

Book reviews

Marx on modernity, revisited

Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 2010. 319pp. Notes. Bibl. Ind. App. \$71, \$22.50 pbk. ISBN 978-0-2260-198-26, 978-0-2260-198-33 pbk.

Kevin B. Anderson has published an excellent and timely book under a title, though, that almost seems designed to belittle the importance of the material discussed: far from being marginal to either Marx's thinking or to the concerns of contemporary social theory, *Marx at the Margins* is centrally about the dynamics of capitalist modernity, the problems of progress and modernization, the role of colonialism for all of these, as well as the resistance to the latter. The title is somewhat misleading also in a second regard: while Marx's views of 'non-Western societies' and ethnicity (mostly of race, actually) are indeed important in this context, nationalism is discussed in the book mostly under the perspective of resistance to colonialism, not, however, comprehensively in its own right.

From 1851–62 Marx worked continuously as the chief European correspondent for the *New York Tribune*, the most important American newspaper of the period. Since covering European politics, included commenting on colonial and world affairs, Marx was forced to study the existing literature on India, Java, Turkey and Russia, the results of which study are documented in numerous notebooks of excerpts. Anderson's first chapter looks at Marx's journalistic work from this period as well as the related notebooks. The second chapter is mostly concerned with the question of whether there was any potential for revolution in Tsarist Russia, and how—in this context—the workers' movement should relate to the question of Polish statehood and nationalism (there are also a few pages on Chechens and Jews). Different from what the chapter's title, 'Russia and Poland: The Relationship of National Emancipation to Revolution', seems to promise, Marx's position as presented by Anderson was not at all informed by any notion of 'national emancipation' but, in strikingly realist terms, reflected a power-political concern with the central role of the Russian regime in the reactionary alliance that defeated the 1848–9 revolutions and determined their aftermath. One of the most interesting aspects here is how Marx reflected on the question of whether the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, which also implied the dissolution of the traditional village community, changed the prospects of revolution in Russia.

The third chapter discusses Marx's writings on the American Civil War of 1861–5. Marx saw the Civil War as a social revolution that in turn was 'the harbinger of socialist revolutions to come' (79). As Anderson emphasizes, his writings on the Civil War explored 'the intersections of class and race'; going beyond abolitionism, Marx appreciated 'African Americans as revolutionary subjects' (85). Chapter four concerns another one of the issues that Marx was consistently passionate about, the decolonization of Ireland. He proposed English workers should actively fight for the dissolution of the forced union between the two countries, as the union's ending would not only trigger a social revolution in Ireland but also—and perhaps more importantly—unblock the process of social emancipation in England itself. (Marx adds, however, that this social revolution would take place 'in backward forms' (148).) Chapter five, 'From the *Grundrisse* to *Capital*: Multilinear Themes', is perhaps the most original and theoretically challenging section of the book and, together with the first chapter (on colonialism) and the final, sixth, chapter on 'Late Writings on Non-Western and Precapitalist Societies', provides the larger conceptual framework in which the discussions of the other three chapters' principal topics (Russia, Poland, United States, Ireland) should be located. Anderson demonstrates that in his mature writings Marx conceived of human history as multilinear: neither is history pressed into a rigid theory of evolutionary 'stages' as in the works of Marx's liberal predecessors, nor is there a sense that all the world by necessity *has* to go through capitalist development in order to regain, equally necessarily, primitive communism in a higher form. For Marx the latter does presuppose, though, the universal adoption of the positive achievements of capitalist civilization (such as modern technology), and Marx clearly sensed that only a combination of specific conditions plus the right kind of revolution could potentially have prevented some countries, such as Russia, from having to go down the capitalist pathway. Such revolutions did not occur, though, and, in the present period, no very large country or area (like Russia) characterized by any form of communal land ownership exists anywhere. If, as Marx seems to have thought, humanity still in the 1860s had a slim chance of finding a shortcut to the 'alternative modernity' of modern communism without passing through capitalist modernity, it failed to take it.

The principal merit of Anderson's book lies in making accessible and opening up for discussion a great wealth of material from Marx, including copious amounts of quoted primary text, bringing to light a highly complex (and at times contradictory) Marx. Less convincing are the conceptual framework and the *Bildungsroman*-style narrative within which Anderson tries to accommodate the material: Anderson proposes at various points that Marx started out from a 'Eurocentric' position that was still full of admiration (a kind of hate-love) for capitalism's modernity (the chief exhibit here is the *Communist Manifesto*) but then, through political involvement and serious study, gradually emancipated himself from this limitation, lost all his youthful illusions about the benign side-effects of capitalism and colonialism,

learned how to love anticolonial nationalisms and even recognized that the 'Asian type' of village community, at least in Russia, was the basis not only of 'Oriental despotism' but also (potentially) of future communism. It seems more accurate, however, to maintain that Marx was unwavering in his commitment to modernity, although it was qualified and destabilized by his critique of the capitalist form of that modernity, a critique that in its early stages was surely less sophisticated but not necessarily less strong. Likewise, Marx always looked for, and variously found, forces that would contribute to the creation of that alternative form of modernity that would mean the return, in a 'higher form', of the communism out of which human history began. It is crucial in this context to note, as Anderson indeed does, that Marx points to the 'lack of social individuation' in the ancient village community (180, quoted from *Capital*, vol. 1), that he considers individuality an important source of social vitality, and that he is very much aware of the fact 'that collectivist forms of domination that minimized private property could also create very pronounced social hierarchies' (204). Anderson correctly states: 'Always the dialectician, Marx followed Hegel in discerning dualities and contradictions within each social sphere, even that of egalitarian and communal preliterate societies' (243), which is indeed true of the early, the mature and the late Marx. As he considered 'intercourse' in the widest sense—cultural exchange bound up with exchange of material wealth, leading to increased accumulation of knowledge and thus 'productivity', broadly conceived, essential to civilization—Marx was fundamentally opposed to any political or cultural project that would isolate this or that section of humanity from any others, hence his fundamental opposition to nationalism and protectionism. At the same time, this fundamental connection between 'intercourse' and developed civilization as conditions for an emancipated humanity might also be seen as the reason why Marx, although 'always the dialectician', occasionally sounded as if he welcomed colonialism, such as in some passages of the *Manifesto* and the 1853 articles on India that Anderson discusses in the first chapter. Anderson gives an important hint (hidden away in endnote 20 on p. 257): Marx wrote in a letter to Engels of June 1853 that his use of the term 'revolution' to describe some of the effects of colonial rule was meant to be deliberately provocative as part of a 'clandestine campaign' against the protectionist economist Henry Charles Carey, whose position the *New York Tribune* was touting. This endnote is the only hint at a crucial dimension of the problem that is missing in Anderson's book: Marx's principled rejection of economic nationalism, expressed most explicitly in his 1845 draft critique of Friedrich List (the most important follower of Carey, not only in Germany, and of huge relevance for anti- and postcolonial discourses all over the world, including, for example, Latin-American 'dependency theory') and a number of related speeches on, or rather against, protectionism. Marx's later support of Irish protectionism, which Anderson reports, needs to be discussed in particular against the fact that Marx strongly rejected it for Germany (and the United States).

The (quite rightly controversial) acknowledgment that colonialism might have unintended positive, emancipatory side-effects might have been motivated not so much by 'Eurocentrism' but by anti-nationalism, that is, Marx's principled rejection of what is probably Europe's most successful political idea.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2013.779802>

Pan-European eugenics

Marius Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*. Modernism and ... Series. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2010. xv + 190pp. Notes. Bibl. Ind. £58, £17.99 pbk. ISBN 978-0-230-23082-8, 978-0-230-23083-5 pbk.

The year 2010 will likely go down as one of the best in recent memory for historians of the international eugenics movement. That year, three major and significant works on the history of eugenics were published: Sheila Faith Weiss's *The Nazi Symbiosis*, Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine's hefty edited volume entitled *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, and Marius Turda's smaller *Modernism and Eugenics*. Each of these works will likely stand as authoritative in the field for years to come, and all make a substantial contribution to the historiography of eugenics around the globe.

Among these, Turda's work stands out for a number of reasons. For one, it is quite a slim volume of only 190 pages, including notes and index. As will be seen, this is in some ways one of its strengths rather than a weakness. Second, Turda takes perhaps the most novel approach to his material of the authors and editors considered. Writing as part of the new 'Modernism and ...' series, edited by Roger Griffin, Turda's intent is to show that eugenics was not only a scientific theory but, more importantly, 'a social and cultural philosophy of identity predicated upon modern concepts of purification and rejuvenation of both the human body and the larger national community' (1). Using Griffin's past work on modernism and 'palingenesis' as a foundation, Turda's efforts are therefore oriented towards showing that eugenics throughout Europe, despite its regional or national differences, was effectively a single ideological movement promising a new framework for constructing identity and strengthening the nation in the face of perceived decline or degeneration. Rather than a scientific movement alone, eugenics was cultural and political as well, a 'scientific model of biological and national engineering' (117).