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**Non-citizens**  
Yolande Jansen

Marx's work abounds with people who are not citizens, neither *bourgeois* nor *citoyens*: slaves, serfs, day labourers, vagabonds, the colonised, proletarians. They have a prominent place in his analysis of capitalism's origins. In his famous part 8 of *Capital I* (chapters 26–33), Marx interprets these origins as a continuous process of 'primitive accumulation' whereby land was taken away from its original users, enclosed and appropriated as private property. The previous users of the land, in European history often tenant farmers, had to enter the urban labour markets, and in this way capitalism first manifested itself within Europe, and subsequently beyond Europe through colonialism. Only by looking at the fate of these non-citizens can we see the threads and stitches on the inside of the metropole's embroidery: "This subject' [primitive accumulation], said Marx, 'one must study in detail, to see what the *bourgeoisie* makes of itself and of the labourer, wherever it can, without restraint, model the world after its own image" (543).<sup>1</sup>

Marx himself had experience with the right of the state to give and take citizenship. National passports had not yet appeared by the mid-point of the nineteenth century, but the papers and decrees that held poor and bothersome people in their place, or expelled them, had. Indeed, *the border was everywhere* was the case for more people than the rosy liberal picture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century often suggests; this

was in many ways comparable to today's migrant experience that *the border is everywhere* (Rosenberg 2006). Marx, the social and political critic, was indeed a bothersome person in the eyes of many authorities and was frequently refused residence or employment, therefore becoming the 'glorious, sacred, accursed but still clandestine immigrant [as] he was all his life.' (Derrida 2006 [1993], 219).

As a young progressive philosopher around 1840 Marx found no place at a German university and he became a journalist for the radical *Rheinische Zeitung*. When it was suppressed in 1843 he left for Paris, from where he was ousted in 1845 after Prussia asked for his expulsion claiming high treason against the Prussian state due to his critical views of the Prussian political economy. He was allowed to settle in Brussels, but only after he renounced his Prussian citizenship. That citizenship had been secured by his father in 1815 by converting to Protestantism, because as a Jew, when the Rhineland became a part of Prussia, he could not remain in public service; his father gave up his religious tradition for citizenship, but Marx did not give up his political views, and lost it again. In 1848 he praised the Revolution taking place all over Europe, and became expelled from Belgium too. With his wife Jenny and four young children he emigrated to England. The family lived in poor conditions for years, with only three of the seven children attaining adulthood. Marx died without citizenship, but liked to sign his letters with "Citizen Marx" (Sperber 2013).

### The 'Jewish question' or the 'citizenship question'?

During his stay in Paris, just before his flight to Belgium, Marx had impeccably exposed the paradoxes of modern citizenship in his *Zur Judenfrage*. These did not concern passports or borders yet, but the right of 'everyone' to take part in political power. The core of Marx's argument is that the equality that arises between *citoyens* through political emancipation – that is to say through universal suffrage and the general right to political activity – is, on the one hand, a necessary step out of feudalism, but on the other does not end the inequalities in social life, and even exacerbates them in many ways. The *homme/man* part of the *Déclaration des droits*

*de l'homme et du citoyen* refers to social life, and Marx reminds the reader that the human with 'human rights' is in practice especially the individual with property rights who stands in opposition to others in the '*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*'/civil society. This individual tends to project equality (and solidarity) onto the state, as does the religious human onto heaven. A further phase of human emancipation is necessary, wherein human beings learn to recognise themselves in other humans as free beings, and as all forming part of a *Gattungswesen*, a *species being*, as social, relational beings.

Why did the elaboration of this view receive the title *Zur Judenfrage* - why did it seem that citizenship specifically concerned the Jews? Marx developed his view as a contribution to the debate on the emancipation of the Jews in Prussia which arose in reaction to the provision of civil rights to (property-owning) Jews in France in 1791. He especially reacted to the view of his former friend Bruno Bauer, who had also published a *Zur Judenfrage*.<sup>2</sup>

A profoundly saddening aspect of this debate was that the question of citizenship played out in terms of 'The Jewish Question', focusing on the minority that did not yet have civil rights, rather than on the elephant in the room, namely the Christian bourgeoisie and its political privileges.<sup>3</sup> This focus inextricably linked progressive philosophy to Christian antisemitism. Bauer did address the relationship between Christian privileges and political citizenship, and criticised the recovery of the political power of the conservative Christian bourgeoisie after 1815 during the Restoration, particularly in Prussia. His intended remedy was the secularisation of the State: France and the U.S. were his models. Bauer radicalised those models, however, for the tough Prussian context, and asserted that not only religious privileges and religious institutions but religion in general should be abandoned – he also thought this because, like Marx, he had been convinced, after reading Feuerbach, that religion should be seen as alienation.

Although the political problem thus primarily concerned the religious privileges of the Christian citizens, Bauer used lines from theology and the intellectual culture of the Enlightenment to explain Judaism as the core of the problem – and to refuse

the Jews citizenship rights. He set forth Judaism as a more dogmatic, directly political and ritualistic religion than Christianity, and Protestantism in particular. Like so many others Bauer adopted the differentiation between the 'particularistic' Old Testament and the 'universal' New Testament, between dogma/law and freedom/love, which he inherited directly from Christian theology and German Idealism. Judaism thus actually became a metaphor for the practically stronger political Christendom, and *in addition* became presented as an objective problem *itself*.

This happened not only in the work of Bauer, but in an entire nineteenth-century intellectual tradition which developed in the European context, in which Athens and Jerusalem, and/or Indo-European/Aryan and Hebrew/Semitic traditions were compared with each other on the basis of several stereotypes, which were endlessly rehashed in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century (Olender 2002 [1994]; Leonard 2012). Thereby (constructed) theological difference became the problem, instead of the actual religious networks intertwined with the state which were dominated by precisely those Protestants who had defined their own religion as 'purely moral'.

This is an important genealogy for seeing the possible problems with how again today religion in general (and especially 'Islam') has been made the core problem of 'particularism' in the public sphere by liberal authors focused on the 'question of secularism'. We can learn how this hides real power differences and hegemony from view both from critical work on the role of (secularising) Christianity in political processes in twentieth century Europe (such as f.e. Samuel Moyn 2015), and from the work on the racial and class (or neoliberal) dimensions intersected with religious differences and secularism today (f.e. Meer 2012; Jansen 2013; Topolski 2018). In this fashion, today's debates, focused on 'religion in the public sphere' and Islam in particular, create their own implicit non-citizens on the grounds of 'religious difference', all promises of assimilation (or integration in today's jargon) notwithstanding, and thus firmly place themselves in the exclusionary tradition of Bruno Bauer (see Farris 2015).

## Marx

Marx made short work of Bauer. He asked the question that preceded the too-superficial diagnosis and exclusionary ‘solution’ by Bauer, and analysed what makes religion and religious privilege possible, what sustains religion, and what different forms it can take. Consequently, secularism itself becomes a problem because it does not question the conditions of religion, but takes religion as a given – and thus also the religious privileges connected to Christianity, capitalism, and colonialism. He sees the separation between church and state as an important development in Euro-American history because it eliminates the direct political inequalities of feudalism, but at the same time it gives rise to the idea that religious differences, which are actually in many ways the manifestation of social inequalities, are essential differences in religious conviction and an exercise of religious freedom. An example of this for Marx is the combination of the cultivation of religious freedom, with on the one hand the *wall of separation* and on the other the huge social inequalities in the US. A step back is necessary: “We do not turn secular questions into theological questions [as in Bauer and German Idealism, YJ], we turn theological questions into secular ones.” (Marx 1978 [1843], 31).

Human emancipation then means overcoming secularism as well: the human is no longer divided between the private ‘religious group-member/owner’ *bourgeois/homme* on the one hand and the public, ‘secular’ *citoyen* on the other. The ‘human’ in emancipation therefore concerns something different than the ‘human’ in human rights. Where for Marx human rights mostly concerned private law and especially property rights, and the security (and closing off) of the individual, ‘human emancipation’ was precisely about the way in which the human and the citizen can be brought together, and the social inequalities overcome.

In the second part of the text Marx continues with his correction of Bauer and encourages the reader not to focus on the Sabbath-Jew, on faith, or on religious difference, but on the everyday Jew; he shifts from theology to social history (Peled 1992; for the ambivalences of this claim, see Newman 1994; Nirenberg 2013). About the everyday Jew Marx then writes terrible things, making the Jew an

emblem for what he will later call capitalism, but still speaks here of usury and the veneration of money. For Marx, just like for Bauer and the Christian philosophers/theologians, ‘the Jew’ remains a figure for the connection between power/authority/law and religion, something that in historical reality was much more connected to the Christian bourgeoisie (and nobility) of Europe. The Jews were, as Yirmiyahu Yovel puts it, a ‘mirror’ of the Europeans and their problems with modernity, whereby they could project their inequalities and discontent onto the religious and/or racialised ‘other’ (Yovel 1998; see as well Nirenberg 2013).<sup>4</sup>

Marx thus remains firmly rooted in the 19th century, from which so much 20<sup>th</sup> century political life inherits and which unfortunately appears to be alive and kicking in the 21<sup>st</sup>. He wrote about citizenship as Hegel did about history, as a participant in an intellectual world of overly bold men who thought they could grasp ‘everything’ and who were among the main inventors of racial theories and stereotypical ideas about religion, culture, and difference. But on a more ambivalent note, we may also be missing some of the élan of Marx’s grand narrative of emancipation, in a time in which as ‘humanity’, we utterly fail to organise ourselves justly or freely, with a US government composed of billionaires and millionaires, and a Euro-American (and increasingly global) citizenry clinging to its imperial lifestyle (Brand and Wissen 2016) and taking their passports as birthrights.

Ironically enough citizenship as national or European membership has thus, in part, become something of which Marx thought was primarily contained in the ‘bourgeois’ part of citizenship: a source of privilege, supremacy and enduring inequalities. In this respect there can be no non-citizens without reminding contemporary citizens that, next to their being *citoyens*, they are also the inheritors of those cruel *bourgeois*, even of the preceding ‘nobility’, who built their wealth on colonies and exploitation. At present the many investments in other notions of citizenship unfortunately cannot compete with that – the ‘we are here ... because you were there’, or rather, ‘because you are there’. But still, *we are here*: to have a voice, to act collectively – those are the other potentials of the citizenship traditions, and they are not dependent on papers; everyone is a citizen, even if borders are everywhere.

## Notes

1] The Dutch get a place of honour in *Capital*: “The history of the colonial administration of Holland – and Holland was the head capitalistic nation of the 17th century – “is one of the most extraordinary relations of treachery, bribery, massacre, and meanness” [...] Wherever they set foot, devastation and depopulation followed. Banjuwangi, a province of Java, in 1750 numbered over 80,000 inhabitants, in 1811 only 18,000. Sweet commerce!” (538). Marx is quoting English historian William Howitt 1838, 9). What a nice contribution to a genealogy of our own post-truth *LTI* with terms like “verschrikkelijke volksverhuizing” (“terrible migration”, minister Halbe Zijlstra about refugees), “kopvoddentax” (“raghead tax”, Geert Wilders proposing a tax to be placed on wearing *bijab*) and “dobbernegers” (“float-niggers” about African refugees in the *Mer Mortelle*, an invention from Anabel Nanninga, who became member of Amsterdam’s city council in 2018 for the new right-wing party Forum for Democracy). And we also have the European race-to-the-bottom tax reduction competition with Netherlands first...

2] Marx’s booklet first received the title *Bruno Bauer: Zur Judenfrage* (Nirenberg 2013).

3] In the Netherlands one speaks of an ‘elephant in the china cabinet’, because people here are especially worried about the possible wrecking of the tableware – (we took the riches imported from the colonies really seriously).

4] The metaphor of the mirror was also used by Edward Said when he was analyzing the figure of the Semite as a shared figure between Judaism and Islam mirroring Christian-secularizing Europe, see further Massad 2015).

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