels's shift away from pro-colonialism can be found in their changing assessment of the progressive potentials of the AMP. As discussed in Chapter One, Tu Chenglin argues that Marx shifted away from his Eurocentric views of the AMP after studying the agricultural communes in Russia, and coming to the conclusion that they could be used to produce a revolutionary regeneration of Russia, skipping the stage of capitalism entirely, if they linked up to a proletarian revolution in the "West" (Tu 10-13). While Tu's characterization of the 1850s Marx as a unilinear theorist of history (7-10) is overly simplistic, the change in attitude towards what Marx believed were ancient communal forms of property is very important to consider because it would affect how he assessed the prospect of them being destroyed. As we saw in chapter two, the Marx of 1853 believed that the destruction of ancient communal forms and the introduction of private property were necessary for India's development. However, as Tu alludes to, this attitude changes in the 1870s, as Marx studied the Russian agricultural communes, and came to the conclusion that they could potentially act as the center piece of a revolutionary process that could regenerate Russia, and skip the horrors of capitalism entirely, were it to link

up to a Proletarian revolution in the West.²⁶ This openness to the possibility of old communal forms playing a positive revolutionary role also caused Marx to make modifications to *Capital Volume One* in order to emphasize that non-European societies were not necessarily condemned to follow the capitalist path of development of their European counterparts. It should be noted that this is in itself a move away from Eurocentrism, in that it deemphasizes Europe as a universal model.²⁷ By de-universalising Western historical trajectories, Marx's changes to his main published work opens space that allows us to think about the development of Asian societies following paths that are distinct from those of European countries. Apart from the effect of making moves away from Eurocentrism, Marx's developing ideas on the revolutionary potentials of the Russian communes would naturally lead him to adjust his attitude to the destruction he saw ancient communal forms undergoing as a result of colonialism, and therefore assess colonial projects in a more purely negative light. As Marx seems to have soured on colonialism by the 1860s, at least in so far as references to its "progressiveness" have disappeared from *Capital*, it seems that his studies on Russia were not the main source of his abandonment of the idea that colonialism was a progressive force, since this abandonment seems to have occurred before those studies began. However, these studies would have reinforced his stance against colonialism, as well as increase his appreciation for pre-capitalist social forms.

²⁶Space does not allow me to discuss Marx's late writing on Russia in detail. As such, I will have to rely on a brief summary of that work to make my arguments. I have drawn heavily on Teodor Shanin's *Late Marx and The Russian Road*, and chapters 5 and 6 of Kevin Anderson's *Marx at the Margins* in creating my summary.

²⁷How much of a move away from Eurocentrism this represents is up for debate, as Marx believed that a proletarian revolution in the West was still necessary for the project of using ancient agricultural communes as a means to regenerate Russia to be successful. However, this invocation of the necessity for a "Western" revolution could also be read as a concession to political realism by Marx, a concession that may be defensible on pragmatic grounds.

A third important lesson revolves around Marx's attitude to progress. It is common to see Marx as a simplistic apostle of progress, who thought that history followed a set of deterministic laws, through a pre-determined set of stages.²⁸ However, as the evidence I have presented in this chapter shows, this reading fails on a couple of fronts. Firstly, while Marx does have a concept of historical development, it is clear that he did not believe that the history of societies goes through pre-determined forms. Moreover, as Engels makes explicit, there is a difference between the models of history they construct, which are designed to capture the underlying logic of historical development, and the actual course of history, which is filled with all kinds of contingencies and even reversals. Marx and Engels were fully aware that history does not follow along a neatly defined path of pre-defined stages. It is true that Marx and Engels saw history as trending towards greater development of the productive forces, and increased complexity, and that this involved moving into new modes of production, as old modes began to restrict rather than enable possibilities latent in a societies developing productive capacities, they did not believe this process followed a uniform pre-determined path, nor did they believe that the succession of modes of production would be the same everywhere. Another issue that complicates how Marx and Engels viewed progress is that for them "it is the bad side that produces the movement which makes history, by providing a struggle" (Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* "Chapter Two:

²⁸See John Rodden's "The lever must be applied in Ireland": Marx, Engels, and the Irish Question" (611-612) for a recent example. Shlomo Avineri, in the early parts of his article "Marx and Modernization" presents this "deterministic" reading of Marx as extremely common, and sets out to challenge it (172-174). Avineri was writing in the 1960s, however, as Rodden's 2008 article demonstrates, this reading refuses to die.

The Metaphysics of Political Economy: The Method”). With regards to feudalism Marx describes the struggle as such:

It must be shown how wealth was produced within this antagonism, how the productive forces were developed at the same time as class antagonisms, how one of the classes, the bad side, the drawback of society, went on growing until the material conditions for its emancipation had attained full maturity (ibid).

Thus, it is in producing the class that will overthrow it, with all the brutality implied by their subordination, that modes of production create progress. The development of the productive forces, beyond a certain point, requires the establishment of new relations of production, which requires class struggle to establish (ibid). To avoid this process would be reactionary, “as the main thing is not to be deprived of the fruits of civilization, of the acquired productive forces, the traditional forms in which they were produced must be smashed. From this moment, the revolutionary class becomes conservative” (ibid). With regards to feudalism Marx claims that to simply have feudalism’s “good side” without the “bad side” would have caused “the development of the bourgeoisie [to be] nipped in the bud” (ibid), leading to the preservation of old forms, and the stalling of historical development. With regards to capitalism, Marx describes this dynamic as such:

From day to day it thus becomes clearer that the production relations in which the bourgeoisie moves have not a simple, uniform character, but a dual character; that in the selfsame relations in which wealth is produced, poverty is also produced; that in the selfsame relations in which there is a development of

the productive forces, there is also a force producing repression; that these relations produce *bourgeois wealth* – i.e., the wealth of the bourgeois class – only by continually annihilating the wealth of the individual members of this class and by producing an ever-growing proletariat (ibid).

Development within capitalism, as within all modes of production is contradictory, in that it involves both the development of new productive forces, and the capacities that come with them, as well as the brutal exploitation of the labouring classes. This dual character of historical development, as both the cite of the development of new capacities, and the violence of brutal exploitation and revolutionary upheaval which make the development of these new capacities possible, shows up in different ways throughout Marx's career. It is in this necessity of bad sides that we see the full significance of Marx's claim that the British exploitation of India revealed the barbarism of bourgeois civilization in its most extreme form. For Marx, this bourgeois system was based off exploitation, which led inevitably to brutality – barbarism was needed to keep the profits high, and the bourgeois economy moving. Along with the necessity for revolutionary upheaval in the transition to more developed modes of production, this conception leads to a fairly tumultuous vision of history. Progress for Marx comes with its own set of difficulties.

In the earlier stages of Marx's career, and for our purposes this is best exemplified by his 1853 writings, this conception of progress seems to underlie his willingness to see a progressive role in Britain's colonization of India. However, with his studies of the Russian peasant commune, he becomes more ambivalent, as he begins to

see more potential in traditional forms (Anderson 234-235). By the end of his career, when he is writing his *Ethnographic Notebooks*, Marx seems to lament the destruction of communal forms as a disaster, causing much suffering, but with seemingly little upside. For the later Marx, the dual nature of a progress which brings barbarism as well as civilization seems to develop further, into a dialectic, where the march of development brings not only progress, but the destruction of old forms, which for all their limitations also contain things of value. I will explore the anti-colonial potentials of this idea in chapter four.

The fourth lesson relates to Spivak's critiques of Marx.²⁹ On the one hand, she is wrong to assert that the AMP is a necessary phase that all societies go through by necessity, since this idea presents an overly unilinear reading of Marx's understanding of history. Additionally, the idea that Marx consigned the AMP to pre-history, while consistent with his earlier writings, does not comport with what he says about India in his *Ethnographic Notebooks*. It would seem then, that at least in his later writings, Marx's universalistic conceptions of emancipation and socialist revolution are not as incompatible with the recognition of the difference of Asian societies as Spivak suggests. Indeed, as Marx's writings on Russia show, he was even willing to consider that these ancient communal forms might, under the right conditions, provide an alternative path to socialism. And if, as my argument suggests, Marx's theory even in the 1850s was not as unilinear as Spivak suggests, then it isn't clear why Marx would need to negate Asia's difference in order to fit it into his system. Indeed, even with capitalism, Marx sees the

²⁹See Chapter One for a discussion of Spivak's critique of Marx

creation of difference as well as similarity. With that said, there are still a couple points Spivak deserves credit for raising. Firstly, her description is more accurate for Marx's early writings on India. The Marx of 1853 did see India as a place without history, which needed to be made capitalist in order to allow it to participate in his universalist project of emancipation. It has to be thus admitted if the assumptions that Marx in 1853 had used were true, then his project would have had pro-colonialist implications. What this suggests is that Spivak is correct to argue that universalist projects like Marx's do have the potential to clash with certain forms of difference, to impose themselves on those who refuse to conform to their dictates. This kind of imposition could be justified in certain circumstances, but it is generally pretty unsavory when colonialism is involved. It is perfectly possible for universalist projects for emancipation to avoid this pitfall, as Marx's turn against colonialism seems to demonstrate, but it does point to a potential tension which needs to be navigated with some care. The second place where Spivak has a point is that while Marx abandoned the notion that India was a land without history, coming to see it as fairly dynamic, with internal mechanisms of development, he for the most part still placed it at a fairly primitive stage of development. True, a few places in India were seen as approaching the stage of European feudalism, but for the most part, India was still seen as having primitive communal relations. This conception of primitiveness reproduces the Eurocentric tendency to see every non-European society as inferior (Dussel and Fornazzari 232), by placing India at the lowest stage of development after primitive communism. This placement is particularly problematic, because it significantly underestimates India's level of development.

While it is beyond the capacity of this study to provide a comprehensive assessment of India's development in its pre-colonial history, it is worth raising a few observations about India pre-British colonization in order to counter claims of its backwardness. In their 2002 article "World-System and "Trans"-Modernity," Dussel and Fornazzari argue that until the 18th century, India and China were actually ahead of the West in terms of development. They argue that from the Spanish conquests of the Americas to the industrial revolution, Europe established a racist system of colonial exploitation in the "New World," from which they extracted bullion. However, because of the advanced state of manufacturing in the East, Europeans were forced to resort to trading the silver they extracted from the Americas in order to access Asian markets. The result, in their view, was a world-system in which the flow of bullion moved from West to East, with China, India, and Southeast Asia as the main centers of accumulation. Asia, not Europe, was for Dussel and Fornazzari the center of the world-system from the 1500s until the French Revolution (ibid 224-230). Whether or not we want to endorse the position put forward by Dussel and Fornazzari completely, the very fact that they could put forward the claim that India and China were more developed than Europe until the late 18th century shows how much our modern understanding of India's development is at odds with Marx's image of a primitive Asiatic Mode of Production.

The final lesson is that, in spite of the limitations they still possess, Marx's *Ethnographic Notebooks* mark significant progress away from Eurocentrism on two fronts. Firstly, they clearly abandon the stereotyped image of India as a stagnant society without internal dynamism or history. Secondly, Marx comes to see considerable value

in India's communal patterns of landownership, and their destruction as the cause of social disasters. It seems that part of the reason Marx was able to move in this direction was that while he did have a theory of historical development, and even progress, this conception of development was ultimately based around an interest in the real dynamics of development in concrete historical circumstances. This made Marx sensitive enough to grapple with and understand local historical conditions, and adjust his analysis accordingly. The fruit of this approach can be found in the Danielson letter, which not only attacked colonialism for its exploitation of India, but also attributed to its population a real capacity to resist it. Thus, if Marx never completely overcame his Eurocentrism, he managed to break with it enough to take positions on India which were far more advanced than those of most of his European contemporaries.

3.4. Conclusion

In this chapter what I have argued can be summarized as follows:

1. That Marx and Engels saw capitalism as creating a division between exploiting and exploited societies at the international level. This division appears early on in their careers, but as their thought continues to develop, it takes on greater importance, until it not only implicates capitalism in slavery, plunder, and exploitation at its very foundations, but through transferring some scraps to the British working class, even comes to be seen as a hindrance to the class struggle

in the imperial hegemon. It is these developing conceptions that are the most likely primary motives for their move towards anti-colonial positions.

2. That Marx and Engels had a multi-linear understanding of history, within the framework of historical development. While not without its Eurocentric and homogenizing dangers, this conception allowed them to ultimately make considerable progress in escaping Eurocentrism, eventually abandoning the idea that India was a stagnant place without history.
3. The main point on which Marx and Engels remained Eurocentric was that they maintained that India was at a fairly low level of development.
4. However, Marx and Engels eventually came to see considerable value in what they saw as India's communal property relations. In Russia, they saw ancient agricultural communes as a basis for socialism in the right conditions, and in India, at the very least they provided a much needed safety net in hard times.
5. Finally, that Marx and Engels saw barbarism as an inherent part of progress in class societies, because of their reliance on exploitation. Earlier in their career, this conception seemed to underline their willingness to see colonialism as a progressive force, in spite of its brutality. Later on, it seems to have produced at least a hint of a more ambiguous attitude towards historical development as bringing not only advances in human capacities, but also destroying things of considerable value as well.

Chapter Four: Marx and the Decolonization of Philosophy

4.1. Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I will begin by briefly laying out the conclusions I have drawn from my argument in the previous two chapters. I will then discuss some of the limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn from my research. Next, I will raise the issue of decolonizing philosophy, and place my work within the context of that wider project. I will draw out some somewhat speculative suggestions for how the ideas I have examined may be engaged with, within the problematic of decolonizing philosophy.

4.2. My Conclusions

Over the two preceding chapters, I have address the issue of to what extent Marx and Engels can be fairly characterized as supportive of European colonialist projects, as well as to whether they were Eurocentric/"Orientalist," and if so, to what extent. My overall conclusions can be described as follows:

1. Marx and Engels started off in 1853 as reluctant supporters of the British colonial project. While seeing it as destructive and exploitative, they also believed that it would clear away India's supposedly stagnant and backward social and economic

system, allowing a new society to be created in its place. This conception of Indian society places them in agreement with Eurocentric and “Orientalist” stereotypes about the nature of “Eastern societies” in general, and India in particular. However, Marx and Engels’s positions even in 1853 are complicated by their willingness to see Indians as agents of their own liberation. For this reason, the more extreme accusations made by Said, about Marx being the kind of racist who saw “Orientals” as forever incapable of ruling themselves or even suffering like Europeans must be rejected. However, Europe is still seen as a universal model at this time.

2. The somewhat conflicted support Marx and Engels gave to the Sepoy rebellion marks something of a turning point in their thought. While still characterizing some of it in a Eurocentric way, and having misgivings about its social content, they also saw it as having a significant base of popular support, and a real basis in legitimate grievances. In supporting the rebellion, Marx’s speculations about the possibility of Indian independence are translated in to something closer to concrete political positions against colonialism.
3. The shift towards an anti-colonial position seemed have been motivated by a changing conception of how societies related to each other under capitalism. While accepting the idea that nation could exploit nation pretty early in his career, this exploitation took on a greater significance for Marx and Engels, and became more implicated into the growth of capitalism, such that it became increasingly untenable to see in colonialism a progressive role. Apart from a shift

towards anti-colonialism, these developing positions also implied a challenge to the idea of Europe as a universal model for the world.

4. Marx's late studies on the Russian commune played an important secondary role in pushing him further away from colonialism and Eurocentric/"Orientalist" conceptions. Not only did he see a possible path to socialism through the communes, at least in Russia, he also began to see a greater value in what he saw as ancient communal forms in general. Studying these non-European forms eventually led Marx to abandon many of his Eurocentric pre-conceptions about India being a stagnant society with no history. However, shades of Eurocentrism still remained because he continued to see India as having achieved a fairly low level of development.
5. By the late 1850s at the latest, Marx had developed a multi-linear theory of history, which accounted for a considerable variance in the paths different societies take in historical development. This multi-linear understanding of history existed with a framework which saw the development towards greater complexity and productive capacities, and the movement through different modes of production based on the level of development, as applicable across cultures. Marx and Engels were for this reason able to maintain a universalistic conception of the basic dynamics at work in historical development, while also accounting for a considerable amount of difference between different societies. For this reason, the theory need not erase the differences between societies in

order to maintain its terms, even if, as a universalist theory, the temptation to homogenize is not entirely absent.

6. Marx saw progress in class societies as driven by struggle and exploitation. For this reason, civilization always contains barbarism within it. In his earlier years, this dual nature of progress, as history developing from its “bad side” seems to have conditioned Marx to accept a considerable amount of destructive upheaval as part of the price of advancement. In his later years, as Marx became more reluctant to embrace the destruction of traditional communal social forms, this conception of the barbarism in class civilization hints at a more complex idea of historical development, one which entails loss as well as progress.

4.3. Limitations to my Conclusions

By focusing on Marx and Engels’s own writing about India, I was able to closely examine what they actually wrote about the subject, and carefully reconstruct their arguments. This allowed me to address many of the accusations of pro-colonialism and Eurocentrism/”Orientalism” in considerable detail. However, by focusing on their writing in one country, by focusing on their own writings, and leaving the examination of their sources largely to future research, there are some limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn from my study.

The first, and probably the most important limitation, is that because I have focused on India, I cannot claim to capture the totality of what Marx and Engels thought about colonialism. What they believed about India might not be entirely the same as what they believed about other regions of the world. For this reason, some caution must be exercised in extending my conclusions to their work on other colonized societies. This also means that certain issues, such as race, were not addressed in detail, because Marx and Engels's writing on other topics, such as the American civil war in the case of our example of race,³⁰ were more relevant. This is a gap which further research can help close.

A second limitation is that due to the focus on Marx and Engels' own texts, there was little space left to discuss their sources. Because of this limitation, I am unable to address questions about the sources of Marx and Engels's Eurocentric and pro-colonialist ideas in detail. This means that a full assessment of Said's claim that Marx's 1853 views were the result of him being seized by a pre-existing series of "Orientalist" lexicographic ideas that blinded him to the realities of Indian society³¹ will have to wait until a detailed examination of Marx's sources on India is conducted.

A final limitation is that while this study addresses where Marx and Engels' writing on India betrayed a support for colonialism and/or Eurocentrism/"Orientalism," it does not address the issue of whether their conceptions of India were historically

³⁰Chapter Three of Anderson's *Marx at the Margins* discusses their views on the civil war in considerable detail, and is well worth looking at for those who are interested.

³¹See Chapter One for a discussion of Said's claims.

accurate. To attempt an assessment of the historical accuracy of Marx's work on India would be a considerable undertaking, far beyond the scope of this study.

4.4. Decolonizing Philosophy

Before we discuss how the arguments I have been making about Marx and Engels relate to the project of decolonizing philosophy, it will be useful to have a working definition of what we mean when talking about the decolonization of philosophy. Alison Jaggar argues that one of the major "tasks [of decolonizing philosophy] is to investigate how far that tradition may be systemically biased by ignoring or misrepresenting its colonial past and possible neo-colonial present" (Jaggar 89). She argues that in analytic political philosophy, with its tendency to deduce positions from a few broad abstract principles, there is a tendency to leave colonial and neo-colonial structures unexamined (ibid 91). Additionally, liberalism, which tends to be the underlying frame work for this kind of political philosophy, has a history of involvement with colonialism, with some of its major historical proponents being not only rationalizers, but also direct participants in colonial projects (ibid 102-103).

Charles Mills extends this critique of hyper-abstract theorizing further, arguing that social contract theory for example, with its focus on abstract individuals, removed from any positionality, obscures the real relations of oppression within society. This

allows for the construction of normative schemas that ignore these issues, allowing real oppression to go unexamined. Worse, this focus on highly abstract notions of justice allows Western political philosophy to pass over its own history of complicity with colonialism in silence, allowing its Eurocentric biases to go unexamined. One particularly pernicious example of these abstract modes of thinking can be found in the field of international relations, which often theorizes the relations between states without accounting for the history of colonialism and neocolonialism (Mills 9-11).

For Mills, it is important to account for nuances in Western thought. While there is much that is pro-colonial in the “Western canon,” there are also strains of anti-colonial thought. These anti-colonial strains have been used to contest colonial projects, including by those who were being forcibly pulled into the “West’s” area of influence. It is also important to acknowledge that these anti-colonial traditions have tended to be forgotten by the hegemonic colonialist mainstream of Western thought. As a result, the history of “Western” thought appears to be more unanimously pro-colonialist than it actually was. The mainstream’s colonialist assumptions have also faced less contestation than they would have if “Western” thought’s more anti-colonialist undercurrents had remained visible (Mills 5).

As an alternative to the highly abstracted modes of thought of the philosophical mainstream, Jaggar advocates thinking about society in a way that captures the complex relations of oppression within society. Society cannot be understood as a discreet series of structures, isolated from each other, but must be grasped as a collection of

interrelated parts, which must be understood as parts of a whole. This whole exists on a global scale (Jaggar 99).

While not exhausting the scope of what it means to decolonize philosophy, for our purposes, the conception of challenging the pro-colonial biases in the Western philosophical tradition is probably the most relevant. This issue can be divided into two parts. The first is a matter of detecting pro-colonialist biases within the work of Marx and Engels, which has essentially been what most of this study has been attempting to do. The second part is the question of to what extent their work can be usefully mobilized for exposing and challenging colonial structures and modes of thought. Most of this study up to this point has been focused on the question of colonialist modes of thought within Marx and Engels' work on India, so I will only discuss the first part of the issue briefly, as it has to a large extent already been discussed at length. I would then like to spend a little time discussing the issue of how Marx and Engels might be used for anti-colonial purposes.

When it comes to the issue of colonial bias within the work of Marx and Engels, the first thing that has to be mentioned is that we are not dealing with simple apologists for empire. Their early hopes that colonialism might bring progress were always tempered with an understanding of both its destructive effects and base motivations. At their most pro-colonial, Marx and Engels were able to envision Indian independence through the self-emancipation of its indigenous population as a real and desirable possibility. Even in 1853, their position was progressive by the admittedly paltry standards of their time. Additionally, Marx and Engels were able to overcome their

illusions about the progressive nature of colonialism, at least in so far as India was concerned. Towards the end of his life, Marx even began to abandon a lot of the Eurocentric/"Orientalist" conceptions he had about India being a stagnant, historyless society.

However, while there were victories for Marx and Engels on the colonial front, which among other things make the use of their work as a framework for challenging colonialism more plausible, it is also fair to say that even at the end of their lives, Marx and Engels retained some Eurocentric/"Orientalist" biases. Apart from the use of 19th century racial categories, which would certainly qualify as racist by modern standards, the most obvious defects lie in the concept of the Asiatic Mode of Production, which is riddled with Eurocentric/"Orientalist" baggage about backwardness and stagnation. It is clear that one task for a Marxist understanding of colonialism would be a revised understanding of Asian societies, which would probably involve abandoning the AMP as an outdated and unhelpful concept. Many Marxists have already argued for the elimination of the AMP, and proposed alternative frameworks. As an example Samir Amin argued that both Medieval Europe and Asia both had what he called a tributary mode of production, which is in essence a mode of production in which surplus is extracted from the labouring population in the form of tribute, such as in taxes or rents to feudal lords. In Amin's schema, European (and Japanese) feudalism is simply a peripheral, underdeveloped form of the tributary mode of production (Amin 233-238). One of the interesting things about Amin's schema is that it implies that places in Asia, like India and China, were actually more developed than Europe during the middle ages,

inverting the assumptions of backwardness that are latent even in Marx's late account of the AMP. While it is of course far beyond the scope of this study to assess Amin's work for historical accuracy, it does provide an example of how it is possible to conceptualize Marxism without the AMP.

4.5. Marx and Engels Against Empire

In this final section, I would like to make some somewhat speculative remarks about the possibility of using Marx and Engels's work to challenge colonialism. From the perspectives on decolonizing philosophy we have been discussing, Marxism has some features which are attractive. Unlike mainstream paradigms like social contract theory, Marxism tends to display an interest in the concrete historical conditions which produce oppression. Additionally, with its focus on viewing society as a totality of interconnecting chains of social relationships, as well as in examining the historical development of those social relations and the categories we use to think about them (Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness* "What is Orthodox Marxism?"), Marxism seems to have a fair amount of potential as a tool for critiquing colonialist relations of domination, as well as exposing Eurocentric/"Orientalist" modes of thought. Finally, as a theory with a long history as an instrument for challenging established power structures, it is somewhat natural that those looking to oppose the current order in

some fundamental way will find Marxism attractive, at least to a certain extent. For our purposes, I would like to look at three topics discussed in this study that I believe may be useful for decolonizing philosophy, and thought in general. These three topics are, the relationships of exploitation between countries, the idea of development as a dialectic between progress and barbarism, and Marx's theory of multi-linear development.

Of these three topics, the exploitation of nation by nation is probably the one that has been the most explored in the history of Marxism. From V.I. Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, to Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, to Samir Amin's *Eurocentrism*, to more recent works like Tony Norfield's *The City*, to countless other works, Marxist have for a long time taken a keen interest in the exploitative economic relationships that exist between different regions of the world under capitalism. While often not referencing Marx's own writings on colonialism, this large literature often presents a stinging counter-narrative to the Eurocentric mainstream by suggesting that the hegemonic regions of the world have based their wealth upon the exploitation of the rest of humanity. To the extent that their accusations stick, these counter-narratives seriously undermine attempts to apologize for the actions of colonizers, expose the full negative impacts of colonialism, as well as how it continues to operate today under new, neo-colonial forms. When it comes to what Marx and Engels wrote on these topics, it is useful to know that they also understood the relations between different regions of the world as exploitative.

Additionally, they may also have specific insights into these issues which have until now been underappreciated.

The concept of “primitive accumulation” has continued to be productive in this line of thought. One recent example can be found in Glen Sean Coulthard’s book, *Red Skin, White Masks*, where he uses the concept of primitive accumulation to argue that the Canadian government continues as a settler colonial regime, by dispossessing its Indigenous peoples of their land, in order to bring more natural resources into its extractive capitalist economy. While not reducing Canada’s settler colonial project to purely economic motivations, Coulthard demonstrates how Canada’s extractive model of capitalism creates strong incentives to continue the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. The result is a deep conflict between Canada’s political economic model, and the rights of its Indigenous peoples to self-determination (Coulthard 6-15). Coulthard’s use of “primitive accumulation” is a strong example of how Marx and Engels’s conceptualization of the relations between nations can continue to provide insight into the dynamics of colonialism, which will be useful to those who wish to decolonize their theorizations by taking these dynamics into account. Additionally, these critiques raise serious normative questions about our social and political systems.

When it comes to what I am calling the dialectic of progress and barbarism, I want to start off by making a distinction between talking about the “barbarism” of bourgeois civilization as a rhetorical device, which as a means of exposing the hypocrisies of colonialist apologetics is perfectly valid, and seeing “barbarism” as an inherently necessary part of class civilization, which is the point I would like to briefly

discuss. As a rhetorical strategy, it is good enough simply to point out that the so-called civilized people do many of the same things they decry in those they deem to be “barbarians,” to show that colonialist apologists are speaking with forked tongues. However, in order to demonstrate the theoretical point I am trying to explain, it is necessary to prove that these “barbaric” acts are a necessary part of how a system functions. In the case of Marx and Engels, this necessity comes from the fact that in class society, a surplus must be exploitatively extracted from the labouring classes in order to reproduce the ruling classes. This drive for surplus often ends up producing all kinds of coercive and even violent means of satisfying its imperatives, which may even be a necessity to keep the ruling class in existence.

The understanding that progress in class society contains an inherently barbaric element can produce a couple of reactions. One reaction is simply to accept this barbarism “as the price of progress,” which actually ends up reinforcing pro-colonialist positions, albeit on terms that are so brutal that it becomes a lot harder to maintain support for these structures politically over a long period of time. For this reason, it ends up producing what is probably a fairly ineffective form of apologetics for colonialism. The second reaction is to use this understanding of the relations between “barbarism” and class civilization to develop a more ambiguous conception of historical development. If development brings a serious amount of destruction as well as progress, it makes sense to reconsider at least whether all development is worth it in all circumstances, because if destruction is part of the deal, there is a very strong likelihood that somethings of value are being lost. An example of this is Marx becoming much

more hostile to the destruction of what he saw as traditional Indian forms of communal property by the British. As soon as it is admitted that something of value will be destroyed by a development process, there is automatically a question of tradeoffs between engaging in the process and not engaging in it. This concern is particularly pertinent when discussing colonialism, because the highly exploitative social relations it often entails tend to minimize the amount of benefit gain from the development it supposedly brings, while maximizing the amount of destruction which it brings. One of the potential virtues of understanding the dialectic of progress and barbarism is that it provides a challenge to what Serene Khader calls justice monism. Khader is specifically addressing gender relations, but I believe it has wider scope, and so I will retranslate the concept in terms of the social relations of a society in general. Thus I will define “justice monism” as the idea that only one kind of just society is possible, and that all societies must seek to replicate that model (Khader 30). Seeing development as a series of tradeoffs tends to mitigate justice monism because it makes it much more difficult to believe that there is one unproblematic path to a “just” society, which all ought to follow, as no model can be considered cost free. The realization that there are different goods that tend to conflict with each other tends to undermine the colonialist’s faith that they know how everyone should live. In addition, the dialectic between barbarism and progress also offers ways of challenging the idea that so-called “primitive societies” are inherently inferior, without entering into highly implausible attempts to deny that historical development occurs, and that technologies have real advantages.

Finally, as I have already discussed in Chapter Three, Marx's theory, while presenting itself as applicable to all of human history, still manages to account for a considerable amount of historical specificity, due to being multi-linear in its general understanding of how history works. Apart from making the theory much more plausible, this sensitivity to historical particularity will allow it to maintain a universalistic understanding of human history, without simply transforming Europe into a model for all humanity.³² There are a number of reasons why one would want to maintain universalism, even if certain kinds of universalism can become complicit in colonialism (ibid 28). To begin with cultural particularist alternatives to universalism can often be used to reinforce structures of domination within colonized societies. An example of this dynamic is the way parochial cultural values can be used to justify the oppression of women (ibid 28-29). Additionally, even anti-imperialism requires universalism to be effective, because it needs to have polemical effectiveness outside its immediate cultural context, specifically because anti-imperialism's enemy is transnational by its very nature, and thus requires international co-operation in order to be effective. Anti-imperialist critique must be able to have an effect outside the colonized society's borders, including in the metropole (ibid 29).

Khader argues that there are not only good reasons to embrace universalism, but also that universalism need not be pro-colonialist (ibid 28). She argues, that the pro-colonial feminists she critiques are not pro-colonialist because they are universalists, but because they have accepted a significant number of non-normative descriptions about

³² My discussion of Marxism's descriptive universalism could be seen as unrelated to normative universalism. However while it is true that one cannot necessarily conflate facts and values, it is also the case that universalism is much more plausible if there are some commonalities in how human history works, which express things that all humans share in common.

how the West relates to the rest of the world (ibid 31). In essence this means they accept a conception of the “West” as the land of freedom, rule of law, adherence to moral principles, and progress, while the rest of the world is deemed to be hierarchical, traditional, violent, backwards, and ruled by custom. This conception leads to an idea where backward non-Westerners need to be saved from their barbarism, by the enlightened West. Of course, this conception relies on suppressing many unpleasant facts about the “West’s” history, which would undermine its claims to moral authority (ibid 32-33). This conception, is guilty of Ethnocentrism, meaning the temptation to judge “others” by one’s own cultural values (ibid 30, 32), and justice monism (ibid 30). Khader argues what is needed is to question Western values, which need to be not treated as transcendent (35-36).

While Marxism’s universalism may not be a problem, there might be other problems that retard its use as a tool of grasping the history of colonialism. As is clear from the results of my study, Marx and Engels were not entirely free of Eurocentric/“Orientalist” biases during any part of their careers. While Marxism’s interest in historical specificity may facilitate the sifting of what is culturally specific from what is truly universal, we cannot assume that this sifting process has yet been carried to its full effect, certainly not in Marx and Engels’s own work, and perhaps not even fully in the work of all contemporary Marxists. This issue does suggest that Marxism could not be used uncritically without reproducing the colonialist forms of thought and praxis de-colonial thinkers wish to avoid. This question would apply both to Marx and Engels’s description of the world, and the values they sought to uphold.

Finally, it is worth addressing the question of whether Marx and Engels's work would fall under the category of justice monism, since this would suggest that their universalism would, under Khader's definition, still be Eurocentric/"Orientalist." It is certainly true that Marx and Engels believed that socialism was a worthwhile goal to achieve for all societies throughout the world, which would impose a certain amount of uniformity on the kinds of social forms they would accept. Khader, in developing a non-justice-monist vision of universalist feminism, argues for a definition of feminism as opposition to gender oppression, on the grounds that it would not imply a uniform set of social relations, nor an end point which all peoples are destined to reach, while still upholding the need to struggle against sexism (ibid 38). One could attempt to draw an analogy between the Marxist goal of a classless society, and Khader's opposition to gender oppression. Indeed, both these positions imply a significant amount of social change, as well as the suppression of certain modes of social organization. However, while Khader argues that some material goods should be inherently part of feminist demands, at least to a level where basic human rights are satisfied (39-40), Marx and Engels seem to want to spread modern technology all over the globe. It is telling that even when they are considering ancient agricultural communes as potential sources of revolution, they still predicated this potential on them gaining access to modern technology. This would suggest something closer to a single ideal state than Khader's position, moving Marx and Engels closer to justice monism.

However, there are some additional factors to consider. The first is that Marx and Engels were writing in the 19th century, when the level of technological

development was much lower. Under these conditions, the tradeoffs made to protect other values to the expense of technological development would have much more dire consequences, as it would imply a reduction in the standard of living from an already much lower level. In addition, Marx and Engels were concerned with the pragmatic demands that come with revolutionary activity, mainly things like whether the revolution will create a viable polity capable of defending itself. In these circumstances, it makes sense to embrace technological modernization.

Finally it should be noted that while communism is in some sense an end state in the Marxist conception, it is itself a fairly open ended idea. It is an academic cliché at this point to point out that Marx never drew up blue prints for a communist society. In this sense Marx's conception of communism share some similarities with Khader's conception of de-colonial feminism. Thus, while closer to justice monism than Khader in some ways, it does not seem fair to accuse Marxism of falling into this trap. Additionally, compared to the Western feminists criticized by Khader, who obsess about Muslim women's veils as signs of oppression, and seem more focused on issues of cultural signification, than the real life conditions of the women they claim to be saving (Khader 28-29), Marx and Engels's concerns about creating a society without class divisions and exploitation have a much better claim to universality. Indeed, if a workable plan to achieve these goals was presented, and then condemned by the ruling classes in colonized societies on "anti-imperialist" grounds, one would wonder, as Ahmad no doubt would have, whether what we were seeing was not the preservation of valued

local culture against the encroachment of European values, but the encroachment of the interests of a small ruling class against the aspirations of the majority of humanity.

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