

CREOLIZING ROSA LUXEMBURG



EDITED BY
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Creolizing Rosa Luxemburg

Creolizing the Canon

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To Rosa

There are stars whose radiance is visible on Earth though they have long been extinct. There are people whose brilliance continues to light the world even though they are no longer among the living. These lights are particularly bright when the night is dark. They light the way for humankind.

— Hannah Szenes

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Figure 0.1 Image from *Red Rosa: A Graphic Biography of Rosa Luxemburg* by Kate Evans, Verso Books, 2015.

Introduction

“I Have a Thousand More Things I Want to Say to You”: An Introduction to Creolizing Rosa Luxemburg¹

Jane Anna Gordon and Drucilla Cornell²

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CREOLIZE ROSA?

There is no question that Rosa Luxemburg was a radiant star. The clarity of her vision lit up a widened horizon of possibility; her boldness offered direction. The aim of our volume is to revisit her prescient insights through the lens of creolizing theory to illustrate how timely they are right now.

Creolizing as an approach to political theory draws insight and orientation from creolizing processes in and beyond the Caribbean. In creolized elements of life—whether speech or food, reasoning or music—forms of activity tied to groups of people who were supposed to be radically unequal and separated through Manichean social orderings in fact combined in ways that were unpredictable and surprising, yet recognizable. Used as an approach to ideas, creolizing takes two primary forms. The first is historical and reconstructive, aiming to identify relations of influence and indebtedness that have been hidden or obscured. In its constructive mode, creolizing stages conversations that could not have taken place historically but that would have been and still remain generative. The creolizing endeavor is not undertaken randomly. The

¹ This title was inspired by the “Rosa Luxemburg: A Thousand More Things” exhibit, organized by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung-New York Office in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut New York. The phrase comes from “Letter to Hans Diefenbach, Wronki in Posen, March 5, 1917,” in *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 380.

² We are grateful to Peter Hudis for sharing his extensive knowledge of Rosa Luxemburg’s life and work with us as we prepared this introduction.

aim is to put different, previously sequestered sides of a shared political situation together to explore the results.

Rosa Luxemburg as a person, thinker, and revolutionary is particularly amenable to creolizing. This is in part because she was self-creolizing, even if she never would have used that language. In her own life, she repeatedly demonstrated an appreciation that it was not only people and sites with recognized institutional authority that offered perspectives that were indispensable. In her research, she followed where the questions led, not stopping where the conventions of any given political or scholarly community might have suggested was appropriate. Indeed, in her engagements with the past and her present, she went where she thought fundamental social transformation was underway—whether or not doing so was safe or sanctioned. She brought into the historical record human struggle that she worried had been forgotten and remained open to being disproven about her expectations (for instance, that Russia and Eastern Europe would be in advance, in revolutionary terms, of Germany).

Hannah Arendt (1995) observed that, as an Eastern European, Rosa had to master a range of languages that made the concrete practice of internationalism possible. She also traced increasingly global circuits that were already evident in local ways, if one were only willing to look. For example, she argued that Russia's development of industry in Poland already connected both places, in different ways, to Africa and to Asia with implications for the kinds of relationships of revolutionary solidarity that thereby became necessary. When she explored enslavement, a relationship that she saw as decisively introducing the divide between mental and menial labor or between those who controlled societies and those who labored for them, she looked as readily at the history of Europe and Asia and Africa as she did across the Americas. She emphasized that capitalism was dependent upon and indebted to ongoing versions of colonization and imperialism. This meant that, to understand Europe with any rigor, one needed to put into relation so-called pre-capitalist and capitalist spheres, refusing the distancing of the European self-image from its actual enmeshment with what would emerge as the Global South. Finally, in ways unusual for a thinker based in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, she connected human and ecological exploitation, framing the suffering of human and other-than-human animals as essentially related. As Jon Nixon put it in ways that resonate with the writings of Enrique Dussel:

As Luxemburg illustrated, it is sometimes—under certain circumstances—revolutionary to attend to the plight of a frozen bumblebee. Revolution resides in . . . the quality of our attention to the specificity of suffering. The crucial point is to understand the ostensible world from the perspective of its often hidden

underside and, in so doing, stand alongside those who constitute that underside.
(2018: 102)

For Rosa, critical consciousness “involve[d] an understanding of the inter-connectivity of things: then and now, here and there, us and them, I and you” (Nixon, 2018: 161).

This understanding was reflected in Rosa’s approach to politics which, for her, was “enacted on the street and in the head, on the campaign trail and at the desk, on the political platform and in her private letters to friends and associates” (Ibid). She always sought to put her “intellect unconditionally at the disposal of what she saw as the common good” (Ibid). But the actual nature of this public good could not be articulated in one center that simply emanated outward.

Workers, whom she always understood broadly, to include army and naval personnel, railroad and postal workers, and those working in and outside the industrial sector, did not only have to engage in struggle to deepen their maturity as revolutionary subjects. Their doing so produced ideas and strategies that would not otherwise have emerged. For her, as Nixon puts it, revolutionary action “is an act of faith . . . in the human capacity to cope with and carry forward the unfinished business that such action inevitably brings” (Nixon, 2018: 141). It requires collective becoming.

This was why any developing socialism had to be ever more democratic and participatory or permanently and perpetually open. Still, maintaining such an orientation required a willingness and ability to remain creative and experimental in the face of what was new. As an example, Arendt considered Luxemburg’s account of collective action exercised through the workers’ and soldiers’ councils as what alone could have averted the petrification of the Russian Revolution. Stressing the necessity of their being geographically inclusive, so as to include agricultural workers, Rosa’s councils aimed to bring together disparate working people of different parties and occupations to work out ways of determining their shared future.

None of this is to say that Rosa offered us divine tablets. Suggesting that she did would contradict her approach to thought and action. Instead, together with the contributors of this volume, as we detail in greater length in the third section of this introduction, we contend that figures like African Americans W.E.B. Du Bois and Lorraine Hansberry, Martinican Frantz Fanon, and Trinidadians C.L.R. James and Claudia Jones extended many of Rosa’s fundamental insights by revisiting them through the lens and lessons of Global Southern contexts. Rosa could not have asked whether human caravans crossing the Americas were engaged in what she would have called a “mass strike.” But this is not an indictment. Rather we see ourselves as underscoring the immense value of Rosa’s work by putting it into relationship with people, ideas, and contexts that her writing suggests would have interested her but that she herself could not have encountered directly. In

so doing, we see ourselves as responding to her invitation to carry her spirit and intellectual project forward.³

Doing so is not a mere historical curiosity for those already interested in Marxism or the history of women political thinkers. Especially since Marx's *Ethnographic Writings* were not published until after Rosa's death (they would only be transcribed and published in 1972), we see her analyses as fundamentally opening the grammar and questions that were not yet offered through European Marxism and that would blossom into some of the most important political concepts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These include the ingredients to develop a full-fledged account of racial capitalism, a genuinely open dialectic regarding from whom and where not just historic suffering but revolutionary transformation would emerge, and her delineating of the specific character of Euromodern colonial capitalism as fundamentally dispossessing in ways that connect human and ecological expropriation.

While they are not explicitly engaged by our contributors, her challenge to undialectical reformism and her account of the necessary relationship of socialism and democracy could also not be more timely. With the latter, Rosa agreed with Marx that "Freedom consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it" (*Critique of the Gotha Programme IV*). In other words, if, for her, what was exciting about the method of Marx was that no principle was treated as unchanging, and every idea had to be reactivated through radical questioning, the same was true for institutions and organizations that could claim to be socialist, democratic, or both.

"LIKE A CLAP OF THUNDER"

You often come out of a page I'm reading—and sometimes out of a page I'm trying to write—come out to join me with a toss of your head and a smile. No single page and none of the prison cells they repeatedly put you in could ever contain you.

—John Berger (2018: 87)

³ In this sense, our book has much in common with Adrienne Rich's depiction of Raya Dunayevskaya's *Women's Liberation and the Dialectics of Revolution* (1985), engaged in this volume by Nigel C. Gibson. Rich writes, "In Luxemburg, Dunayevskaya portrays a brilliant, brave, and independent woman, passionately internationalist and antiwar, a believer in the people's 'spontaneity' in the cause of freedom; a woman who saw herself as Marx's philosophical heir; who refused the efforts of her lovers and other men to discourage her from full participation in 'making history' because she was a woman. But the biography does not stop here . . . Luxemburg's life and thought become a kind of jumping-off point into the present and future—what she saw and didn't see, her limitations as well as her understanding. We can learn from her mistakes, says Dunayevskaya" (2001: 91–92).

Although many readers of this book will be familiar with Luxemburg's intellectual biography, we here offer a brief introduction for those who may be encountering her thought for the first time.

To begin, the reader will notice that we refer to Luxemburg throughout this introduction as "Rosa." If you are in the academy, you may well have been lectured about the importance of calling women by their last names, even if these last names are only and inevitably their father's or husband's. Are we trivializing Rosa when we call her by her first name? If we thought so, we obviously would not do it. We identify Rosa as Rosa to express a fondness shared by the masses of people in Germany who, during her endless participation in popular movements, also called her Rosa. They saw in her a counter to what she criticized in the Bolshevik Revolution and in democratic centralism itself. Specifically, she rejected the desire for a great phallic leader who could complete his followers by offering all of the answers and by promising an impossible certainty. For Rosa, this was nothing but a fantasy, and a dangerously anti-socialist and anti-revolutionary one at that.

In a letter to Leo Jogiches penned in 1899 in Berlin, Rosa wrote, "I want to affect people like a clap of thunder, to inflame their minds not by speechifying but with the breadth of my vision, the strength of my conviction and the power of my expression" (2004: 892). A profound theorist as well as a courageous and committed revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg is as challenging in death as in life.

Born in 1871 into a family of fluctuating financial circumstances, Rozalia or Róża Luksenburg always manifested a combination of unusual brains, curiosity, and marginal status. Although her grandfather was a rabbi, her parents embraced the cosmopolitan attitudes of "enlightened" Jewry. When moving from Zamosc to Warsaw in 1873, they chose a neighborhood that put them at a distance from the majority of poorer and more orthodox Jews (Kaiser, 2008: 121). Róża, herself, was not moved by specifically religious faith, but this was largely irrelevant to Tsarist authorities who confined "Poles of the Mosaic faith" to ghettos and shtetls (Evans, 2015: 14).⁴ One consequence was that Jewish girls did not have access to academically serious schools which were reserved for Russians. Róża was still able to attend a Polish school on a scholarship. Only a few spots were allowed for Jews, however, and they were held to a higher

⁴ O'Kane observed that in biographies of intellectual women, there is a tendency to over-emphasize personal details. With Rosa, in O'Kane's account, this is evident in undue attention to her romantic relationships and the repetition of her being "born into a Jewish family in Russian-occupied Poland." O'Kane continues, "Given that her family, although very supportive of her, were not themselves involved in politics and that Rosa, having left Poland at the age of eighteen, did not

standard of admission. Despite her remarkable academic achievements, the highest medal was withheld from Róża because of her already identified “rebellious spirit.”

Róża consistently sought and found educative experiences outside of formal institutions of learning. Unusually small, with one misshapen leg, when Róża was five, her already recalcitrant limp was misdiagnosed. Homebound in a heavy cast for a full year, she was surrounded by her mother and brothers’ love of learning and ideas. Enveloped in this culturally rich and creative environment, by ten Rosa spoke Russian, the language of the occupying powers; Polish, the language of her country; and German, the language, along with Latin, of higher learning at the time.⁵ Similarly, on completing the Second Gymnasium as a fifteen-year-old girl in Poland, there were no formal, advanced educational opportunities available to her. She again sought to continue her education through other means, this time through becoming active with *Proletart*, the first Polish Socialist Party founded underground in 1882. The issues that were their focus were vivid to Rosa who, living at the center of industry of the Russian empire, concretely witnessed the close proximity of people living with exorbitant wealth and in extreme poverty. Hostility to socialist ideas was also clear and pronounced. One year earlier, four leading members of *Proletart* were hanged in the Warsaw Citadel while others were imprisoned. The founder was sentenced to sixteen years of hard labor but died in custody. After two years, the police became interested in Róża’s participation. Others could cloak their identities, but there was no way to hide hers.

Smuggled across the Polish–German border at seventeen when *Proletart* was crushed by government forces, Róża enrolled in the University of Zurich. It was there that she registered as Rosa Luxemburg, the spelling of her name on which she insisted from then on (O’Kane, 2015: 23). She first took classes in botany and zoology, which remained life-long loves to which she would later return when she became disenchanted with the SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, the Social Democratic Party of Germany) and during her imprisonment in Wronki Fortress. But in Switzerland, she ultimately switched to law, which included the social sciences, and her primary focus of economics. Zurich and Paris had also become homes to much of the Russian and Polish socialist leadership living in exile.

herself practice the religion into which she was born and later refused to join the Bund (General Jewish Workers’ Union of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia), it is doubtful that these particular aspects of her early life deserve very much emphasis, and it could be seen as a legacy of her vilification as a “Bolshevik Jew” (2015: xiii). We include Rosa’s Jewishness first because, as was true of many other non-religious Jews, we understand many elements of Rosa’s internationalism and socialism as an expression of a secular Jewishness. In addition, for the Jewish co-editor of this volume, Rosa’s Jewishness is a point of Jewish pride.

⁵ O’Kane adds that she would later build on these existing language skills to become fluent in French and “pretty good” in English and Italian.

As she pursued her doctorate (1889–1897), Rosa also developed her skills as an orator and activist intellectual. Her aims in her formal intellectual work were always to make a contribution to Polish Marxism. Traveling regularly between Zurich and Paris, she researched in Polish libraries, oversaw the publication of *The Workers' Cause*, and remained an active member of, and speaker in, Polish émigré circles. A year into her studies, she met Leo Jogiches, a Lithuanian Jew, who would be a comrade and lover for seventeen years and a colleague until the end of her life. He had joined the socialist movement in Vilna in 1885 and was considered an outstanding strategist and socialist leader. While he published little under his own name, he offered commentary on most of Rosa's early articles and essay drafts, propagating their ideas in underground organizational work, and remained one of Rosa's most trusted interlocutors on political matters.

Like Rosa, Jogiches ascribed to a dissenting position on the question of nationalist independence for Poland. The recently founded Polish Socialist Party followed the stances of Georgi Plekhanov (who was widely, if regrettably, considered to be the founder of Russian Marxism) and of Marx and Friedrich Engels who, in the culminating pages of their *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, had called for the national independence of this occupied country.⁶

Rosa thought otherwise. Her experiences of Warsaw, conversation with Poles in and outside the country, and her detailed studies of economic statistics made it clear that Poland was no longer a primarily agricultural economy. "Unlike Marx and Engels, Rosa Luxemburg was looking back not to 1772 and to the lessons of 1830, 1848 and 1863 . . . but seeking to apply Marx's analysis to the Poland of the day" (O'Kane, 2015: 22). It had an emerging proletariat in its own right and the territory's industrial development meant that it was already embedded in a global economy, reliant particularly on Asia and Africa for raw materials. Winning independence as a Polish nation would embolden the budding brood of the local bourgeoisie. It would not increase the power of its poor. They would do better allying with the Russian proletariat in ways that could expand into a wider and deeper internationalism.⁷ When Rosa insisted at the Third and Fourth Congress of the Second International and through the founding (with Jogiches) of the Social Democracy and the

⁶ Even after they fell out over organizational issues in 1902 and fully broke off relations by 1912, Lenin continued to encourage Russian youth to read Plekhanov's works. Plekhanov and Rosa detested each other from their first meeting. In 1907, he would accuse her of being "a Madonna reclining in the clouds." She said nothing positive about his written works, which included the introduction of the term "dialectical materialism."

⁷ As Stephen J. Bronner put it "socialism [had to] offer a *qualitative* alternative" (1997: 17) to the bourgeois model of nationalism. If one were to charge that Rosa failed to comprehend the strategic idea that national revolution could serve as an opening to the permanent international revolution, this was, in "a certain sense . . . beside the point" (1997: 18).

Kingdom of Poland (SKDP, which later expanded to include Lithuania) on a strict internationalism, she was engaging in relentless self-criticism: was what had emerged as a point of dogma still the freshest strategy and most adequate theoretical answer to the central questions of socialism?

Rosa's *The Industrial Development of Poland* met with the rare honor of being accepted as a dissertation and being immediately published as a book. One of the first studies of its kind, it shared much with the distinctive tradition of dependency theory in the political economy of the Caribbean, including the sociologist, political economist, and philosopher Paget Henry's dissertation-turned-book on *Peripheral Capitalism and Development in Antigua* (1985). Like that work, it centers on a supposedly marginal or minor territory to illuminate the local expressions of global political-economic relations.

Rosa's commitment to revolutionary struggle led her to Berlin. The city sustained ninety different socialist dailies. It was also home to the SPD, which, as the leading party of the Second International, claimed 100,000 members.⁸ To secure permanent residency in Germany, Rosa married a man she had never met. They parted immediately after they had been legally joined and would let the marriage dissolve five years later. Her first charge was to campaign for the SPD with Polish workers in Upper Silesia. She was surprised by how much she enjoyed this work, by how effective she was at it, and by how open Polish workers were to a socialist message.

But within the SPD itself, Rosa quickly became a controversial figure. This began with her direct challenge to one of its leaders, Eduard Bernstein, who Friedrich Engels had made Marx's literary executor. For his part, Bernstein was developing a decidedly un-Marxist view. Capitalism, he argued, develops mechanisms, like credit, to iron out its instabilities. With the growth of trade unions, the proletariat were able to secure higher wages, thereby addressing exploitation. And SPD's growing electoral power seemed to demonstrate that capitalism could be reformed through legal and parliamentary measures.

For Rosa, as she would articulate in speeches, articles, and essays, capitalism was ridden with crises. It moved with predictable unpredictability from boom to bust. Credit was an incredibly ambivalent tool because, if adopted to overcome the inevitable crises of overproduction to allow the proletariat to buy goods they could not afford, it could not play the role assigned to it by Eduard Bernstein as a "savior" from capitalist crises. Rosa agreed that extending democratic rights through legal means was necessary, but full democracy could not be achieved under capitalism because participatory democracy required mechanisms for transforming economic and social

⁸ As Bronner puts it, "[t]he revolutions of 1848 had failed, the Paris Commune had been crushed and the First International lay in ruins. The Second International had arisen from the ashes and the SPD stood at its forefront" (1997: 24).

inequality. The larger aim of socialism therefore had to orient any and every fight for social transformation, keeping the relationship between reform and revolution in a living dialectic. Revolutionaries did have to involve themselves in reform struggles—over the right to unionize, the right of women to vote, and the democratization of voting itself. But all reforms had to be indexed according to their larger role in the achievement of a totally changed society. This included whether the struggle for them itself played a role in educating the working class.

Most in the SPD recognized that Rosa's intellectual entrance marked the arrival of a serious theoretical voice. In response, some, including Clara Zetkin, who was editor of SPD's newspaper for women and head of its Women's Office, supported her against Bernstein, forming the emerging far-left wing of the party and becoming Rosa's life-long friend. For others, Rosa's self-confidence was interpreted as rudeness and arrogance. She would be referred to as the "guest who comes to us and spits in our parlor" (quoted in Anderson and Hudis, 2004: 9).⁹

Rosa soon published what would be her first critique of Lenin's centralist party organization. In it, she accused Lenin's "uncompromising centralism," through which he imposed strict and direct discipline of central authority on local organizations, of wrenching "active revolutionaries from their, albeit unorganized, revolutionary activist milieu" (2004b: 250). In her words, his approach was primarily concerned with "control of party activity and not with its fertilization, with *narrowing* and not with *broadening*, with *tying the movement up* and not with *drawing it together*" (2004b: 256, emphasis in original). In its place she argued for "a completely new notion of the mutual relationship between organization and struggle" (2004b: 251), through which those actively engaged in struggle develop, as an expression and means of extending their raised consciousness, new ways of organizing collective action. Understood this way, "organization, enlightenment, and struggle" are "different facets of the same process" (2004b: 252). The precise relationship among them is not "ready-made" or "predetermined" in ways that the Central Committee could determine and seek to "drill into the social democratic membership" (Ibid).

These criticisms were not personal. Indeed, despite her sharp criticisms of Lenin and differences between them on matters of organization and leadership, Rosa was a militant supporter of the Bolshevik seizure of power and would remain in close touch with Lenin for the rest of her life. At stake were competing conceptions of power and the desperate need for democratic institutions under socialism.

⁹ Richard Fischer, the managing editor of the SPD's main publication, *Vorwärts*, used this phrase. See *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitag der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands, September 22-28, 1901* (Berlin: SPD, 1901), p. 191.

In January 1905, a mass uprising spread through vast areas of the Russian Empire and Russian-partitioned Poland. When 200,000 people marched to the Winter Palace to petition the Tsar, troops opened fire and hundreds were killed. News spread and anger mounted: students shut down the universities, sailors mutinied, soldiers turned against their officers, and half of all paid laborers in European Russia went on what was called *the mass strike*. Given the sweep of the revolutionary struggle—*this, surely, was the revolution about which socialists were constantly speaking and strategizing*—Rosa was sickened by the lukewarm responses of her fellow socialists in Germany.

She snuck into Cracow, where Jogiches was organizing, and wrote and had illegal newspapers printed. The two were caught, arrested, and slated for execution. One of Rosa's brothers intervened and generously bribed the authorities who claimed to let her go on grounds of ill health. Jogiches remained imprisoned and, though he would escape, was sentenced to hard labor in Siberia. On release, Rosa traveled to Finland, where she spent time with Lenin and the Bolshevik circle, publishing *The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions* as a pamphlet in Hamburg.

As she explored, the aim of a mass strike is to make the relevant political situation ungovernable. Workers are typically at the center, but the resultant action is not exclusively theirs as the mass strike blurs the line between economic and political struggle. The economic struggle, demanding the dignity of workers, often becomes the platform for a much greater political demand for democracy. In like manner, the demand for democracy could also spur mass movements to challenge economic hardships. One cannot know in advance whether a particular mass strike will lead to the overthrow of a repressive regime. For instance, it could be argued that the end of apartheid in South Africa was not primarily the result of armed struggle. It was due to what Luxemburg would call a mass strike. The United Democratic Front in South Africa adopted the slogan of making the country ungovernable, which led to the uprising of the Black population. It was those mass movements that played the major role in the collapse of apartheid.

While the SPD would publish Rosa's work on mass action, spontaneity, and organization, the dissemination of this writing was blocked by the SPD leadership who, at best, were willing to accept the mass strike as a defensive strategy. When she returned to Germany, Rosa stood trial for her remarks and was sentenced to two months in prison. In the face of a powerful surge of strikes, demonstrations, and conflicts with the police as part of the press for general suffrage, the party sought to refocus its energy in the electoral domain. This led to public breaks and to the isolating of Rosa in SPD settings. Rationalizations of her treatment became more pronounced in their sexism with those who said that she was as clever as a monkey but a bitch who could

do a lot of damage or who charged her with flying off the handle when her vanity came into question (Nettl, 1966: 291; Dunayevskaya, 1991: 27).¹⁰

Against Marxists who spoke incessantly of the proletariat but who thought their consciousness was reductively determined by material conditions, Rosa believed strongly in popular political education both through the collective organizing that we have already mentioned and in the classroom. Every winter from 1906 until the outbreak of World War I, district organizations chose party and trade union members to participate in the SPD Party School in Berlin. From 1907, Rosa became the only female lecturer, teaching courses on economics while working on her *Introduction to Political Economy*. As one would expect from what we have already seen, according to her contemporary and collaborator Paul Frölich, Rosa “proved an outstanding teacher . . . She never lectured at [the students] and promised no ready-made answers, compelling them to work out their own ideas and conclusions” (2010 [1939]: 146–147). When the Party School was criticized for failing to raise the general level of education of workers and doing a poor job of training SPD activists, Luxemburg offered a response. She argued against both a superficial curriculum aimed at general, comprehensive literacy and a narrow training focused on highly specific issues relevant only to immediate organizing. Students needed to develop practical and theoretical forms of reasoning together over the course of a life of learning. The Party School’s role was to encourage such learning and offer a grounding of “how—from a Marxist perspective—the political economy works” (J. Nixon, 2018: 26).

Rosa’s magnum opus, which has stirred up controversy as well as admiration, was *The Accumulation of Capital*. It extended her criticisms of the revolutionary potential of nationalism and of centralized forms of organization and control to argue for the fundamental relationship between capitalism and imperialism. In ways that foresaw what are now called globalization, on the one hand, and the military-industrial complex, on the other, its critical revisiting of Marx’s concept of primitive accumulation is her most significant intellectual contribution. She argued that primitive

¹⁰ Victor Adler wrote to August Bebel on August 5, 1910: “It really is too bad—the poisonous bitch will yet do a lot of damage, all the more so because she is as clever as a monkey while on the other hand her sense of responsibility is totally lacking and her only motive is an almost perverse desire for self-justification. Imagine! . . . Clara [Zetkin] already equipped with a mandate and sitting with Rosa in the Reichstag! That would give you something to laugh about, compared to which the goings on in Baden would look like a pleasure outing.” It is worth noting that in Bebel’s reply to Adler of August 16, 1910, he stated, “With all the wretched female’s squirts of poison I wouldn’t have the party without her.” On the same day, Bebel wrote to Karl Kautsky, “It’s an odd thing about women. If their partialities or passions or vanities come anywhere into question and are not given consideration, or, let alone, are injured, then even the most intelligent of them flies of the handle and becomes hostile to the point of absurdity.”

accumulation would remain inevitable to the attempted resolution of the crisis of industrial capitalism in the so-called industrial states with the implication that such crises could only be resolved through fresh bouts of intensified violence.

When the SPD won an unprecedented number of parliamentary seats, Rosa doubled down in her determination that they should challenge the impending World War I as imperial and essentially antipathetic to the cause of internationalism. Her mobilization efforts brought her into court for a sentencing hearing that she used to put army abuses on trial. The findings led to her dismissal but what followed was crushing: The SPD members in parliament voted unanimously for the war. As it broke out, Rosa served her sentence in the women's prison in Berlin, where she authored *The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in German Democracy*. While it is not an explicit focus of any of the chapters in this volume, Rosa's arguments made her "among the most important antimilitarist figures in European history" (Hudis and Anderson, 2004: 7). Indeed, as recently as 2003, 100,000 people attended a rally in the Berlin suburb of Friedrichsfelde to commemorate Rosa's life and legacy. They did so "in the midst of growing opposition around the world to the new stage of military intervention signaled by the impending U.S. invasion of Iraq" (Ibid). For them, Rosa was "a rallying point amid the challenges of imperialist war and terror" (Ibid).

When Rosa was released from prison in Berlin, she was promptly rearrested and transferred to a prison in Poland. While there, the Bolsheviks came to power. She interpreted their seizure of power as daring and courageous, but her essay "The Russian Revolution" still offered a searing critique. To be fair, she believed that the wealthy might have to have their property expropriated without anything like just compensation. She even accepted, with Lenin, that the elite classes might have to be denied their right to participate in democratic institutions, at least for a time. Ultimately, her critique of Lenin was that he confused necessity with what socialism could be.

A revolutionary uprising of soldiers and workers led the German Imperial Government to hand power over to the SPD. Briefly, there was a new chancellor of Germany who was one of Rosa's former students. He immediately declared Germany a republic.

As soon as Rosa was released, she traveled directly to Berlin. Karl Liebknecht and the Spartacus League had declared the Socialist Republic of Germany. Rosa immediately joined them in fighting for an effective seizure of state power. Among the League's demands were to impound food and distribute it to the starving; confiscate weapons and arms and create a workers' militia from the adult working population, selecting their officers by election; put generals on trial for war crimes; abolish all private wealth above a certain level; nationalize the banks and heavy industry; divide up

large landed estates so they could be farmed collectively. This was to be achieved through elected worker and soldier councils that would meet every three months. And there had to be complete legal equality of the sexes.

Although other founding members of the German Communist Party (KPD) and Rosa spoke publicly about a full vision of socialist democracy, most members of the SPD were satisfied with their party, with one man one vote, and an eight-hour day. Some of her critics said that Rosa's support of the Spartacus League was clear evidence that she had become unhinged by her long imprisonment and isolation. They misunderstood one of Rosa's central positions: that there was no such thing as premature revolutionary activity. When Rosa framed capitalism as a continued problem, she was accused by some as a Russian spy seeking simply to bring Germany into Russia's project. The irony was that she was increasingly in trouble in Russia since she made known her disappointment in the absence of freedom of the press and assembly under Lenin. He was using terror which she thought was not necessary to a proletarian revolution.

Some of Germany's new leaders wanted to use terror as well. They claimed that Germany had not lost the war but had been betrayed, especially by socialists and by Jews. Demonstrators were shot and propaganda circulated widely. When the SPD voted their powers away and revolutionary momentum faltered, the party's right-wing leaders called in the Freikorps (or mercenary or volunteer private armies), who would become core members of the Nazi Party. Gustav Noske indirectly called for Rosa's assassination, directly empowering the Freikorps that would kill her (Gietinger, 2019).

In January 1919, Rosa was brutally murdered. Her body was thrown into the Landwehr canal. When her body washed up and was identified, her funeral was held at Friedrichsfelde Cemetery. She was 47.

Rosa's life and politics were remarkably unscripted. Dominated by her unflagging commitment to revolutionary theory and action as both possible and necessary, she imitated no existing model. As one of the earliest and most forceful resisters against what would become mainstream, widespread orthodox Marxism, she believed that Marxist commitments and methods required not just application but thinking and acting anew. As such, she believed that socialist democracy was not a closed project. This is precisely why Rosa was engaged in her own version of adaptive thinking and why she lends herself so amenable to the project of this book.

CREOLIZING ROSA

In an effort to reflect the multifaceted nature of Rosa's many contributions, the book that follows is divided into five thematic sections.

The first, “Debating Nationalism,” critically revisits debates over the potential revolutionary value of nationalism. Peter Hudis sets the stage for the creolizing work by tracing the historical stages of the Global Southern reception of Rosa. He explains that before 1929, Rosa was a figure whose thoroughgoing internationalism, opposition to all forms of imperialism, and unique personality—of not just preaching but *living* her ideas—inspired founders of the communist movements in China, Indonesia, India, Lebanon, Mexico, and Syria and the reprinting of her works in Peru and Brazil. However, by the 1930s, she was actively written out of the communist movement by Stalin and Mao. At the same time, this was not only *their* doing. Interpretations of Rosa’s virulent criticisms of Lenin’s single-party state following the 1917 Russian Revolution and her persistent opposition to national independence did not endear her to independence leaders seeking to replace colonialism with their own single-party states or to movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America that sought self-determination in primarily nationalist terms. More recently, in the face of tenacious forms of neo-colonialism, there is a growing appreciation for the prescience of Rosa’s insights. Many seek to articulate and build an explicitly anti-imperial internationalism since, they have concluded, each national proletariat is largely powerless when fighting in isolation against a bourgeoisie that functions transnationally (Anuja Bose, 2019; Inéz Valdez, 2019).

The explicit work of creolizing Rosa begins with Drucilla Cornell returning readers to the historical context in which Rosa criticized the project of national liberation. She reminds us that Rosa feared that “liberation” of territories surrounding Russia would simply empower their respective ruling classes to ally against the Bolsheviks, endangering the project of the Soviet Union. Effectively resisting capitalism, then and now, Rosa and Cornell insist, therefore had to take transnational forms. Cornell underscores this argument through reading Luxemburg with Frantz Fanon’s critique of the hijacking of the Algerian Revolution by that country’s national bourgeoisie and his warnings about the dangers of separating the project of national liberation from the struggle against the global accumulation of capital. Cornell emphasizes that Rosa clearly opposed the oppression of one nation by another; however, she always connected the question of nationalism to the larger aim of a thoroughgoing transformation of capitalism. This insight is deepened when considered through Fanon’s dialectical treatment of nationalism as both a necessary resource for anticolonial revolution and one that had to be remade and transcended if the aims of turning the world upside down were to be achieved.

Closing this section, Alyssa Adamson suggests that the failures to read Luxemburg as part of the tradition of decolonial political economy—in which Adamson thinks Rosa rightly belongs—has much to do with the history of

response to her challenges to nationalism outlined by Hudis. For Adamson, Rosa's distinct theory of revolution and democracy in political organizing—to which many in the Global South are now returning for their vision of a *process* that must, in its means and strategies, exemplify the goals it aspires to achieve—remain relevant for ongoing decolonial praxis. Still they would be yet more effective if read back through the insights of C.L.R. James into the indispensability of national liberation struggles to the larger process of class warfare.

One could object to Rosa's criticisms of the democratic centralism and single party of Lenin that he—unlike Rosa—was faced with seizing and maintaining state power. The question of what it means to act as a revolutionary subject is the focus of the second section of the book. Robin D. G. Kelley begins it by revisiting the radical African historian and Guyanese revolutionary Walter Rodney's seminar on "Historians and Revolutions" taught at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1971. At its center was a study of Russia as home to the first successful socialist revolution. When considering the question of democracy, Rodney offers an ambivalent account of Rosa. In it, he charges her with abandoning an analysis of Russian historical conditions and succumbing to bourgeois democracy when insisting on the full franchise for all, the restoration of the Constituent Assembly, and the preservation of a free press. While Kelley argues that Rosa seemed to be anticipating the Stalinist bureaucratic state-in-the-making, Rodney read her as failing to realize that the class opponent was a mortal enemy and even suggested that, in her own context of Germany, it had been her miscalculation of that effort to seize state power that led to her murder. Kelley considers Rodney's misinterpretations of Rosa's positions while also reflecting on how Rodney's own understanding of socialist transformation in the Third World would have been enriched by reading Rosa's *The Accumulation of Capital*. Kelley concludes with pointing out the irony that C.L.R. James would later claim that Rodney's state-sponsored assassination resulted from Rodney's failure to understand the concrete conditions and power dynamics in Guyana.

Jane Anna Gordon continues consideration of Rosa through New World Black resources by turning to Luxemburg's remarkable analysis of enslavement. Framing slavery as introducing defining problems with which socialism had to grapple, Rosa argued that enslavement created and normalized a fundamental division between those who labored and those who made consequential political decisions, the division that gave rise to the emergence of the state as a coercive power of the ruling classes. At the same time, Gordon argues that, in her writings explicitly focused on enslavement, Luxemburg mistakes the ideological account of the separation of physical from mental labor for its historical realization. Relatedly, while Luxemburg celebrates the ways the enslaved frequently resisted their exploitation, she calls the results

of their actions ultimately futile, as seeking little more than a return to pre-slavery circumstances. Putting Rosa in conversation with eighteenth-century abolitionist, anti-imperialist, and natural rights philosopher Ottobah Cugoano and with C.L.R. James, Gordon argues, in a similar spirit to Adamson, that reworking Rosa's claims through insights in the Black radical tradition would enable a creolizing of the dialectic at the center of Marxist thinking in ways that are immanent in her much disputed *The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to an Economic Explanation of Imperialism*.

Appreciating how Rosa was one of the few socialists from Europe who supported neither side of the South African Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902, Gunnett Kaaf observes how when many of her contemporaries sided with Britain as an advanced capitalist country that would help South Africa on the path of capitalist development, she rejected the trap of this socialist strategy. She did not agree with the dogma that countries must first undergo capitalist development before they proceed to the socialist stage of revolution. Similarly, her accumulation theory made her a pioneering theorist of capitalism as a global system in ways that would later be advanced by Paul Baran, Samir Amin, and Immanuel Wallerstein. Kaaf centers Rosa's challenge to restricting democratic mass participation and to bourgeois reformism—which he sees as having been vindicated by the failure of left centralized parties—when turning to the crucial guides Rosa offers for addressing contemporary South African political crises.

Turning to the relevance of Rosa's work for prison justice advocacy in the present, Maria Theresa Starzmann reads Rosa's political ideas against the backdrop of two crucial experiences in her life: her relationship to the natural world and her imprisonment. In addition to being a talented political theorist, Rosa was also an avid collector of plants. Between 1913 and 1918, which included her years spent in prison, she produced a herbarium spanning seventeen notebooks. Starzmann traces how the deprivation of imprisonment intensified Rosa's love for nature and fueled her search for radical social change. Given that incarceration remains a central technique of political violence globally, Starzmann suggests that Rosa's engagement with plants and animals offer creative ways of resisting the “necropolitics” of the contemporary prison.

Each of these chapters turns to Rosa as an indispensable resource whose ideas can be re-enlivened and extended by their consideration in contexts that were not her primary theoretical focus. This orientation continues in the third section, which focuses on Rosa's formulation of the mass strike. Often misread as a narrowly economic phenomenon, Rosa understood general strikes as harbingers of the revolution to come. The authors in this section reposition her analysis in the three different contexts of the United States Civil War, the Arab Spring, and the twenty-first-century migrations northward through the American hemisphere.

Beginning by pointing out that they were contemporaries, Rafael Khachaturian's chapter revisits the central arguments of Rosa's 1906 work *The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions* by placing it alongside W. E. B. Du Bois's chapter on "The General Strike" in his magisterial 1935 book *Black Reconstruction*. There he made the novel argument that slaves were a "black proletariat" whose refusal to work was a crucial catalyst in both the outcomes of the U.S. Civil War and the attempted social revolution of Reconstruction. While Luxemburg and Du Bois shared an interest in the strike as illuminating working-class subjectivity, self-organization, and spontaneity, reading them together enables us to consider how Du Bois's analysis could have enabled Rosa to further explore the way racialized social structures problematized the organization of the proletariat. Luxemburg, in turn, raises questions for Du Bois about whether the slaves' self-organization could map on to her treatment of revolutionary politics from the standpoint of the party form and whether these actions could be considered a general strike despite occurring within the specific, enslaved fraction of the working class. More generally, considering the strike from within different social formations of the shared temporality of capitalist modernity helps illuminate the numerous fault lines within class struggles across the unevenness of capitalist development.

Sami Zemni, Brecht De Smet, and Koenraad Boegaert insert Rosa's 1906 pamphlet in the context of the Arab Spring of 2011, which came to symbolize Arab political life as more complex than the false choice between authoritarian rule or Islamist oppositions. Using her writings as their guide, they offer a historical reading of the decade of political organizing that culminated in popular uprisings that witnessed the emergence of "the Arab peoples" as political actors who toppled entrenched authoritarian leaders by challenging repressive regimes and their brutal security apparatuses. Re-reading the revolutionary events in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco through Rosa's resources, they illustrate how the economic and the political, on the one hand, and the local and the national (and the global), on the other, are indissoluble yet separate elements of the same process. For revolutionary actors in Tunisia and Egypt, the authors argue, the challenge lies in the connecting, organizing, and fusing of these dispersed moments and spaces of struggle into a politicized whole. Conversely, they hope that understanding the reciprocity between revolutionary change and the mass strike will allow activists in Morocco to recognize the workers' movement as a potentially powerful actor of change and enable trade unionists to incorporate the political in their economic mobilizations. The authors ultimately read the workers' protests in Tunisia and Egypt as anticipations of the mass strike during the revolution and frame the mass strike as the specific mode in which workers participate as a class in the revolutionary process.

Josué Ricardo López keeps Rosa in the twenty-first century to argue that migrant caravans traveling north through the Americas can be understood as an instance of what Rosa understood as a mass strike, with implications for projects of popular education. Specifically, López asks, how might we understand the revolutionary significance of the migrant caravans traversing the Western Hemisphere now? What kind of political education can address the transnational economic and political crisis which contributes to mass mobility as a tool of survival? Luxemburg lends herself to such engagement because she offered a rich examination of the revolutionary nature of the spontaneous mass strike in Russia at the turn of the twentieth century and her analysis also accounted for the role of political education not as a cause for the spontaneous mass strike but rather as a complementary dimension of revolutionary political leadership from those working in solidarity with the masses. Rather than a paternalistic teacher–student relationship, Luxemburg understood that the pedagogical relationship needed for political education was based in recognizing the political power of the educated masses and believing in their capacity as agents of change.

The fourth and largest section of our book is devoted to engaging with Rosa's pivotal reworking of the concept of primitive accumulation. This begins with Robert Nichols's consideration of the range of interpreters, including Rosa, who challenged the sense given in Marx's *Capital* that primitive accumulation was a historical stage supplanted by the general law of capitalist accumulation. Nichols traces how the rejection of this historical periodization and the corresponding idea that overt extra-economic violence was transformed into the silent compulsion of exploitation informed the emergence of an entire tradition of postcolonial Marxism. Nichols explores how the burgeoning use of the concept led to its multiplication into a range of "ambiguously related companion concepts" that emphasize, respectively, a spatial framework through which "outsides" of capitalism are incorporated within it, one that emphasizes the ongoing use of extra-economic means, and one that emphasizes what is appropriated as most essentially land. Returning to the centrality of the separation of the bulk of humanity from the productive power of nature in Marx's classic conceptualization of so-called primitive accumulation, Nichols argues that, if naming a distinct logic of capitalist development grounded in converting the planet into a homogeneous and universal means of production in ways that order social pathologies related to dislocation, class stratification, and/or exploitation, the dispossession of primitive accumulation can be understood as constitutive and contemporary as argued by Rosa and evidenced in ongoing Indigenous resistance.

This is followed by three pieces that explore Rosa in the historical and contemporary contexts of South Africa. In the first, Jeff Guy revisits Luxemburg's central theoretical point that capitalist forms of production

continuously interact with non-capitalist societies and forms of production as necessary to capitalist accumulation. He reminds us that, although Luxemburg's reliance on the idea of a natural economy was not historically rich enough to describe different kinds of non-capitalist societies and economies, her central insight was that these economies were directed to what Guy calls the production of labor power and not the circulation of commodities. Guy draws on Harold Wolpe, who also relies on Luxemburg, to claim that there is an articulation of a particular form of South African capitalism with African pre-capitalist modes. Without idealizing pre-capitalist modes of production, Guy shows that, although unquestionably patriarchal, Zulu economy—which existed both prior to colonial invasion and later in an interaction with its consequences—was focused on the reproduction of labor power, and therefore the economy was organized to serve people and not things. Guy's article concludes with a provocative discussion of ideals, such as Ubuntu, and argues that, although rooted in pre-capitalist modes of production that have been either destroyed or effectively undermined by colonization, they still play an important role in anticolonial struggle and the aspiration to salvage African intellectual and ethical heritage from their obliteration.

Pointing out Rosa's prescience in grappling with the theory and practice of capitalist/non-capitalist relations that now characterize both Western multinational corporate extraction and firms from several contemporary "emerging" economies, Patrick Bond explores how, after 1994, South African capitalism's rates of exploitation rose and racially biased, gendered super-exploitation was given renewed legitimacy. Drawing from Rosa's tradition of analysis, Bond explores "unequal ecological exchange" or new understandings of value transfers from Africa based on natural resource depletion and the ways that imperial and sub-imperial national powers collaborate in Africa's continued impoverishment. Bond calls for the need to develop new solidarities out of protest, drawing on eco-socialist ideas.

In ways that illuminate societies increasingly characterized by the permanence of a surplus population, Ahmed Veriava puts a number of writers who have returned to Marx's concept of primitive accumulation (in ways outlined by Nichols) into conversation with the rich literature on South Africa's neo-liberal transition into the post-apartheid present. He considers how to draw on Marx and Luxemburg to argue that government practices targeting the poor in a society without work enact their own forms of primitive accumulation. Even as such policies are resisted, Veriava contends, their aim is to enclose social wealth and forms of life that have thus far resisted integration into newly marketized frameworks.

Suggesting that Luxemburg's distinctive reworking of the concept of primitive accumulation was a provocation to make the concept "travel" to

other domains while maintaining its rootedness in an emancipatory critique of capitalism, Siddhant Issar, Rachel H. Brown, and John McMahon interweave it with analyses of racial capitalism, the logic of global coloniality, and race-making in medieval Europe. Examining her concept in the context of the racialized consolidation of difference, they argue that the forging of a collective, pre-imperial, and “white,” Christian European subject amounted to a primitive accumulation of whiteness. This constitution of *homo europaeus* became an essential condition of possibility for processes of imperialism-qua-primitive accumulation that Rosa theorized. Ultimately, the authors suggest that this engagement with Luxemburg and medieval race-making is a necessary element of challenging racial capitalism and contemporary coloniality in theory and practice. Bridging the fourth and final section of the book, Ankica Čakardić’s argues that, although Rosa rarely addressed the “woman question” explicitly, her strong emphasis on the vital dynamics between capitalist and non-capitalist spaces coupled with her critique of bourgeois feminism can be resources in the development of a contemporary, global feminist theory of the commodification of women’s reproductive labor.

The book closes with the staging of conversations between Rosa and other revolutionary women with whom she could not have spoken. Nigel C. Gibson begins the section with the fellow Eastern European, Marxist Humanist Raya Dunayevskaya, who revisited Rosa’s writing repeatedly over the course of her life, each time with renewed and deepened appreciation. On the one hand, Dunayevskaya found Rosa’s vigilant detailing of conquest and extermination—including the violence and brutality of French colonialism in Algeria and British colonialism in India and South Africa—compelling. On the other, bearing in mind the context of the Maji Maji revolt and the Zulu rebellion, she could not understand why Rosa had not drawn any conclusions about Africans being a revolutionary force, especially since, for Dunayevskaya, they were clearly a key, new source for a philosophy of revolution. Still, for Dunayevskaya, who, like Rosa, engaged in ongoing work of translating revolutionary ideas, Rosa’s passionate, interwoven commitments to revolution and “staying human,” or to a place for the “‘inner world’ of human feelings, emotions, and affections” in revolutionary struggle (see Hudis in this volume), as explored most fully in her personal correspondences, foreshadowed key developments of the Women’s Liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Mediated through an engagement with Jamaican writer and theorist Sylvia Wynter, Paget Henry couples Rosa with Claudia Jones, who migrated to the United States in 1924, where she graduated from Wadleigh High School in Harlem, went to work in a laundry, and joined the Communist Party USA,

becoming deeply involved in its theoretical and practical life. Centering the similarities of these women as committed revolutionaries fighting actively for the liberation of the working class and suffering greatly for this cause, Henry focuses on the differences in the ways in which Jones and Luxemburg contributed to the rethinking of the Marxist project. Jones is remembered for her re-articulation of the dialectic between class, race, and gender within the daily life of the Communist Party USA, her intense focus on the “super-exploitation” of Black female domestic workers, and for her making culture into a site of political resistance, particularly after her deportation to England. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the extent to which it is possible to suggest that Jones’s contribution to Marxism includes a creolizing of Rosa Luxemburg.

Closing our volume is LaRose T. Parris’s reading of Luxemburg’s writings, speeches, and letters with and through those of Lorraine Hansberry. Highlighting Luxemburg’s shared theoretical allegiance to core emancipatory dimensions of what came to be understood as the Black radical and Black feminist traditions, Parris explores the women’s shared decisions to privilege a life of intellectual pursuit, political agitation, and commitment to advancing an authentic humanism. Rooted in persistent socio-political problems of racial, socio-economic, and gender-based exploitation and oppression, they culled insights from a range of disciplines, producing work that illuminated late nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideological and geo-political developments that defined their overlapping historical eras. These included the late nineteenth-century First Wave, white bourgeois feminism; Second Wave European imperialism; and European socialist revolution, all of which preceded mid-twentieth-century Third World decolonization, and the related African American Civil Rights and Women’s Liberation movements. Parris shows how these two historic women thinkers utilized their platforms to envision *and* fight for a more human world for all.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FIGHT?

What does it mean to learn about how to fight from a woman murdered at 47 in 1919 as part of a struggle that did not successfully seize state power and that therefore was seen by many as not only beaten but discredited?

Rosa had a profoundly pedagogical understanding of what it meant to be (even brutally) defeated. When grappling with historical setbacks in particular struggles, including the attempt to establish a socialist republic in Germany, her first question was what lessons the losses offered. As she wrote: “What was this recent ‘Spartacus Week’ in Berlin? What has it brought? What does

it teach us?" (2004c: 375). This was no celebration of weakness or fear of successfully winning power. It was an expression of her conception of revolutionary struggle and her commitment to all of it, including the attendant and inevitable difficulties.

For Luxemburg, the lesson of the so-called "failure" of the 1905 Russian Revolution was not that the masses of people needed strong leaders to tell them what to do, but instead that the people needed to think through *how* they might seize power differently. As we have seen, Lenin advocated a democratic centralist party, in which, to paraphrase his formulation, the brains were in the Central Committee and the arms and legs of the party were the cadre. For Luxemburg, the only real school of revolution was in struggle. As she wrote in criticism of Lenin in 1904:

"The working class demands the right to make its mistakes and learn in the dialectic of history. Let us speak plainly. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee" (1970: 108).

Rosa understood that revolutionary struggles would take place over a long period of time and that the ultimate goal of seizing state power and overthrowing capitalism would involve series of partial victories and partial setbacks. This offered an important reminder that radically transforming the world is not an easy undertaking. As she writes: "The socialist transformation presupposes a long and stubborn struggle in the course of which, quite probably, the proletariat will be repulsed more than once" (2004d: 159). But crucially, steps forward were enabled by, literally made upon, previous defeats which were indispensable in nurturing collective "strength and clarity of purpose" (2004c: 377).

In addition to having a highly constructive approach to defeat, which always contextualized individual instances of failure in the much larger horizon of collective transformation, many have rightly emphasized Rosa's bravery. It was as evident in her many life decisions, some of which we have recounted here, as it was in her readiness to think and step into the unknown. At the very heart of her many disagreements with supposed comrades was the point that we do not and cannot know what socialism is in advance. This is in part because we have been inculcated by exploitative relationships out of which we cannot just imagine our way out.

Unlike many who invoke it, Rosa was actually comfortable with the possibility of enacting her freedom and seeking, with others, to birth the new. When doing so, she did not deny her intellectual or political indebtedness to those who came before her. Instead she saw her actions as the extension

of what it meant to continue the project inaugurated by Marx, even as she debated Marx himself. She would repeatedly call out even the most esteemed in her circles. This was neither oedipal nor done for the sake of being irreverent. Being a comrade meant pushing one's comrades not to be lazy in their thinking or in their actions.

Rosa insisted that socialism and freedom were compatible, and that the protection of basic freedoms was necessary for the imagination of and struggle to build new socialist relations. She once wrote that "Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently" (1970: 69). This was her recognizing that the one who thinks differently might be just the dreamer we need, the artist who makes us see differently, the poet who beckons us to another world, the housewife who insists that domestic chores must be shared. This was not, then, an empty liberal maxim so much as a call to open avenues to reconsider how we can radically transform the ways we live together.

Rosa brought to the fight a sober assessment of what she uniquely could contribute. In her case, this was her intellect, imagination, capacity for human relations, and ferocious energy. She also had an understanding, if abbreviated by her murder, that one had, in the face of individual instances of suffering, such as imprisonment and torture, to sustain and work at maintaining life-affirming vitality and joy through varieties of forms of intimacy or ways of connecting with human and other-than-human others.

It is easy to sit on the sidelines and despair. That is and has always been true. Perhaps, at moments when our ability to change the exploitative relationships of capitalism and imperialism seems small, Rosa's message to all of us is that we cannot know of defeat in advance. We cannot know what possibilities any particular struggle will yield. We do not struggle only because we think we can win or even that we can hope to win. We struggle because we want to live more human lives by investing in and with others to build a new world. From such a vantage point, pessimism is not only irrelevant. The pessimists throw themselves on the wrong side of history.

We read Rosa today because she calls on us to rethink her ideas by creolizing them so that she can continue to speak to the most burning issues of our time.

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DEBATING NATIONALISM

Chapter 1

A Troubled Legacy

Rosa Luxemburg and the Non-Western World

Peter Hudis

ACCESSING LUXEMBURG'S FULL BODY OF THOUGHT

One of the striking features of today's intellectual landscape is that Rosa Luxemburg's stature as a thinker continues to rise, even as that of her many colleagues in the Second International has declined. Kautsky, Lenin, and Trotsky have their admirers but that can hardly compare to the resurgence of interest in her work in recent years among feminists, public intellectuals, literary figures, critical race theorists, and youth seeking to renew the idea of socialism. This is bound to increase as more of her writings become available. As of a decade ago, less than 20 percent of her work was available in English—and much of it was unavailable in any language. Yet this actually understates the amount of her unavailable writings. In the last few years, an additional 1,800 pages of writings by her in German and 3,000 pages in Polish have been identified.¹ All will appear in the seventeen-volume *Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*.²

It is therefore only now that we can *begin* to grasp her body of work as a *whole*. That her entire *oeuvre* will for the first time become available provides new eyes for grasping her relevance—especially by those in the Global South, where her work has been less studied than in the West. This does not

¹ For the recently published materials originally composed in German, see Luxemburg (2014, 2017). For a German translation of a small selection of her Polish writings (they are not included in the *Gesammelte Werke*) see Luxemburg (2015c). Some of these appear in English translation in Luxemburg (2019).

² Three volumes of the *Complete Works* have been published in addition to a companion volume, *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*. See Luxemburg (2011c, 2013, 2015a, 2019).

mean that her influence has been confined to Europe and North America. She was much admired by founders of the Chinese Communist movement, such as Chen Duxiu and Li Da, who introduced her to the public in a pamphlet on women revolutionaries in 1921. She also strongly influenced M. N. Roy, a founder of the Mexican, Indonesian, and Indian Communist parties. In the 1920s, José Carlos Mariátegui reprinted her writings in the pages of his Peruvian journal *Amauta*. In 1927, the Brazilian Marxist Mário Pedrosa came across several works of Luxemburg's while traveling to Berlin and upon his return to Brazil several years later was responsible for disseminating her ideas there; he later issued one of the earliest translations of Luxemburg's *On the Russian Revolution*. Husain ar-Rahhal, one of the first Iraqi Marxists, witnessed the Spartacus League's uprising in 1919 while in Berlin; under his influence and that of Haroutioun Madovan, the first communist group in Lebanon and Syria was named in its honor. What attracted these thinkers to Luxemburg was her thoroughgoing internationalism, opposition to all forms of imperialism, and unique personality of not just preaching but *living* her ideas.

However, in the late 1920s and 1930s, Luxemburg (as well as her admirers) was written out of the communist movement by Stalin and Mao, who took any positive reference to her as an act of heresy. They knew what they were doing. Her sharp critique of Lenin's suppression of democracy in *On The Russian Revolution* (1918) was well-known. Yet she supported the Bolshevik seizure of power and maintained a dialogue with Lenin, whom she respected. But there was no way she could have supported the rise to power of—or even carried on a comradely debate with—Stalin or Mao, who were immeasurably worse. The Stalinists repaid her by making her into a non-person.

Nor did her critique of Lenin's imposition of a single-party state win her admirers among more independent leaders of the Afro-Asian revolutions in the 1950s and 1960s, since many were committed to replacing colonialism with single-party states of their own.³ Moreover, her persistent opposition to struggles for national self-determination, as well as her insistence that peasants are incapable of playing an independent political role,⁴ could hardly endear her to Third World revolutionaries who fervently supported such struggles. Frantz Fanon—whose approach to matters of spontaneity,

³ An important exception is the Lanka Sama Samaja Party in Sri Lanka, which published a number of her political writings in the 1950s and 1960s. For a time they were virtually the only works of hers available in English.

⁴ See Luxemburg (2011a: 561 and 564): "I completely denied any role on the part of the peasantry . . . peasant movements are completely unable to play any independent role and are subordinated in every historical context to the leadership of the other classes that are more energetic and more clearly defined."

organization, and consciousness is similar to hers—never cites her.⁵ And even those who did, like C.L.R. James, consistently defended Lenin against Luxemburg’s criticisms of him.

Matters did not change much with the rise of postcolonial theory in the 1980s and 1990s, albeit for different reasons. For some, the embrace of cultural and discursive theory rendered Luxemburg passé. But the neglect continued even among Marxists—despite the fact that few Marxists of her time explored more fully (and showed greater appreciation for) pre-capitalist, communal formations in Africa, Asia, and the Americas or wrote as profoundly about the integrality of capitalism and imperialism. Benita Parry writes,

This failure to mine her work by Marxists participating in the postcolonial discussion is a lapse of which I, amongst others, am guilty, and which I can only explain—not justify—by pleading that her dense economic writings (the first half of *Accumulation* would tax all but trained economists) were not readily accessible to those of us accustomed to the language of the humanities. The loss was ours. (Parry, 2018: 58–9)

MARX AND LUXEMBURG ON CONTINUOUS PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION

Today the situation is different. The collapse of “Leninist” tendencies worldwide, along with the failure of national independence in the Global South to surmount statist authoritarianism, capitalist exploitation, and the oppression of women, has led many to view her work far more appreciably. This is especially the case with her writings on the relation of imperialism and the accumulation of capital. However, to see how her work on this speaks to today, we must clear away a common misconception: *viz.*, that Marx held that the “primitive accumulation of capital” applies only to capitalism’s European origins.

The claim that Marx treats primitive accumulation as a stage that is supplanted by the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation cannot be supported on either textual or conceptual grounds. Those who claim the contrary fail to ask some basic questions, such as why Marx entitled his part “the *so-called* primitive accumulation”?⁶ And why did Parts Seven and Eight of Volume One form a single part in the first German edition? Doing so clearly

⁵ Although Fanon possessed many works by Marxists in his library there was not a single one by Luxemburg. See Fanon (2018: 761–3).

⁶ See Marx (1977a: 871).

places primitive accumulation in the context of the absolute general law. Most importantly, why did Marx write in the second German edition, as well as in his letters to Vera Zasulich and N. Mikhailovsky, that the section on the historical development of capital accumulation in Volume One of *Capital* does not provide a universal theory but is *limited* to describing developments in *Western Europe*?

Capital, Volume One is not an analysis of all aspects of capitalism past, present, and future; it is restricted to “capital in general” *as it manifests itself* in *West European* history. Since Volume One does not aim to provide a universal account of capital accumulation, it follows as a matter of course that its discussion of original or primitive accumulation deals with the European origins of capitalism. In this sense (to use Hegelian terms), the chapter on primitive accumulation is adequate to its content. Those who complain that it does not take account of developments beyond capitalism’s European origins misconstrue the book’s object of analysis. They share with vulgar Marxism the assumption that the historical section on accumulation provides a universal theory of human development and criticize it for not demonstrating this by showing how primitive accumulation prevails in contexts outside of Europe’s historical development.

But it in no way follows from Marx’s approach that he failed to conceive of primitive accumulation as an ongoing and continuous process. He devoted the last fifteen years of his life to determining the extent to which it impacts developments in the non-Western world, as seen in his voluminous studies on Russia, China, India, Indonesia, Muslim North Africa, Southern Africa, Australia, and First Nations Peoples of the Americas.⁷ These writings analyze the violent dispossession of native peoples from the land and the commodification of their labor power as an essential condition for the expansion of capitalism.⁸ Indeed, a major reason for his failure to complete Volumes Two and Three of *Capital* by the time of his death was that he was still in the process of absorbing and analyzing these developments, which would no doubt be as important for the later volumes of *Capital* as England and West Europe were for Volume One.⁹

⁷ See especially Marx (1972, 1977b). A comprehensive study of these writings is in Anderson (2010). See also Hudis (2004, 2010, 2018, 2019b).

⁸ Even earlier, in the period he was composing the *Grundrisse* (1858) Marx wrote, “Value [production]...already presupposes: 1) the destruction of natural communism (in India etc.); 2) the destruction of all undeveloped, pre-bourgeois modes of production which are not governed in their totality by exchange” (Marx and Engels, 1983: 58).

⁹ See White (2018: 109): “It was immediately after this visit [from Sieber, in 1881] that Marx embarked on an intensive reading of Morgan, Maine and Lubbock... It is not absolutely clear how Marx intended to use them, but the context suggests it would have been to account for the emergence of capitalism from earlier collectivist society—that is, in connection with Volume II of *Capital*.”

No post-Marx Marxist was a more attentive as well as *brilliant* analyst of Marx's *Capital* than Rosa Luxemburg. However, she was encumbered by two limitations that defined all Marxists of the time. First, she knew nothing of Marx's notes and writings on the non-Western world following the publication of Volume One of *Capital* in 1867, since they remained unpublished until decades afterward. Kautsky asked her to help sort and publish Marx's *Nachlaß* shortly after she arrived in Germany, but she turned him down. Had she done so, she would have been surprised to discover that much of the material taken up in Part Three of *The Accumulation of Capital* had already been covered by Marx himself between 1868 and 1883—indeed, they used much of the same source material.¹⁰ Second, she lacked access to the drafts of *Capital* (such as the *Grundrisse*) in which Marx makes it clear that his object of analysis is “capital in general.” In contrast, she tended to read *Capital* (especially Volume Two) as a description of how capital accumulation occurs in the empirically “real” world—which is clearly not the case. It was not until the pioneering work of I. I. Rubin, Henryk Grossman, Roman Rosdolsky, and Raya Dunayevskaya that this began to become understood.

It is one thing for Luxemburg to mistakenly claim that Marx restricted “so-called primitive accumulation” to the origins of European capitalism when she was unaware of textual evidence that indicates otherwise. But how does one explain the fact that 100 years later the same claim is repeated by many post-modernists, post-Marxists, and postcolonial theorists who have long had access to this material?

THE LOGICAL DETERMINATION OF LUXEMBURG'S THEORY OF ACCUMULATION

Evaluating Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital* depends upon being directly and thoroughly familiar with its main object of discussion—Volume Two of *Capital*. The latter's subject is *the reproduction of the total social capital* through the threefold circulation of money capital, productive capital, and commodity capital. Accounting for this involves tackling a formidable problem: how does capital reproduce itself on an ever-expanding scale when individual consumers cannot realize the value of the total product?

Marx tackles this by abstracting from secondary factors that get in the way of his object of investigation. He first abstracts from foreign trade, treating capitalism as a single isolated nation. He is fully aware that no such phenomenon exists in the “real” world, since capitalism can only exist, he stresses, in

¹⁰ Both used the work of Maxim Kovalevsky, Henry Sumner Maine, and Henry Lewis Morgan. For a comparison of Marx and Luxemburg's use of these sources, see Hudis (2010).

the context of a world market. He writes in Volume Two, “The circulation of industrial capital is characterized by the many-sided character of its origins, and the existence of the market as a world market” (Marx, 1978: 190). He also abstracts from such market phenomena as effective demand and realization crises in order to focus on the underlying social relations that drive expanded reproduction. In doing so, he also abstracts from changes in the productivity of labor. Capital strives to augment value by increasing productivity through labor-saving devices. This results in more capital-value being produced than can be consumed by individuals, leading to a realization crisis. But since Marx wants to penetrate beneath such surface phenomena, he abstracts from revolutions in the productivity of labor. The object of analysis in Part Three of Volume Two of *Capital* is therefore a highly abstract, “chemically pure” capitalism that in no way resembles its phenomenal appearance. Marx does so to unearth the *essential* determinant of expanded reproduction—the domination of dead over living labor.

This is what Luxemburg took issue with. As Dunayevskaya cogently argued in one of the first English-language discussions of *The Accumulation of Capital*, Luxemburg “counterposed theory to reality” in arguing that Volume Two fails to account for the *actual* process of the expanded reproduction of capital (Dunayevskaya, 1946: 47).

Although most commentators on *The Accumulation of Capital* single out her objection to Marx’s exclusion of foreign trade, they tend to ignore the decisive issue—her objection to Marx’s abstraction from changes in the productivity of labor.¹¹ She did not object to Marx’s view of “effective demand” or realizing surplus value as such. She instead took Marx to task for abstracting from *any* discussion of effective demand or realization crises in the final Part Three of Volume Two, the formulas of expanded reproduction. She was not a crude underconsumptionist who failed to understand that social relations of production are more important than such market phenomena as effective demand. Nor did she take issue with Marx’s distinction between simple and expanded reproduction. Luxemburg fully understood these basic Marxian concepts and had no quarrel with them. Her difference with Marx centered on the question of *where does the effective demand come from* to purchase the additional labor power and means of production needed for expanded reproduction. Does it arise from inside the capitalist system or outside of it?

As the value of the social product grows at the expense of living labor, the variable capital (workers’ wages) in Department II (means of consumption) becomes insufficient to realize the value of the constant capital in Department I (means of production). Hence, there is insufficient demand to buy back

¹¹ For her objection to Marx’s abstraction from technological revolutions, see Luxemburg (2015b: 395–6).

the social product. *Where does the effective demand come from?* becomes the decisive issue. Luxemburg argues that it can only come from a “third group” composed neither of workers nor capitalists—non-capitalist strata in the developing world. Capitalism needs imperialism to open up new markets that enable accumulation on an ever-expanding scale. But this also spells capitalism’s doom, since, as she sees it, such strata are “inevitably” destroyed upon contact with capitalism-imperialism¹²—which eliminates the source that can absorb the surplus product. *At that point, capitalism must of necessity collapse.* What sustains capitalism—its cooptation and destruction of non-capitalist strata in the developing world—leads to its demise.

Luxemburg’s argument is logically coherent—so long as one accepts her premise that expanded reproduction depends upon the *entirety* of the social product taking a monetary form.¹³ This premise was not shared by Marx, who held that much of the social product is consumed by *capital*. Economists call this *productive consumption*—iron and coal are consumed in making steel, silica in making microprocessors, and so on. This is in contrast to *personal consumption* by people. Of course, a portion of the value of constant capital is transferred to the commodity and consumed by individuals. *But not all of it.* A significant share is locked up in means of production.¹⁴ The material or bodily form of the product predetermines the extent to which its value will be realized by capital. Marx hammers away at this point again and again in taking issue with Adam Smith, who “spirited away” the value of constant capital by claiming that it devolves into revenue.

A pivotal question nevertheless remains: *Where does the money come from* to enable the variable capital in Department II to purchase the value of constant capital in Department I that *does* take a monetary form? Marx suggests in his unfinished draft of Part Three that the money is supplied by the capitalists themselves. Since production creates its own market, and capitalists are the personifications of capital, they are compelled to supply the money sufficient for workers to purchase the surplus product from Department II, which in turn enables them to add new value to the means of production in Department I. Of course, in doing so, the basic problem—the growth of means of production at the expense of personal consumption—is reproduced

¹² White reports, “By 1868 [Marx] had come to believe that capital in its circuits did not carry all before it, and instead could coexist with traditional precapitalist societies. From that point on Marx consistently held that contact with the capitalist system did not automatically extend capitalist relations, a position reflected in his comments on Kovalevsky’s book” (White, 2018: 104). For more on this, see Hudis (2010).

¹³ “Luxemburg had apparently failed to grasp Marx’s point that constant capital, or the products of human labor that have already been appropriated on the production line, is consumed by capital at the expense of human labor” (Morton, 2018: 87).

¹⁴ See Marx (1968: 486–8). For a further discussion of this, see Hudis (2014).

on a higher level. Capitalism is therefore an inherently unstable and non-viable social formation.

Luxemburg rejected Marx's explanation of where the money comes from, arguing that expanded reproduction is possible only by relying on the effective demand of non-capitalist consumers. Where Marx locates the limits of capital *within* the logic of capital, she seeks it in factors exogenous to it—in non-capitalist strata in the developing world.

Luxemburg's analysis provides a coherent explanation for the *necessity* of capitalism to invade, occupy, and destroy social formations in non-capitalist regions. It is getting renewed attention, especially in China. A Chinese translation of *The Accumulation of Capital* by Peng Chenshun and Wu Jian was published in 1959, followed three years later by a translation of *Introduction to Political Economy*—fifty-three years before the latter appeared in full in English.¹⁵ However, these works received very little discussion during the Mao period since she was rendered a non-person because of her disputes with Lenin. This is now changing: a small but growing number of Chinese Marxists are discussing her economic theories, and a Chinese edition of her *Complete Works* is now in preparation (Volume One, covering 1893 to 1900, will appear in 2020).

Her theory of accumulation remains compelling because it speaks to those victimized by imperialism—first, by showing that it is integral to capitalism and not an accidental by-product of it; and second, by suggesting that the suffering of its victims will be redeemed, since capitalism must collapse and give way to a new social order once its global domination becomes total. The promise of redemption from suffering is a central (if often overlooked) dimension of Luxemburg's life and work. That a theory is coherent and compelling, however, is one thing; whether it is adequate and *true* is another.

Her argument appears strongest when it comes to China and India, which had highly developed monetary economies prior to the entry of European colonialism. But what about sub-Saharan Africa and much of Southeast Asia, which did not? Where did the money come from to buy up the surplus product in areas defined by subsistence agriculture? What often drove imperialism was the brutal extraction of raw materials, not accessing new markets. Moreover, it is questionable even for China and India that the destruction of their “natural economies” released enough purchasing power to soak up the surplus product—especially since the bulk of surplus value is realized in capital transfers *between* industrially developed countries.

It can be argued that these and related factors are more adequately accounted for by Marx's crisis theory, which centers on the tendency of

¹⁵ For the full English translation of *Introduction to Political Economy*, which is one of her most important books, see Luxemburg (2013: 89–300).

the rate of profit to decline. This is not discussed in Volume Two, since it abstracts from changes in labor productivity—which drives the long-term decline in profit rates. But Volume Three of *Capital* drops that simplifying assumption as Marx moves to a more concrete level of analysis. It shows that the growth of the organic composition of capital reduces the relative amount of living labor, the only value-creating substance, thereby putting downward pressure on profits. Capitalism responds with a slew of countervailing measures, such as seeking cheaper sources of labor and raw materials, opening up new markets, intensifying exploitation, creating fictitious capital through financialization, and so on.

Hence, a coherent and comprehensive theory of imperialism could be developed on the basis of *Volume Three of Capital*. This is exactly what was pointed out by one of the earliest critics of *The Accumulation of Capital*, M. I. Nachimson, in a review published in the *Dresdner Volkszeitung* in 1913. This remarkable but forgotten thinker, whose work is completely unknown in the English-speaking world, was the first theoretician I know to highlight Marx's theory of the decline in the rate of profit.¹⁶ Luxemburg was hardly impressed; she dismissed his argument in a few sentences, stating that the sun will sooner burn out than capitalism will exhibit a secular decline in profit rates (Luxemburg, 2015b: 499). She, like virtually all others of the time, was so blinded by the superprofits generated by imperialism as to consider the concept irrelevant.

Moreover, since Luxemburg holds that the limit of capital is reached with the exhaustion of non-capitalist strata, it follows that what brings the system down is not the actions of *people* but rather the lack of a *thing*, effective demand. Of course, she states that “long before” this point is reached, the *proletariat* will rise up and bring the system down. But since for her the limit to capital is found *outside* of capitalism, this does not logically follow from her theory of accumulation. As Dunayevskaya emphasized, “The question *theoretically* is: does the solution come organically from your theory, or is it brought there merely by ‘revolutionary will’?” (Dunayevskaya, 1981: 45).

Moreover, if the limit to capital is exogenous to capitalist relations of production, what *subjective* force *within* the non-capitalist world brings it down—the fight for national independence from imperialism? The peasantry? The lumpenproletariat? But Luxemburg denied that peasants or lumpen proletarians can play an independent political role and rejected calls for national self-determination as reactionary. As a result, despite her fervent opposition

¹⁶ Nachimson was a leading theoretician of the Jewish Bund who authored numerous books and dozens of scholarly essays on Marxist theory. It is a shame that none of his work has ever appeared in English. See also her letter to Franz Mehring of February 10, 1913 (Luxemburg, 2011b: 324).

to capitalism-imperialism and impassioned defense of its victims, she never singled out the colonized masses as a *subject of revolution*.

Contrary to the claims of Cedric Robinson and others, this had nothing to do with insensitivity to racism and national oppression that he (wrongly) claims characterized “classical Marxism.” No one was more sensitive to the victims of racism and imperialism and wrote more passionately in their defense than Luxemburg. No, her failure to single out the subjective potential of anti-imperialist revolts flowed from the premises and logical determination of her theory of accumulation.

Integral to this was her stubborn opposition to national self-determination. She developed an array of arguments against calls for the independence of Poland, Ireland, and other oppressed nations: economic conditions make it unrealistic; the masses there are no longer interested in national demands; they are interested in them but that will be their undoing, and so on. The details cannot detain us here.¹⁷ But there is no doubt that her persistent rejection of demands for self-determination isolated her Polish party from the mass of revolutionary workers, thereby vacating a space that was later filled by right-wing Polish nationalists.¹⁸ This was bad enough, but not actively singling out movements for national self-determination in the developing world was even more problematic. Despite *The Accumulation of Capital's* magnificent critique of the crimes of imperialism, it never mentions anti-colonial revolts—whether the Gusii and Maji Maji revolts in East Africa and Zulu Rebellion of 1905, the Iranian Revolution of 1907–1911, or the Aceh revolt in 1903. Even the Chinese Revolution of 1911 gets mere passing notice (the Mexican Revolution of 1910 gets none).

In 1920, just a year after her murder, the Korean Marxist Pak Chin-Sun stated: “The whole history of the ignominious collapse of the Second International has shown that the western European proletariat cannot win the fight against its bourgeoisie as long as the bourgeoisie has a source of strength in the colonies” (Pak, 2019: 63). This became the official position of the Third International at the Baku Congress that year. There is little evidence that Luxemburg would have concurred. Whereas for Pak (as well as M.N. Roy, Sultanzadeh, et al.), national liberation struggles in the colonies are a fundamental prerequisite for the victory of the European proletariat, she held that the victory of the proletariat is the prerequisite for the liberation of the colonies. This flowed from her view that neither the peasantry nor national minorities are an independent force of revolution.

¹⁷ See Luxemburg 1976 for a selection of her writings on the national question. Most of her writings on the subject have never appeared in English. *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* will devote three volumes (of about 600 pages each) to them.

¹⁸ See Hudis (2017) for a detailed discussion of this.

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS, DEMOCRACY, AND THE TRANSITION TO SOCIALISM

So how does Luxemburg's legacy speak to today's Global South? In contrast to her era, the whole world is now (and has been for some time) *capitalist*: there is not a single corner of the globe that is not subject (to some degree) to the law of value that governs the world market. The problem we face today is *not* the inability of capital to further expand now that the world is completely capitalist, but rather the threat to the very existence of civilization posed by the fact that it *is* fully capitalist. Her premise that the limit to capital is exogenous to capitalism therefore must be surrendered in order for her economic theories to be relevant to the realities of the Global South.¹⁹ However, other dimensions of her legacy, such as her political theory, directly speak to its realities—most of all her insistence on the inseparability of socialism and democracy.

Luxemburg's conception of revolutionary democracy is grounded in her embrace of spontaneous revolts. She heralded the "self-activity" of the proletariat long before later Marxists came to the notion. Her view that class-consciousness is *the* prerequisite for social transformation represented a break from the crude materialism and determinism that defined the Second International. She never wavered from the view that, in contrast to the transition from feudalism to capitalism, socialism cannot and will not arise through blind historical forces. Instead, she held, socialism is the first system that arises from the *free, conscious, and democratic* deliberation of the masses. This dimension of her work, more than any other, speaks to today's search for a viable alternative to capitalism.

While Luxemburg placed great emphasis on spontaneous struggles, she did not counterpose it to organization. She adhered to the need for a "vanguard" party as much as any Marxist of the time. However, she differed from many (such as Kautsky and Lenin) on the *form* of the relation between spontaneity and organization. For her, the proper form is to *enlighten* workers to think for themselves rather than lecturing them like a schoolmaster. Parties can play a key role, she held, in fostering class-consciousness by illuminating the essential nature of capitalism and specifying the nature of the socialist goal. But exactly *how* is such consciousness to be developed? She addressed this

¹⁹ Some have sought to get around this by referring to the non-capitalist sectors that still exist within the developing world; but this hardly makes much sense, since such sectors existed to no less degree within the Western capitalist economies of her time. Yet Luxemburg firmly rejected the notion that non-capitalist sectors within a capitalist economy can provide the purchasing power to absorb the surplus product. Otherwise, she would have had no reason to focus on the non-capitalist world in *The Accumulation of Capital*.

in an article in the Polish journal *Czerwony Sztandar* entitled “Critique in the Workers’ Movement.”²⁰

During the fight . . . as the proletariat bears down on its enemy, it *learns*, it educates itself. A victorious outcome depends on the degree of that consciousness. How, then, do members of the proletariat become conscious? They read pamphlets, appeals, and periodicals. They listen to speeches by people who give advice on various things. They must *weigh for themselves* which of these things is right, for such consideration is the basis for choosing what path to take.

But what ensures that the masses will choose the right path? She continues,

The freedom to speak and publish is one precondition to the attainment of consciousness by the proletariat; the second is that the proletariat not put any restrictions on itself, that it not say, “we can discuss this, but not that.” Conscious workers the world over understand this, and they always try to give even the worst of their enemies the right to freely explain their views. They say, “Let even the enemies of the working people voice their own views, so that we may respond to them, and so the working masses can work out for themselves who is a friend and who a foe.” (Luxemburg, 1906a: 3)

The notion that even “the worst of their enemies” be given “the right to freely explain their views” later became central to her critique of the Bolsheviks in 1918,²¹ when she attacked them for closing down opposition newspapers and parties (including those of the anti-capitalist Left). However, one does not have to wait for 1918 to know that the inseparability of socialism and democracy was a *distinctive* theme of her entire work.

This does not mean she was a starry-eyed idealist. She knew that workers often make wrong decisions. She spent much of life engaged in lengthy disputes with party members and trade unionists that opposed radical tactics like the mass strike or capitulated to national chauvinism in supporting World War I. But she held that, unless the socialist movement is defined by an open-ended, democratically conducted battle of ideas *that directly involves the workers*, no transition to socialism *in any form* is possible.

She spelled this out in a remarkable essay of 1908, “Lessons From the Three Dumas.” She follows Marx and Engels in arguing that the form best

²⁰ Both this article and “Lessons from the Three Dumas” will appear for the first time in English in the forthcoming Volume Four of the *Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*. Thanks to Joseph Muller for the translations from the Polish.

²¹ Other aspects of her critique of the Bolsheviks are more questionable, such as her objection to granting peasants ownership of the land. See Hudis (2017).

sued for achieving the transition to socialism is a *democratic republic*. This is not limited to a *bourgeois democracy*, in which partial political liberties exist without any democratic control of the economy. She attacked reformist socialists who seek a peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism on the grounds that it leaves the social relations of production in the hands of capitalists. All efforts to capture state power from above and impose a “socialist” agenda solely through electoral and administrative measures are bound to fail because the real power in capitalism lies not in the state but in the *economic* relations of civil society. The past 100 years has confirmed her view, as seen in how leftists who win elections so often end up compromising with the system and embracing capital. This is inevitable so long as the capture of political power does not proceed to the expropriation of the property, class dominance, and economic power of the personifications of capital. *Only then is a truly democratic republic possible.*

At the same time, she attacks those who think that a transition to socialism can bypass or eliminate democratic liberties and independent representative bodies. This is of course how Marxist-Leninists understood “the dictatorship of the proletariat.” But neither Marx nor Luxemburg advocated a dictatorship of a party *over* the proletariat, as existed in every single misnamed “socialist” or “communist” regime since 1917. The dictatorship of the proletariat, she argues, is the rule of the immense majority, the workers, at the expense of the minority, the capitalists, who are forcefully divested of control of the means of production. But this can succeed only if there is “unlimited democracy,” which she castigates Lenin and Trotsky for suppressing (Luxemburg, 2004: 308).

But is it guaranteed that a democratic republic that ensures political liberty will actually lead to the creation of socialism? There is no guarantee, she argues, since socialism can only arise on the basis of specific material conditions—which were lacking at the time in Russia, as it was still a largely agrarian economy. Moreover, socialism cannot be created in one country but can only come into existence on an *international* level. This is what all Marxists upheld before the rise of Stalinism. She writes, “The socialist revolution can only be a result of international revolution, and [decisive is] the level and form of development of class relations and proletarian operations in other capitalist countries.” But if the transition to socialism cannot occur until there is an international revolution, how likely is it that the masses will be able to maintain their rule in a single land? She is brutally realistic on this score: “The working class cannot delude itself that, having overthrown absolutism and attained a dictatorship for a certain period, that it will establish a socialist system.” She directly refers to “the inevitable removal of the proletariat from power by a counterrevolutionary operation of the bourgeoisie” if the revolution is limited to a single country: “It may be that in the end, after

the proletariat is overthrown, the republic will disappear.” But this will not mean that the revolution will have been in vain, since “if the revolutionary proletariat in Russia were to gain political power, however temporarily, that would provide enormous encouragement to the international class struggle”—thereby inspiring new revolutions to come in other parts of the world (Luxemburg, 1908: 189–91).

Luxemburg’s discussion in “The Three Dumas” speaks directly to what happened a decade later, when tsarism was overthrown in Russia in 1917, followed by the Bolshevik seizure of power. Lenin and the Bolsheviks were fully aware that Russia’s material conditions did not permit the immediate creation of a socialist society. This is why Lenin worked to foster proletarian revolutions in Western Europe. However, the Bolshevik regime did not take the form of a democratic republic, as seen in its suppression of political liberties. Moreover, Lenin famously declared in 1918, “Now that we have seized power, we intend to keep it”—*permanently*. This is the total opposite of Luxemburg’s insistence that “the inability of the proletariat to stay in power” is not the worst outcome, so long as its creation of a democratic republic based on the rule of the working class inspires others elsewhere in the world to take up the fight against capital.

In a word, she opposed sacrificing democracy for the sake of staying in power, since doing so only guarantees that a transition to socialism can never occur. But if a regime that expresses the will of the masses exists even for a brief period, it can help inspire the transition to socialism to later arise on an *international* level. Clearly, this is not the course that was followed by “revolutionary” regimes over the past 100 years. Stalin, Mao, or Castro would never have taken the chance of being voted out of power. But neither did their regimes lead to socialism; they instead led to another version of capitalism, *state-capitalism*. The path intimated by Luxemburg is the one less traveled, but perhaps for that very reason it is the one that is increasingly being turned to today.

We see evidence of this everywhere—from Tiananmen Square 1989 to Tahir Square in 2011, and from today’s protests in Hong Kong to the struggles in the townships of South Africa and the mass upsurge in Sudan. Virtually every mass struggle for the past several decades in the Global South has taken the form of spontaneous, decentralized, and horizontal forms of organization, defined by democratic forms of deliberation and development. This is not accidental; they disclose, even if in embryo, the organizational form best suited for transitioning to a socialist society.

The irony is that in a historical period during which many postcolonial theorists and established Marxists spent immense time and energy bemoaning the illusions of political democracy and the values of the Enlightenment, the masses of the Global South made it clear through their actions as well as

their words that free elections, the rule of law, and the defense of inalienable universal human rights are central to their efforts to overcome the ravages produced by neocolonialism and statist “socialism.”

To be sure, liberal democracy suffers from a severe limitation: the inability of legislation on the political or parliamentary level to fundamentally transform the property, class, and human relations that define capitalism. Democratic legislation can alter various aspects of the system, but it cannot transform its basic nature so long as the production and reproduction of social life are based on alienated social relations. Liberal democracy can therefore only be maintained in the long run by extending democracy to the *economic* sphere. This marks a move toward what Marx called “true democracy.” The achievement of true democracy is what enables socialism to first come into existence.

The task of rethinking what socialism means for today as a thoroughly *emancipatory* project calls into question at least one aspect of Luxemburg’s theory of class-consciousness. She placed so much emphasis on class-consciousness as to reduce all forms of revolutionary cognition to it. That left little space for other forms of consciousness, such as national consciousness—an issue that remains of much importance in today’s Global South. Moreover, if revolutionary cognition becomes equated to class-consciousness, why would one be drawn toward emphasizing the need for a *philosophical* reconstruction of Marxism? Luxemburg clearly wasn’t. She viewed Marx’s work as the venue through which the proletariat gets to know itself, but she showed little interest in philosophy (unlike later Marxists like Lukacs, Gramsci, et al.). As Dunayevskaya argued, “The question of class-consciousness does not exhaust the question of cognition, of Marx’s philosophy of revolution” (Dunayevskaya, 1981: 60). But if it is held that the social consciousness that arises from the self-activity of the masses *does* exhaust cognition, it follows that a philosophy of revolution that can give spontaneous revolts a direction becomes completely superfluous. This is indeed the approach that has been followed by much of the anti-Leninist and anti-vanguardist Left, which has resulted in an abdication of responsibility for providing spontaneous revolts with a vision of the future that can point the way to a viable alternative to capitalism.

This speaks to the glaring contradiction facing today’s democratic grassroots movements. Despite their many contributions, they are *ephemeral*—they come and go with the flow of time. Despite raising important emancipatory demands, none have yet managed to coalesce into an ongoing, self-conscious movement that can bring down capitalism. Spontaneous revolt without a guiding vision of what kind of society we need to be fighting for is clearly not enough. In this sense, the limitations that inhere in Luxemburg’s theory of class-consciousness is *our* historical limitation.

As Dunayevskaya cogently put it, “The myriad crises in our age have shown, over and over again, from Russia to China, from Cuba to Iran, from Africa to Pol Pot’s Cambodia, that without a philosophy of revolution activism spends itself in mere anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism, without ever revealing what it is *for*” (1981: 194).

REVOLUTIONIZING THE PERSONAL AS WELL AS THE POLITICAL

Nevertheless, Luxemburg’s conception of the inseparability of democracy and socialism *before and after the seizure of power* speaks directly to the challenges facing today’s Global South, since she consistently held that expanding democratic liberties and promoting a socialist alternative requires a *revolutionary* uprooting of existing society. Revolution to Luxemburg was not just a phrase; it was the determinant that her entire life revolved around, politically and personally. Her conception of revolution was *expansive* since she viewed it not as a singular act but a *process* of permanently contesting the injustices and inequities of class society. This is why she sharply critiqued reformist socialists (not only Bernstein but also Kautsky and the Russian Mensheviks) for holding to the illusion that political democracy and socialism could be introduced through the medium of existing social institutions. And this is why she sharply critiqued revolutionary socialists (such as the Bolsheviks after 1917) for presuming that spontaneity, free expression, and democratic deliberation come to an end with the seizure of power. She understood that the tentacles of capital reach so deeply into the recesses of everyday life that socialism can only come into existence through an open-ended and ongoing personal as well as social transformation, which is why she famously declared, “The Revolution is everything, all else is bilge!” (Luxemburg, 1906b: 259).

The Global South has had its share of revolutionary movements, but the concept of revolution that was upheld by its leading tendencies over the past half-century fell far short of the uprooting demanded by the need to transcend the confines of neocolonialism and statist “socialism.” Even some of the most radical leaders of the anti-colonial revolutions of the 1950s and 1960s that sought to go beyond the confines of the bourgeois nationalist phase, such as Kwame Nkrumah and Sekou Touré, ended up heading single-party dictatorships in the years after the seizure of power. While at the time many supporters of the anti-colonial revolutions refrained from publicly criticizing such figures, no such reticence defines today’s activists in the Global South. There is a growing understanding—one that Rosa would surely endorse—that the means employed by a movement must conform to the nature of the goal that

it aspires for. Precisely because the revolutions of the past have not delivered on their promise, a new generation is searching for alternative visions of revolutionary transformation that are adequate for the realities of the twenty-first century. Luxemburg's expansive concept of revolution has much to contribute to this. As a recent statement by Indian scholars organizing the first conference exclusively devoted to her ideas in that land put it:

Rosa Luxemburg decried the assumption that theoretical knowledge and the workers are diametrically distinct and therefore need intermediary “intellectuals” to bring them together. To her mind such attitude leads to degeneration of the organization, which becomes a hurdle for revolutionary politics . . . The proposed conference is not about simply revisiting her works as a sterile professional academic exercise within ivory towers of knowledge production, devoid of a manifestation with the politics outside in the streets. It aims at looking at contemporary theory and politics through this prism or through recalling the debates that Rosa was part of within the anti-capitalist movement. Given the way movements are weakening, the classical forms of unionization seem to be waning, the organizational aspect of the Left has come under question . . . Rosa Luxemburg provides sufficient intellectual insight that needs to be revisited in our times to understand the nature of current politics. (Paul and Pant, 2019: 4–5)

Inseparable from this, many are drawn anew to Luxemburg because they see her refusal to separate the personal from the political (most eloquently expressed in her voluminous correspondence) as foreshadowing central issues that concern us today. This is especially expressed in her correspondence with her longtime comrade and lover, Leo Jogiches.²² Luxemburg's letters to Jogiches reflect a persistent effort to connect the personal and political, as she pushed back against his fixation on revolutionary politics at the expense of exploring the “inner world” of human feelings, emotions, and affections. These tensions ultimately led to the breakup of their two-decade-long relationship in 1907. Dunayevskaya—who was the first to make a detailed claim for Luxemburg as a feminist—argued that their breakup had much to do with the personal leap that Luxemburg experienced from her involvement in the 1905 Revolution. Prior to 1905, she took little interest in the day-to-day details of running an organization, leaving that to Jogiches. But upon arriving in Russian-occupied Poland at the end of 1905, she plunged directly into revolutionary activities, such as organizing the underground resistance and

²² All discussions of the Luxemburg-Jogiches relationship have been one-sided since while her letters to him survived, it was assumed that those by him did not. However, a trove of over 5,000 letters of Jogiches has recently been discovered in an archive in Moscow. These have yet to be transcribed or translated.

participating in building up her revolutionary party, the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania. As a result, Dunayevskaya argued, Luxemburg increasingly felt she could fly on her own without Jogiches:

In a word, it was not only intellectually, as a pamphleteer, that she was reaching new heights, but organizationally. No doubt, she no longer considered Jogiches's organizational expertise as sacrosanct. . . . What we do know is that the tensions led to a breakup of their intimacy, without any way breaking up their revolutionary political activity. (Dunayevskaya, 1981: 91–2)

Since revolution was the central focus of Luxemburg's life and work, it is only to be expected that experiencing one would leave a deep personal impact. The way in which she *lived the revolution* by challenging the notion that political commitment entails putting aside the effort to liberate *all* aspects of human personality transcends the boundaries of her time and speaks directly to our own.²³

There is a lesson to be learned here: Although Dunayevskaya praised Luxemburg from the beginning of her career in the 1940s—especially in singling out her deep understanding of Marx's *Capital* and the theory of value²⁴—in the late 1970s, in response to the modern feminist movement, she re-examined Luxemburg anew, enriched by this vantage point. It provided eyes to appreciate dimensions of her legacy that had been overlooked, including by her. As a new generation in the Global South encounters Luxemburg's *full* corpus of work, they are bound to find much in it that speaks to them in new ways as well.

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²³ See Hudis (2019b) for an analysis of Luxemburg's support for women's struggles for self-emancipation.

²⁴ In a 1942 essay critiquing the theory of bureaucratic collectivism, she writes: "To say that in Russia all classes are equal because none owns, is to take the legal fiction of ownership at face value. Rosa Luxemburg deals most profoundly yet succinctly with the property versus production theory" (Dunayevskaya, 1942: 28). And she came to an even more appreciative view of her work a few years after writing her 1946 review of *The Accumulation of Capital* in a letter to C.L.R. James of 1949: "It should be said to Rosa's credit that at least she tried to see a connection between imperialism and production and accumulation of capital. Instead of trying to deduce it from the laws of capitalism as expressed in the decline in the rate of profit, she fell for the inductive method of history and ended up, as we know, revising Marx. But what I did not see before this was that she attempted to stick to *Capital*" (Dunayevskaya, 1949: 1642).

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Chapter 2

The Contemporary Transnational Relevance of Rosa Luxemburg's Socialist Critique of National Self-Determination

Drucilla Cornell

My goal is to reframe Rosa Luxemburg's rejection of Lenin's decree on the right to self-determination of nations oppressed by the Czarist regime after it was overthrown by the Bolsheviks in 1917. I will argue that Rosa has been frequently misunderstood as rejecting the right of national self-determination out of hand. For Rosa, national liberation always has a class component; therefore, passing power over to the reactionary ruling class of so-called "freed nations" is not in and of itself revolutionary. It is important to note here that an essential aspect of Rosa's criticism of Lenin is his inconsistency—that at the same time that he defends the ideal of national self-determination as a right, he is also undermining some of the most basic rights, such as freedom of expression. Certainly neither Rosa nor Lenin reject what I have called moral images of freedom as guiding the struggle for socialism.¹ Put simply, for Rosa, nationalism is a problematic ideal, and of course we are seeing just how problematic it can be in today's world. In the case of the Bolsheviks, the abstract decree was also strategically problematic since the ruling class in many of the so-called "freed nations" sided with German imperialism and fought against the Bolshevik seizure of power. As is often the case, Rosa was ahead of her time in her critique of nationalism. Rosa suffered greatly for her opposition to World War I as an imperialist war, spending the entire duration of the war in jail.

To show the broader reach of her argument, and indeed to creolize her, we will turn to Frantz Fanon's critical analysis in "The Trials and Tribulations of

¹ See Lenin (1917); Cornell (2008).

National Consciousness” in his classic text *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004) and to Lewis Gordon’s recent work on the importance of the distinction between political and moral questions in “Reimagining Liberation” (2018) and his forthcoming book *Fear of Black Consciousness*. Rosa was writing in a specific historical context, and yet her critique of Lenin still has implications for how and why the right of national self-determination must always be put into a larger transnational context.

Rosa Luxemburg was unquestionably a staunch internationalist. Long before current debates on globalization, Rosa understood that capitalism necessarily had a global reach. Therefore, socialism would ultimately have to be global were it to be able to effectively overthrow the exploitation of capitalist relations of production. She elaborates on her argument in her magnum opus *The Accumulation of Capital* (2015 [1913]), in which she argues that industrial capitalism is imperialism. In other words, the central crises of capitalism—the falling rate of profit, underconsumption, and overproduction—cannot be resolved in one nation-state, even the most advanced capitalist one.² Therefore, imperialist domination and all the brutalities of colonialism are inherent in capitalism and make endless war unavoidable as the colonized inevitably begin to fight back.

ON NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION: DISAGREEING WITH LENIN

Rosa’s argument with Lenin on the right to self-determination as a rigid moral formula has to be put into a broader context. She understands Marxist theory’s approach to political questions, such as a struggle of nations for independence, as questions of the class struggle and not simply as abstract moral decrees, even in the form of rights. Ultimately for Lenin, the overthrow of the feudal relations of the Czarist regime would necessarily bring in capitalism. Throughout his later work, he vacillates about whether it is necessary to go through the capitalist form before moving to socialism. As a result, for him the recognition of national self-determination is part and parcel of overthrowing feudalism and moving to normal capitalist relations, as this would set the stage for socialist revolution. Rosa may at times have thought in terms of stages, and, like Marxists of her time, that would mean that revolution would have to pass through something like capitalist relations of production before it could move to socialist revolution. However, for Rosa, history always has

² To be fair to Lenin, he was also an internationalist who knew that socialism could not survive in an isolated Soviet Union, and therefore pinned his hopes on the German revolution that resulted in Rosa’s murder and to the revolution’s defeat.

surprises, so she is ambiguous about whether or not a revolution can move directly to socialism.

In a direct polemic with her, Lenin writes the following:

Therefore, the tendency of every national movement is towards the formation of *national states*, under which these requirements of profound economic factors drive toward this goal, and therefore, for the whole of Western Europe, nay, for the entire civilized world, the national state is *typical* and normal for the capitalist period. (1972)

Of course, her rebellion against what she sees as a form of moralism in Lenin's proclamation of the right of national self-determination should in no way lead us to think that Rosa denies the importance of moral ideals for socialism. What she rejects is turning moralism into abstract policy decrees without looking at the context of the class struggle. Of course, for Lenin, the underlying Marxist point is that the development of national states is necessary for capitalism, but for Rosa the actual program of national self-determination is moralistic, even if for Lenin its underlying importance is about what it means to overthrow the feudalism of Czarist Russia. To quote Lenin, "At present, we must deal with Rosa Luxemburg's effort to 'dismiss' the inescapable conclusion that profound economic factors underlie the urge towards a national state" (1972). Lenin completely misunderstands Rosa when he argues that she rejects the economic realities of nationalist movements. It is precisely because she recognizes the class struggle within those movements that she sees the complexity of when and how revolutionary Marxists should support struggles for national self-determination.

Yet, as we also will see, part of the paradox for Rosa is that, at the very moment that Lenin is arguing that the dictatorship of the proletariat need not enforce democracy and does not necessarily include rights, Rosa is arguing the opposite: that socialist democracy is the most sweeping form of participatory democracy that human beings damaged by exploitation could possibly create, and that this would demand protection of constitutional rights. As I have written earlier, Lenin seems to be defending an abstract conception of rights at the very moment that the Bolsheviks are denying rights and juridical freedoms in the name of the dictatorship of the proletariat. For Rosa, you can never forget about the class struggle, even in the revolutionary overthrow of colonialism.

As a strong internationalist, but also one completely committed to the struggle against imperialism and militarism, she also tells us,

The contradiction that is so obvious here is all the harder to understand since the democratic forms of political life in each land, as we shall see, actually involve the most valuable and even indispensable foundations of socialist policy,

whereas the famous “right of self-determination of nations” is nothing but hollow, petty bourgeois phraseology and humbug.

Indeed, what is this right supposed to signify? It belongs to the ABC of socialist policy that socialism opposes every form of oppression, including also that of one nation by another. (Luxemburg, 1970: 49)

For Rosa, given her analysis of capitalism as imperialism, one of the first moves of a socialist party that takes power is that the entire munitions industry would come to an end. There would be no more war because there would be no more capitalism. The barbarism of our current world—the endless insistence on more and more deadly weapons—is for Rosa inherent in capitalist domination. Famously, she opposed World War I and was imprisoned for its duration in conditions of isolation until she was freed by the German revolution. I cannot emphasize this enough, because hers was not only a lonely voice but one that ultimately led to her murder because she was militantly opposed to anti-imperialist domination of other nations and saw that as the only justification for the German Socialist Party advocating support for the war.

We also have to recognize that Rosa was one of the first European thinkers to concretely discuss what colonization meant in southern Africa and to understand colonization in all of its brutality. In *The Accumulation of Capital*, Rosa explores in-depth the complex relationship between the English, the Afrikaners, and the Black population that made up well over 85 percent of the populace. Her sources were the anthropology of the nineteenth century, so she of course uses seemingly outdated phrases, like speaking of primitive economies of both the Afrikaners as nomadic farmers and of the Black majority as having developed forms of communal living as well as simple commodity production. But Rosa strongly argues against the civilizing power of capitalism and argues that indigenous forms of life should be protected and not slaughtered. There are alternative ways of living together that do not need to be brought into Euro-modernity by capitalism. This idea that indigenous forms of life do not have to be civilized by capitalism is part of her debate with Lenin.

Rosa is the first to discuss how the discovery of the gold mines in South Africa completely changed the relationship between the British and the Afrikaners. They both escalated the violence against Black independent farmers and handicraft workers so as to force them into the gold mines as indentured servants. Many years later, Professor Sampie Terreblanche would describe the 354 years of unfree Black labor in more contemporary economic terms.³ To Rosa’s credit, she describes the absolute devastation of Black

³ See generally Terreblanche (2002).

workers as they were, chained to the trains of the goldmine as the only way to survive economically.⁴ Rosa speaks to the horrible reality of the break-up of communities and the complete undermining of any form of African independence from capitalist exploitation:

The old opposition between the British and the Dutch has now been superseded by the new one between capital and labor: both nations have sealed their touching fraternal union in the new state with the civil and political disenfranchisement of the population of five million black workers by one million white exploiters. It was not only the Blacks of the Boer republic who emerged empty-handed from this process; those of the Cape Colony, whom the British government had previously granted equal rights, also found these partially withdrawn from them. This noble endeavor, which crowned the imperialist policy of the Conservatives with a brazen show of force, was accomplished by the Liberal Party to the frenzied applause of the "liberal cretins of Europe," who felt great pride in the moving gesture with which the U.K. granted the handful of whites in South Africa full self-government and freedom, hailing it as proof of the enduring creative power and greatness of liberalism in the U.K. (2015: 301–302)

We will now turn to the contemporary significance of Rosa's understanding of how the accumulation of capital necessarily generates racism, as there needs to be a set of workers who are beyond the so-called capitalist "fair" labor exchange to provide capital with super-exploitation that is not available to them in the metropole of Europe. Her deep understanding of the brutality of colonization, however, was not the focus of her organizing efforts. For her, the job for the European proletariat was to end European militarism and therefore, of course, the imperialist domination of Europe over other nation-states of the world. Rosa was a woman of her time, even as an outsider to conventional definitions of the "European" as a Polish Jewess, yet she still spoke of the proletariat as a potentially unified revolutionary class. As she tells us in her article "The Socialization of Society," "Naturally the entire war and munitions industries must be abolished since a socialist society does not need murder weapons and, instead, the valuable materials and human labor used in them must be employed for useful products" (2004: 347).

No one fought harder than Rosa to wake up the "Sleeping Beauty" of the European masses, to borrow Frantz Fanon's famous phrase, to the fight against imperial militarism. As Fanon writes,

⁴ Hugh Masekela, the renowned jazz musician, later embodied in his music the trains taking displaced Black workers to the gold mines in "Stimela."

This colossal task, which consists of reintroducing man into the world, man in his totality, will be achieved with the crucial help of the European masses who would do well to confess that they have often rallied behind the position of our common masters on colonial issues. In order to do this, the European masses must first of all decide to wake up, put on their thinking caps and stop playing the irresponsible game of Sleeping Beauty. (2004: 62)

Indeed, she gave her life for that struggle and would never have been murdered if the class struggle had not begun in earnest in Germany under her leadership and that of Karl Liebknecht.

Let us return once again to Rosa's own argument with Lenin against his rigid formula of the right of self-determination of nations that for Rosa had unquestionably been oppressed by the Czarist empire. Rosa's argument against Lenin, in a profound sense, has to do with his reduction of right of self-determination to an abstract moralistic decree that came from the Bolshevik central committee, often when there were no actual movements for national independence but instead struggles for proletarian revolution. Let's take the example of Ukraine, one that Rosa herself emphasizes. To quote Rosa,

At the beginning of the century, before the tomfoolery of "Ukrainian nationalism" with its silver rubles and its "Universals" and Lenin's hobby of an "independent Ukraine" had been invented, the Ukraine was the stronghold of the Russian Revolutionary movement. From there, from Rostov, from Odessa, from the Donetz region, flowed out the first lava-streams of the revolution (as early as 1902-04) which kindled all South Russia into a sea of flame, thereby preparing the uprising of 1905. The same thing was repeated in the present revolution in which the South Russian proletariat supplied the picked troops of the proletarian phalanx. Poland and the Baltic lands have been since 1905 the mightiest and most dependable hearths of revolution, and in them the socialist proletariat has played an outstanding role. (1970: 52)

As Rosa explains to us, many of the nations who chose to separate from Russia after the Bolsheviks took power did not do so because there was a people's struggle for national independence. Indeed, the revolutionary proletariat of Ukraine was broken by the reactionary forces put into power that separated Ukraine from the overall revolution in Russia. This did not just happen in Ukraine, but in other so-called "freed countries" in which the bourgeoisie joined with German imperialism against the Bolshevik revolution. Again, to quote Rosa on the reactionary basis of the so-called "national struggle":

The Bolsheviks were to be taught to their own great hurt and that of revolution, that under the rule of capitalism there is no self-determination of peoples, that in

a class society each class of the nation strives to “determine itself” in a different fashion, and that, for the bourgeois classes, the standpoint of national freedom is fully subordinated to that of class rule. The Finnish bourgeoisie, like the Ukrainian bourgeoisie, were unanimous in preferring the violent rule of Germany to national freedom, if the latter should be bound up with Bolshevism. (1970: 50-51)

THE DANGER OF ABSTRACT MORALISM IN NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY

The actual decree of national self-determination was in some instances a strategic disaster for the Bolsheviks; however, Rosa's own point is not simply one of strategy, but that national self-determination has to take into account the class struggle that does not pit class against anti-black racism. This political disagreement over the Bolshevik central committee's decrees of self-determination has to do with a much more sweeping critique of Lenin and Trotsky and their notion of party centralism. For Lenin, in his famous tract “One Step Forward, Two Steps Back,” which he wrote in 1904, the failure of the proletariat and the peasants in the rebellions that swept across Russia and other of the oppressed nations of the Czarist empire at that time was that they simply did not have the kind of harsh revolutionary discipline that they needed nor did they have the theory of what was to be done. For Lenin, the lesson of these revolutions is that there needs to be a democratic centralist party in which the central committee would be the brains of the party and the cadre of the party would be its limbs carrying out decrees. For Rosa, this means that mistakes like the abstract formula of the right to self-determination are the inevitable result of the party being more and more estranged from mass movements.

For Rosa, the deeper problem is then that, for Lenin, the party has to separate itself off from the revolutionary masses and give them orders to control them. Rosa would certainly have said that that mistake is at the heart of Lenin's democratic centralism. Years later, Fanon puts it very succinctly, with his usual eloquence, that in the course of revolutionary decolonizing struggles, “People are no longer a herd and do not need to be driven” (2004: 127). For Rosa, the party is always part of the revolutionary masses, learning from the struggles that develop and theorizing from within the knowledge of the streets. As she tells us against Lenin, “Let us speak plainly. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee” (1970: 108).

For Rosa, Marxist theory works precisely in a dialectical manner with those historical tasks at hand, so that there are no ready-made answers, but only the ability to learn from the actual struggles of the people. Hers is what I am going to call a “struggle perspective,” or what, later, the Afro-Caribbean

philosopher Paget Henry (2009) will call “creative realism,” in which theorists of the party strive to keep up with the innovations of the actual struggles that they themselves should participate in. Fanon, writing from within a revolutionary struggle for decolonization, underscores the importance of the relationship of the revolutionary party to the people it supposedly “leads.” To quote Fanon, “In an underdeveloped country the party must be organized in such a way that it is not content merely to stay in touch with the masses. The party must be the direct expression of the masses” (2004: 130).

The irony for Rosa is that, at the same time that the Bolsheviks were drastically curtailing the democratic rights of the peoples in Russia, they insisted on the abstract moralistic right of self-determination, even though all the other basic rights were drastically—if not completely—repressed in the name of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Indeed, as she tells us of socialism and its relation to democracy,

It has as its prerequisite a number of measures of force—against property, etc. The negative, the tearing down, can be decreed; the building up, the positive, cannot. New territory. A thousand problems. Only experience is capable of correcting and opening new ways. Only unobstructed, effervescing life falls to light creative force, itself corrects all the mistaken attempts. (1970: 70)

For Rosa, “The only way to a rebirth is the school of public life itself, the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion” (1970: 71).

Once we understand that Rosa’s argument with Lenin is about the formulaic and abstract right of self-determination, we can grasp how it is not national revolutionary struggles per se that she rejects, but the way in which the Bolsheviks decreed national self-determination. The distance of the party from the actual revolutionary aspirations of the proletariat was what led to the disaster of many of the “new nations” joining the side of the imperialist war, and therefore bringing on even further hardship to the new revolution.

But no one was a stronger supporter of the Bolsheviks in their daring to seize state power than Rosa Luxemburg. As she writes,

It is not a matter of this or that secondary question of tactics but of the capacity for action of the proletariat, the strength to act, the will to power of socialism as such. In this, Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the *first*, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world; they are still the *only ones* up to now who can cry with Hutten: “I have dared!” (1970: 80)

Her criticism is that Lenin and Trotsky confuse necessity under conditions of extreme hardship with principles that, as she puts it, pit democracy against the

dictatorship of the proletariat. For her, that dictatorship would be a dictatorship of the class and would involve the widest forms of democratic participation; while for Lenin, bourgeois rule would simply be replaced by proletarian rule, but the basic organization of society, including in the factories, would remain the same. For Rosa, that is fundamentally to misunderstand the radical transformation of all forms of society that a truly socialist revolution would demand. As she tells us,

Far from being a sum of ready-made prescriptions which have only to be applied, the practical realization of socialism as an economic, social and juridical system is something which lies completely hidden in the mists of the future (1970: 69).

Despite his insistence on the right to national self-determination, the profound irony is that Lenin himself did not believe that socialism in any country alone was sustainable. He desperately hoped that the German revolution that led to Rosa's murder would succeed, and that this would lead to a sweep of revolutions throughout Europe.

ROSA LUXEMBURG'S CRITIQUE OF BOURGEOIS NATIONALISM READ WITH FANON

Rosa would seemingly find an ally in Frantz Fanon here as well. We need to remember that Rosa Luxemburg was murdered on January 19, 1919. She did not live to see the global liberation struggles against colonialism that broke out in all their strength after World War II. Rosa was a theorist, of course, but she was also a polemicist, and some of her writing against Polish nationalism has been picked up as a theory of all national self-determination. This, for me, mistakes the way Rosa's struggle perspective entered her discussion of national liberation. One can only speculate about what she would have thought of the liberation struggles throughout Africa and Latin America. But given her masterwork *The Accumulation of Capital*, I am going to dare to speculate that she would have cheered them on because for Rosa, when the masses rose up there was only one place to be, and that was at the heart of the struggle. Some would say there are differences between Rosa and Frantz Fanon. Of course there are, because they wrote in different periods of time. But I want to do something else, which is to show how close her critique of bourgeois nationalism is to Franz Fanon's, both to creolize Rosa and to open up Fanon to the absolute necessity of economic revolution in decolonial struggles.

Fanon also warns of the dangers of a national bourgeoisie, whose call for independence remains separate from sweeping policies of economic transformation. To quote Fanon,

We have seen that the objective of the nationalist parties from a certain period onward is geared strictly along national lines. They mobilize the people with the slogan of independence, and anything else is left to the future. When these parties are questioned on their economic agenda for the nation or the regime they propose to establish they prove incapable of giving an answer because, in fact, they do not have a clue about the economy of their own country. (2004: 99)

Fanon is eloquent in how he argues that “the apotheosis of independence becomes the curse of independence” (2004: 54). And why is this the case for Fanon? As he tells us, the bloated European powers, rich on the exploitation of colonialism, grant independence to countries that have been systematically impoverished and their infrastructure destroyed. It is, as he tells us, a form of mockery given the horrors of colonial domination: take your independence and also take the consequences. To quote Fanon,

Independence does not bring a change of direction. The same old groundnut harvest, cocoa harvest, and olive harvest. Likewise the traffic of commodities goes unchanged. No industry is established in the country. We continue to ship raw materials, we continue to grow produce for Europe and pass for specialists of unfinished products. (2004: 100)

So the question of what Europe owes the Global South and the redistribution of wealth globally therefore has to be part of a program for transformation. There were many great experiments in Africa that tried to develop ethical visions of socialism—often against forms of bourgeois nationalism—but their struggles have yet to be fully documented and understood.⁵ Even these great visionary leaders, as Fanon points out, often ended up repaying their debts to the European colonizers and at the same time demanding and getting hard work and devotion from the masses of people who supported them as leaders of the struggle against colonialism. But without infrastructure and without capital, without technical capacities, it is almost impossible for the bourgeoisie to do anything more than subject themselves to continuing economic imperialism. Financial violence is therefore crucial to Fanon’s own thinking about what violence has done to the colonized.

Thus, the democratization and discussion of real economic transformation are crucial in Fanon’s understanding of decolonization as a process. Fanon then asks one of the most important questions, which we have perhaps yet to address:

⁵ For an excellent discussion of not just decolonization projects but experiments with remaking the world and what it means to be human in Africa, see Getachew (2019).

In the underdeveloped countries, the bourgeoisie should not find conditions conducive to its existence and fulfillment. In other words, the combined efforts of the masses, regimented by a party, and of keenly conscious intellectuals, armed with revolutionary principles, should bar the way to this useless and harmful bourgeoisie.

The theoretical question, which has been posed for the last fifty years when addressing the history of the underdeveloped countries, i.e., whether the bourgeois phase can be effectively skipped, must be resolved through revolutionary action and not through reasoning. The bourgeois phase in the underdeveloped countries is only justified if the national bourgeoisie is sufficiently powerful, economically and technically, to build a bourgeois society, to create the conditions for developing a sizeable proletariat, to mechanize agriculture, and finally pave the way for a genuine national culture. (2004: 119)

This move to authoritarianism, which has become so much part of our political discussions today of national belonging, is for Fanon rooted in the failure to maintain a vision of economic transformation as crucial to the revolutionary humanism that he always defended. Simply put, there is no decolonization without revolutionary transformation, and therefore questions of political economy must once again be put on the forefront of our agenda. We need to underscore the importance of Fanon's question that we might simply move beyond the bourgeois phase at the time of independence. For Lenin, as we've seen, it is part of normal capitalism to develop nation-states, and therefore the right of national self-determination is what Fanon would call the national bourgeois stage. So Fanon's question of whether or not we can move beyond that stage at the time of a struggle against colonialism remains part of the debate that Rosa had with Lenin so many years ago.

So was Fanon a capitalist or a socialist? It is clear that he was a socialist, as he himself tells us. But even the terms of socialism have to be rethought within the struggle for decolonization and the struggle against anti-black racism. As he tells us,

The basic issue with which we are faced is not the unequivocal choice between socialism and capitalism such as they have been defined by men from different continents and different periods of time. We know, of course, that the capitalist way of life is incapable of allowing us to achieve our national and universal project. Capitalist exploitation, the cartels and monopolies, are the enemies of the underdeveloped countries. On the other hand, the choice of a socialist regime, of a regime entirely devoted to the people, based on the principle that man is the most precious asset, will allow us to progress faster in greater harmony, consequently ruling out the possibility of a caricature of society where a

privileged few hold the reins of political and economic power without a thought for the nation as a whole. (2004: 55–56)

For Fanon and Rosa, economic transformation in the direction of socialism is crucial to decolonization. Therefore, it is not surprising that Fanon’s searing critique of bourgeois nationalism is in line with Rosa’s own profound concerns that Lenin’s moralistic decrees about national self-determination without social and economic change would not liberate the nation. Their arguments are not against liberation from colonialism, but they demand that we look politically at the circumstances in which independence is seized. Fanon tells us, as we have said, that independence could almost be a mockery if the destruction of the colonized left them no resources with which to rebuild their nation. That said, for both Rosa and Fanon, socialism is not a blueprint of moralistic decrees. If socialism lies in the mists of the future, as Rosa argues and Fanon indicates, then we have nothing less than the important task, as daunting as it may seem, to reimagine, as the philosopher Lewis R. Gordon tells us, what liberation means. To quote Gordon, “Liberation *from* is a response to harm; liberation *for* is the rallying of creative resources of possibility” (2018: 21).

Rosa Luxemburg unquestionably wrote from within the metropole of the Global North. However, Rosa is one of the few Marxist thinkers who argues that capitalism necessarily produces racism, as it must foreclose any economy that challenges its domination and declares its independence.⁶ As she puts it, capitalism feeds on alternatives to capitalist economic structures and leaves them in ruins, and these ruins are what force masses of people of color into conditions of what Terreblanche (2002) calls unfree Black labor, indentured servitude, and slavery.⁷ Therefore, capitalism inherently produces racism and racialized humans that fall below the supposed bar of humanity allotted to the unionized white working class. As she so profoundly argues, capitalism demands super-exploitation, and therefore there must be a racialized group that falls below the fair labor exchange of “normal capitalism.”

This is an important insight even today as many who emphasize the class struggle do so against what they disparagingly call “identity politics.” For Rosa, struggles against anti-black racism must be anti-capitalist, and anti-capitalist struggles must be anti-racist. That is the political lesson of *The Accumulation of Capital* and one that is often missed. For many years, the left has been bogged down on whether to privilege class over race. If capitalism, under Rosa’s analysis, necessarily produces racialized beings

⁶ For discussion of whether alternative economic experiments can survive within a capitalist economy, see Luxemburg (2015).

⁷ See generally, Luxemburg (2015, chapters 26–30), where she discusses southern Africa. See also Terreblanche (2002).

in conditions of super-exploitation, to struggle against racism is to struggle against capitalism.

Yet, we cannot expect Rosa, who was writing from within Germany, and earlier Poland, to offer a phenomenological description of the subjective conditions of liberation from colonialism. For that, we turn to thinkers like Frantz Fanon and Lewis Gordon. As I wrote earlier, Rosa was certainly one to respond to Fanon's call that the European masses wake up and join the struggle for the global transformation of capitalism. Fanon, like Rosa, calls for the end of the militarism inevitably associated with capitalist rule and its financial violence. As he writes,

It is our duty, however, to tell and explain to the capitalist countries that they are wrong to think the fundamental issue of our time is the war between the socialist regime and them. An end must be put to this cold war that gets us nowhere, the nuclear arms race must be stopped and the underdeveloped regions must receive generous investments and technical aid. The fate of the world depends on the response given to this question. (2004: 61)

National liberation is, for Fanon as it is for Rosa, always tied in with thoroughgoing economic transformation. He is, as is well known, an advocate of the necessity of the affirmative armed struggle to end the rule of the colonizer, and that meant the seizure of state power. Even if the armed struggle demands certain forms of centralization, Fanon is more than wary of these concessions; as necessary as they are in revolutionary struggle against colonialism, they always carry a certain price. This is why he at times warns that those who led the struggle are not necessarily the best to lead the transformation of a new revolutionary decolonized world. Therefore, he critiques the turn to a centralized authoritarian party, as this kind of party could not undo the terrible dehumanization and racism that colonialism brought with it. His critique of the moralism of so-called great almost mythic national leaders is searing. As he writes,

A bourgeois leadership of the underdeveloped countries confines the national consciousness to a sterile formalism. Only the massive commitment by men and women to judicious and productive tasks gives form and substance to this consciousness. It is then that flags and government buildings cease to be the symbols of the nation. The nation deserts the false glitter of the capital and takes refuge in the interior where it receives life and energy. The living expression of the nation is the collective consciousness in motion of the entire people. It is the enlightened and coherent praxis of the men and women. The collective forging of a destiny implies undertaking responsibility on a truly historical scale. (2004: 144)

If Rosa were around at the time, we could imagine her jumping up and down with enthusiasm as Fanon writes, "If nationalism is not explained, enriched,

and deepened, if it does not very quickly turn into a social and political consciousness, into humanism, then it leads to a dead end” (Ibid).

Fanon emphasizes throughout his work that the struggle is a process. It is not a morally purified object that the great leader can uphold for his people. He writes,

The leader pacifies the people. Years after independence, incapable of offering the people anything of substance, incapable of actually opening up their future, of launching the people into the task of nation building and hence their own development, the leader can be heard churning out the history of independence and recalling the united front of the liberation struggle. Refusing to break up the national bourgeoisie, the leader asks the people to plunge back into the past and drink in the epic that led to independence. (2004: 114)

I am using the word “his” deliberately, because these leaders have mostly been men who often aspire to the ideal of European notions of phallic white masculinity. As Fanon writes,

[The national bourgeoisie] mimics the Western bourgeoisie in the negative and decadent aspects without having accomplished the initial phases of exploration and invention that are the assets of this Western bourgeoisie whatever the circumstances. In its early days the national bourgeoisie of the colonial countries identified with the last stages of the Western bourgeoisie. Don’t believe it is taking short cuts. In fact it starts at the end. It’s already senile, having experienced neither the exuberance nor the brazen determination of youth and adolescence. (2004: 101)

They made themselves into myths, struggle leaders who had to be worshipped and respected for the moral authority that they once had in the armed struggle. To quote Fanon again,

No leader, whatever his worth, can replace the will of the people, and the national government, before concerning itself with international prestige, must first restore dignity to all citizens, furnish their minds, fill their eyes with human things and develop a human landscape for the sake of its enlightened and sovereign inhabitants. (2004: 144)

The mythic leader claims all his actions as righteous and therefore moral. Lewis Gordon warns us not only of the dangers of this kind of leadership, but of the importance of always emphasizing what I earlier called a struggle perspective, or what Henry calls creative realism, in the struggle for decolonization itself. To quote Gordon,

Without thinking about what decoloniality is for, it becomes a fetish and collapses into familiar patterns of religiosity and its accompanying moralistic investments. For instance, fetishism and moralism appeal to models of purity. This means, in effect, the elimination of all that is not consistent with preferred avowed systems or those who embody them. The effect is a form of puritanism that collapses purification into a moral ideal...this inward search turns away from political conditions of political problems—because politics is too messy to serve as criteria—and moves toward a quest for the moral subordination of political life. That this resulting moralism is compatible with neoliberalism, which privileges the moral individual over political subjects, in effect leaves structural inequalities intact. (2018: 15)

For Fanon, this struggle is always about revolutionary humanism. In two of his recent works, “Reimagining Liberation” and *Fear of Black Consciousness*, Gordon reminds us of the important difference between moralistic righteousness as a form of truth and political responsibility.⁸ As we have seen, Rosa’s criticism of Lenin is that the decree of national self-determination had become moralistic. It was no longer a Marxist-informed notion of struggle, for, in many of the countries that separated from Russia, there was no battle for national independence but rather involvement in the proletarian revolution that the Bolsheviks bravely led. Gordon’s distinction is extremely important in understanding decolonization as a political process but as one that does not in any way deny moral and ethical ideals as a guiding light of the struggle. But they are ideals, not truths. Rosa, as we have seen, did not speak from within the process of decolonization; she spoke of the responsibility of the proletariat in the metropole to end the armaments that maintained the primitive accumulation of capital. She called on the masses of the German proletariat to wake up. Because she did so, as I’ve already written, she spent World War I in jail and was ultimately murdered.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEWIS GORDON’S DISTINCTION BETWEEN MORALISM AND POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY

To return to Lewis Gordon’s distinction between moralism and political responsibility and his argument that *Black Consciousness* is political, we need to remember that, if we turn decolonization or socialism into moralistic decrees, we undermine the political difficulty of reimagining what it would

⁸ This does not mean that we reject moral images of freedom, as long as we understand them as aesthetic ideals that can always be challenged. See also, Cornell (2008).

actually mean to radically transform our world. Gordon, like Rosa, emphasizes the importance of participatory politics as the only way to move toward decolonization. To quote Gordon,

Any state and society premised on the degradation of a people must block the resources through which such people could appear as people. Waging war against their inclusion, it will also do so against anyone who assists them. Its goals become total. Its focus becomes rule, and as that dominates, there is something that must be suppressed. That dangerous possibility, Biko argued, is politics. (forthcoming, 159)

Gordon's reference to Steve Biko's argument⁹ is extremely important because Biko's argument was often reduced by whites to an immoral hatred of anyone who was not Black. Therefore, supposedly, it was a moralistic discourse and one that was white-baiting and full of hatred toward whites. Gordon turns this whole phenomenological understanding of Black Consciousness around. Black Consciousness was indeed a political movement and it was one involved in political struggle. In Gordon's reading of Biko—and I agree with him—Black Consciousness called on all those who saw racism as fundamentally a form of anti-humanism to struggle against any forms of racial exclusion.¹⁰ The struggle to be included as human and to thereby redefine human being is, for Gordon, political by definition. This does not deny the need for moral and ethical ideals, as long as they are understood as ideals. It is that call to political struggle that evokes the fear of Black Consciousness among whites. To rebel is revolutionary, in that it demands the reshaping of the world and a new way of being human together.¹¹ As Gordon writes,

What else is Black consciousness, then, but the mature demand for the political responsibility or commitment of overcoming the impasse posed by the false dilemma of the zero-sum claim of all for some and nothing for the rest? What else is Black consciousness but the ongoing question of and struggle for dignity and freedom as breaking this false dilemma? (forthcoming, 182)

If, as Rosa tells us, Bolshevism could raise the question of socialism but not solve it, then it is undoubtedly true of decolonization that it cannot take place in one country alone. And yet we are called to action, and it is our political responsibility to reimagine not only liberation but also other ideals, such as freedom and dignity. We have to begin to join the struggles where

⁹ See Biko (2002).

¹⁰ Of course, this would apply to gender and sexual identities as well.

¹¹ See generally, Getachew (2019).

we are located, as well as showing solidarity with the struggles of oppressed people throughout the world. That is why Marx and Engels started the “First International.” There has to be solidarity among peoples.

I leave Gordon with the last word about what it means to struggle for a socialism that remains in the mists of the future and a liberation that is yet put in our hands as a political responsibility. I believe Gordon profoundly reflects the spirit of Rosa Luxemburg's life and death when he states, “In effect, the message, politically understood, is this: learn we hope, but try we must” (forthcoming, 32).

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Chapter 3

Against a Single History, for a Revaluation of Power

Luxemburg, James, and a Decolonial Critique of Political Economy¹

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In her 1903 essay “Stagnation and Progress in Marxism,” Rosa Luxemburg writes: “The scrupulous endeavor to keep ‘within the bounds of Marxism’ may at times have been just as disastrous to the integrity of the thought process as has been the other extreme—the complete repudiation of the Marxist outlook” (Luxemburg, 1970: 107). Luxemburg thought that historical materialism as a method and science was as “unelaborated and sketchy as it was when it was first formulated by its creators” (Luxemburg, 1970: 108). She did not think that the lack of progress was due to its “rigidity or completeness” as some have thought. Instead, she urges us to “remember that each epoch forms its own human material; that if in any period there is genuine need for theoretical exponents, the period will create the forces requisite for the satisfaction of that need” (Luxemburg, 1970: 108). Turning Marx’s work, and Marxism generally, into a “completed” and totally worked out theory of the capitalist mode of production not only misreads Marx, but it has caused serious theoretical and practical errors. From rigid stadial theories of history and economic development to the idea that economists in Hungary could coherently “plan”

¹ Big thanks go to Jane Gordon and Drucilla Cornell for their helpful comments and editing of this essay, though any errors are of course mine alone. The title of this essay is inspired by the following quote from Édouard Glissant: “The struggle against a single History for the cross-fertilization of histories means repossessing both a true sense of one’s time and identity: proposing in an unprecedented way a revaluation of power” (Glissant, 1999: 93).

the economy of Guyana, twentieth-century history is littered with missteps based in fossilized and ahistorical applications of so-called Marxism.

When it comes to the colonial situation, the mistake of crudely “applying” Marxist economic analysis, as if it offers a complete “theory of everything,” has dire consequences. Frantz Fanon writes in *Wretched of the Earth*:

in the colonies the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure. The cause is effect: you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to deal with the colonial problem. (Fanon, 2004: 5)

Fanon here highlights the fact that while Marx was innovative and indispensable to theorizing developments of capitalism, as it is tied to imperialism and colonialism, the categories of his analysis will need to be stretched and further developed with respect to the colonial situation and the specific contradictions given the coloniality of modernity. On this point, Luxemburg would have to be in agreement with Fanon—each epoch forms its own “human material” to meet its theoretical and practical needs, and the twentieth century was a turning point for international decolonial struggles able to produce theorists like Fanon and the Trinidadian Marxist C.L.R. James.

Given Fanon’s assessment of Marxism, what then needs to be “stretched” in Luxemburg’s work and what Marxist categories is she already “stretching”? What is or is not complicit with the coloniality of modernity in Luxemburg’s critique of political economy? How was Luxemburg shaped by her epoch to meet its theoretical and practical needs? Luxemburg, more than most Marxists of her generation, took up the challenge of “stretching” Marxist categories and analysis to better illuminate the interrelations of imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, and militarism that plagued her time. At the same time, while her analysis left theoretical space for a more developed theory of racial capitalism as Fanon, James, and the Black radical tradition more generally, would develop, Luxemburg tended to emphasize the suffering of the colonized over their historic capacity for revolutionary action.

Ironically, if we take the openness and unfinished character of Marx’s method and work seriously, this is not reason to criticize or diminish the contributions of Luxemburg. It is instead reason to learn what we can from her and from subsequent decolonial theorists so that we can develop the necessary theoretical analyses for our own day. In what follows, I will situate Luxemburg’s work alongside a discussion of Marx’s method of historical materialism and his critique of political economy, highlighting the ways in which she further develops this critique. Additionally, I will show how she is useful to further developments articulating a *decolonial* critique of political economy that takes seriously the reality and necessity of decolonization so

that there can be a “new history of humanity” (Fanon, 2004: 238.) where the last shall finally become first.

KARL MARX: THE CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE IDEA OF A SINGLE HISTORY

What was revolutionary about Marx’s critique of political economy was its ability to expose what bourgeois political economists mystified: namely, the fetishistic and inherently unstable nature of capital and the fact that it produces its own gravediggers. But some questions remain: What exactly is the locus of capitalism’s instability and *who* are the gravediggers? While there are answers to these questions in Marx’s work, we also should not forget that much of his work is left incomplete—what was accomplished in the three volumes of capital we have today is only a general and partial study of capital.² However, although his work was left unfinished, in this section, I will highlight the openness and flexibility of Marx’s method as he worked through, and eventually beyond, the Eurocentric conception of a single history of “progress” in terms of political, social, and economic development.

Marx proved the untenability of capitalism *metaphysically* as he developed a new humanism in his writings on alienation, and *analytically* as he traced the logic, fetishistic development, and accumulation of capital in *Capital*. However, the division between these two modes of argumentation is never wholly separated. Marx’s analysis in *Capital* hinges on his Hegelian account of the dialectics of freedom and necessity and, as I will show, a particular philosophy of history. How various post-Marx Marxists will articulate where the metaphysical argument ends and the analytical one begins varies widely. One way of conceptualizing this is by thinking through how theorists differently make the division between what is historically contingent and what is necessarily invariable given Marx’s arguments about the nature of human freedom. A serious charge against Marx and Marxism has been that its method is Eurocentric because it posits the contingent developments in the rise of capitalism in England as if they were a universal guide for every nation-state on its way to socialism. It is true that many Marxists in Europe, especially in Luxemburg’s time, did think that way. But insofar as Marxists did this, I argue that they made the metaphysical cut incorrectly in their assessment of Marx’s work.³

² Given the notes and outlines we have from Marx, Enrique Dussel has pointed out that the three volumes of capital we have today only represent 1/72 of Marx’s total project (Dussel, 2001: 211).

³ Though there is precedent in Marx and Engels’ work to make this mistake—most famously in their analysis of historical development as it appears in the “Communist Manifesto.” However, Vijay

What comes from historical material analysis is not meant to represent static or completed sets of eternal metaphysical truths, but rather its findings are meant to reflect concepts developed according to an *organic* analysis⁴ of concrete developments tied to a time and place. To elevate that analysis to the level of pre-set stages of development is to make a major philosophical, historical, and political mistake. Rather, as Marx made explicit in Part 8 of *Capital, Volume I* in the section titled “So-Called Primitive Accumulation,”⁵ “the history of this expropriation, in different countries, assumes different aspects, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different periods. In *England alone*, which we take as our example, has it the classic form” (Marx, 1992a: 876). What Marx is trying to make clear here is that his study of the initial, or as he terms “classic” development of capitalism, is *particular* to a specific time and place. In this case, an industrializing England engaged in many years of exploitation of people and land both within and without the nation-state through the enclosure of its commons and colonization. In the French edition of *Capital*, Marx expands this statement to say that “all the other countries of Western Europe are following the same course.”⁶ Marx did not believe his account of capitalism’s development, and its transition to socialism, was something that could be articulated in a single “universal” grand narrative of development⁷—even if many post-Marx Marxists (and even his contemporaries) would make this claim.

Even if *Capital* was largely based on an analysis of the development of capitalism in England, Marx understood that centuries of colonization and the trans-Atlantic slave trade were the conditions of possibility for the rise of Western European capitalism. Marx recognized slavery as something *not* uncharacteristic of modern European but rather the *foundation* of its colonial wealth. As Marx writes in his 1847 response to utopian socialist Proudhon: “Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry. It is slavery that gave the colonies their value; it is the colonies that created world trade, and it is world trade that is the precondition of large-scale industry” (Marx, 1992b: 82). While Marx did not fully recognize or theorize the role of race in the development of capitalism—as decolonial and Africana

Prashad argues that their use of the language “backwards” versus “developed” may not be as chauvinistic as it first seems (Prashad, 2019: 21).

⁴ Marx’s method of “organic” concept development, very much based in Hegelian logic, will be discussed in more depth later in the section.

⁵ It is unfortunate that *ursprüngliche Akkumulation* has been translated as “primitive accumulation” when the term “primitive” has such a racist and paternalistic tone that is not in the German word *ursprüngliche*—which merely means “original.”

⁶ While this addition has not made it into any English editions of *Capital*, Marx does quote this passage in his 1881 draft letters to Vera Zasulich (Hudis, 1983: 41).

⁷ See Anderson (2016: chapter 5). For an interesting critique of Anderson’s reading of Marx’s late writings see Araujo (2018).

approaches to political economy have proven to be essential⁸—he recognized that slavery was essential to the development and continuation of capitalism.⁹ Marx understood that the relatively better position of those in “wage-slavery” in England was immediately tied to chattel slavery in the colonies: “the veiled slavery of the wage-earners in Europe needed, for its pedestal, slavery pure and simple in the New World” (Marx, 1992a: 833).

In his 1881 writings to Russian revolutionary Vera Zasulich, and in his responses to N. Mikhailovski in 1878, Marx further clarified his position against universal theories of economic “stages.” While some argued that Russia must “pass through” a capitalist stage before developing a socialist revolution, Marx saw revolutionary potential in the Russian communes. Marx writes to Zasulich:

To save the Russian commune, there must be a Russian Revolution . . . if the revolution takes place in time, if it concentrates all its forces . . . to ensure the unfettered rise of the rural commune, the latter will soon develop as a regenerating element of Russian society and an element of superiority over the countries enslaved by the capitalist regime. (Marx, 1983: 116–7)

While some have said that Marxist political and economic analysis overly prioritizes “proletarian struggle” *qua* waged labor, here we see that Marx makes this claim only in heavily industrialized contexts. Here Marx shows his understanding of the concrete situation of Russia as he recognizes the potential of a socialist revolution coming from the further development of rural communal life *against* proletarianization. If possible, this would be preferable to furthering capitalist developments in Russia that would further divorce human beings from the means and conditions to achieve self-determination.

In response to N. Mikhailovski who asserted, “Marx was expounding a ‘historico-philosophical theory of Universal Progress’” (Marx, 1983: 57), Marx writes:

The chapter on primitive accumulation claims no more than to trace the path by which, in Western Europe, the capitalist order of economy emerged from the womb of the feudal economic order. At the end of the chapter, the historical tendency of production is said to consist in the fact that it “begets its own negation with the inexorability presiding over the metamorphosis of nature” . . . that capitalist property, effectively already resting upon a collective mode of production, cannot but be transformed into social property . . . Now, what application

⁸ For more on Africana political economy and its analysis of racial capitalism see Henry (2015).

⁹ For a detailed account of Marx’s understanding of slavery in the United States see Ken Lawrence (1976).

to Russia could my critic make of this historical sketch? Only this: if Russia is tending to become a capitalist nation like the nations of Western Europe—and in the last few years she has been at great pains to achieve this—she will not succeed without first transforming a large part of her peasants into proletarians; subsequently, once brought into the fold of the capitalist regime, she will pass under its pitiless laws like any other profane peoples. That is all. (Marx, 1983: 135–6)

All that can be determined about Russia vis-à-vis Western Europe is, if it wants to develop along similar capitalist lines, many peasants must be proletarianized. This is not to say that Marx thought this *should* happen—but that the capitalist developments in Western Europe were particular to its conditions. Marx concludes his letter, “*success will never come with the master-key of a general historico-philosophical theory, whose supreme virtue consists in being supra-historical*” (Marx, 1983: 136, emphasis added).

As Luxemburg noted, Marx’s analysis of capital is an unfinished outline—it is not supposed to operate as a stadial theory of history and economic development using the particular history of Western Europe as the measuring stick of progress universally. That historical materialism as developed by Marx is avowedly open to change and development based on lived realities is precisely what makes it especially useful and powerful. Against liberal European and settler anthropologists analyzing developments of non-Western European peoples *against* the history of Western Europe and positing the requirement of colonial force for their development, Marx understood these mechanistic and Eurocentric accounts to be inimical to actually understanding history. For Marx, history is made by the *organic self-determination* of groups of people where the relations between people are not externally nor arbitrarily related. Rather, social organization is aimed toward the social reproduction of some way of life for some social totality.

“Organic” here is meant to connote a distinction against mechanistic or merely reactionary understandings of development and to highlight a dialectical perspective. Historical self-determination of a social group, for Marx, is not something reducible to reactions to external forces, but rather is an outcome of creative responses to external conditions arising from internally and collectively derived principles.¹⁰ This is the foundation for Marx’s normative claims about the illegitimacy and barbarism of colonialism and capitalism. Imperial capital has *attempted* to obliterate the conditions of possibility for a global majority to be history making. It does this by reducing the quality of living conditions to the bare minimum and increasing work time to the maximum. However, what I find to be a strength of Marx’s account is that

¹⁰ This particular conception of “organic” is inherited from Hegel, and for its social dimensions, largely from the *Philosophy of Right*.

because of the nature of humanity's *species-being* [*Gattungswesen*],¹¹ as long as human life exists, human history-making capacities can never be totally obliterated. In contradistinction to Eurocentric Social Darwinism, Marx was developing an analysis of history that avoids a universal narrative demanding isomorphism between narratives. Basing history in the *self-determination* of peoples means there are as many "selves" determining history as there are people with histories. This is why Marx would criticize Henry Lewis Morgan's theory of societal evolution as a theory only thinking in terms of abstract external forces—as if history was not the coming together of both subjective and objective conditions—and he would further criticize Morgan for using Western Europe as the only locus of history.¹²

LUXEMBURG WITH AND BEYOND MARX: IMPERIALISM, COLONIALISM, MILITARISM, AND CAPITALISM

While Luxemburg would take up many of the positive aspects of Marx's work, she would not always be so careful to avoid the stadial theory of history characteristic of the Second International. For example, in her unfinished textbook *Introduction to Political Economy* written for the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) party school, she follows suit with Engels and the anthropologists Henry Lewis Morgan, Henry Sumner Maine, and Maxim Kovalevsky, positing a transhistorical concept of "primitive communism."¹³ Contra Engels, Luxemburg, and the Second International, Marx was much more critical of these colonial bourgeois anthropologists in his *Ethnological Notebooks*.¹⁴ As Lawrence Krader writes, Marx had developed well beyond his early remarks in the *Communist Manifesto* juxtaposing "prehistoric" and

¹¹ For Marx (following Hegel), humans reproduce themselves, their communities, and ultimately the species *consciously*—which is a major difference between humans and non-human living beings. While it is true that plants and animals reproduce for the continuation of their species in an abstract sense, they do this *unconsciously*—each individual is only largely conscious (if conscious at all) of their immediate situation and their immediate needs. Because humans have a second order awareness of how their actions and their needs connect them to their whole species, it makes them the kind of being with *history*—where history articulates the different ways that humans have socially produced and reproduced themselves. As Marx and Engels write in *The Holy Family*, "History is *nothing but* the activity of [humanity] pursuing [its] aims" (Marx and Engels, 1975: 93).

¹² Marx's criticisms of bourgeois anthropologists are also interlinked with his criticisms of Cuvier, Darwin, Lubbock, and the whole European "scientific" project. See Lawrence Krader (1974: section 7) for more on this.

¹³ One place this happens is in Rosa Luxemburg (2013: 157). For an excellent comparison of Luxemburg and Marx's account of pre-capitalist formations and the non-Western world see Peter Hudis (2010).

¹⁴ For more on Marx's critical attitude in the *Ethnological Notebooks* and their context within his larger corpus see David Norman Smith (1995, 2002); Kevin Anderson (2002); Archana Prasad (2018).

“historic” societies in his idea that “all hither too existing society is the history of class struggles” (Marx and Engels, 1978: 473), instead “an interaction is posited between the ancient and primitive commune and the modern peasant commune on the one side, and on the other, the communal and collective social plan arising out of the capitalist era and opposed to it” (Kradner, 1972: 35).

But to her credit, like Marx, she took to task bourgeois intellectuals’ mechanistic Eurocentric presuppositions in analyzing non-Western societies.¹⁵ Her critique of German ethnologist Ernst Grosse, who reduced all cultural and social development to external “natural” conditions, is very similar to Marx’s critique of Morgan. Luxemburg highlights the role of *internal* social relations as the primary driving force arranging the social reproduction of a given society. Both she and Marx offer a dialectical account of “human” and “nature” in the sense that they are not separable entities at war, but rather human life shapes its existence *always in relation to* the earth and non-human life, even if human life is not completely determined by these external forces. As Luxemburg writes,

What is decisive for the economic and cultural conditions of people is *not the external natural source of their sustenance*, but rather the connections that people form between one another in their labor. The social connections of production determine the question: what form of production prevails among a given people? Only when this aspect of production has been thoroughly grasped is it possible to understand the determining influences of a people’s production on its family relations, its concepts of right, its religious ideas and the development of its arts. Most European observers, however, find it extraordinarily difficult to penetrate the social relations of production of so-called primitive peoples. (Luxemburg, 2014: 169)

Luxemburg recognized that colonial European observers illegitimately reduced their non-European others to playthings of “nature,” putting them outside the realm of humanity’s history and development—or as Fanon terms it, they are placed into the zone of non-being. She diagnoses this problem as a

¹⁵ For example, she writes in *Introduction to Political Economy*: “James Mill, father of the celebrated John Stuart Mill, when he wrote in his history of British India: ‘On the basis of all the facts we have considered, we can only reach one conclusion, that landownership in India fell to the conqueror, for if we were to assume that he was not the landowner, we would not be in a position to say who the owner was.’ The idea that ownership of land simply belonged to the Indian peasant communities who had worked it for millennia, that there could be a country, a great social culture, in which land was not a means for exploiting the labor of others, but simply the foundation of the existence of working people themselves, was something that the brain of a great scholar of the English bourgeoisie was unable to accept” (Luxemburg, 2014: 156–57). For more on Luxemburg’s critique of bourgeois intellectuals see Peter Hudis (2018).

function the inability of bourgeois intellectuals to understand the significance of the social relations of labor and the reproduction of social life as it shapes family relations, religious practices, concepts of right, and art.

Overall, her *Introduction to Political Economy* takes a long view of the development of capitalism highlighting the *organic unity* of colonization, imperialism, and capitalism. Against understandings of imperialism and colonization that make them incidental to capitalism, Luxemburg shows their *necessary* relationship:

The European conquerors are the first who are not merely after subjugation and economic exploitation, but seize the very means of production, by ripping the land from under the feet of the native population . . . What emerges is something that is worse than all oppression and exploitation, total anarchy and that specifically European phenomenon of *the uncertainty of social existence*. (Luxemburg, 2014: 234)

That colonial-imperialist-capitalism not only steals, tortures, murders, and exploits masses of people around the world but also leads to the *global* “uncertainty of social existence,” is a recurring *existential* theme in her work and the philosophical backdrop of her slogan: “socialism or barbarism.” Unlike Lenin’s *Imperialism: The Highest State of Capitalism*, which focused on describing monopolies and finance capital, Luxemburg’s analysis takes pains to detail how Spain and Portugal colonized Africa, America, and the Caribbean, the rise of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and how the central colonial powers eventually shifted to the Dutch, English, and French. Her analysis highlights the role of imperialism clearly as both the condition of possibility for global capitalism and the motor for its continued development.¹⁶

While Lenin has the edge on Luxemburg on the national question, Lenin would say in his marginal notes of her *The Accumulation of Capital*, “the description of the torture of negroes in South America is noisy, colorful, and meaningless. Above all it is ‘non-Marxist’” (Le Blanc, 2014: 133). This is an aspect of Luxemburg’s work where, if it is true that her documentation and empathy for human suffering in the context of slavery in the colonies is “non-Marxist,” she is stretching Marxist categories in the positive way that Fanon stipulated. Here Luxemburg connects the humanist dimensions of Marx’s account of alienation to his account of the logic of capital accumulation. She

¹⁶ However, Lenin would be the one most revered and remembered by communists in the Global South because he had a *concrete* understanding of national liberation struggles as class warfare while Luxemburg would maintain an abstract position overdetermined by her experiences and analysis of Poland’s economy and nationalist parties. See Raya Dunayevskaya (1982); Eric Blanc (2018).

is correctly determining what was not merely contingent but *necessary* for the founding and continued development of capitalism. This understanding of imperialism, that includes the humanist and existentialist dimensions of its threat to social existence in general, alongside the account for the suffering of colonized and enslaved people, makes her stand out from other European Marxists of her time.

Tracking imperialist developments, Luxemburg described how tactics and goals of European colonial nations changed over time as global capitalism established itself. We move from Spain and Portugal's "speediest plunder of the treasures and natural wealth of the newly discovered tropical lands in terms of precious metals, spices, valuable adornments and slaves," to the Dutch model (that the English would copy) focusing on trade "with various raw materials from overseas countries being imported for the European market, and valueless trash and plunder being pressed on the indigenous peoples of these countries" (Luxemburg, 2014: 150–1). Later, older models and strategies of imperialism persisted but took on new dimensions "of more persistent and systematic exploitation of the population of the colonies for the enrichment of the 'home country'" (Luxemburg, 2014: 151) through taxation of colonized peoples as "subjects" of the imperial state. However, to further exploit colonized peoples through taxation, European colonial powers had to fundamentally disrupt indigenous relations to land:

In order to seize land from the hands of its former proprietors, it was first necessary to establish who these proprietors were. In order not just to decree taxes, but also to be able to collect them, it had to be established who was liable for such taxes. Here the Europeans in their colonies came upon relationships quite foreign to them, which directly overturned all their notions of the sanctity of private property. (Luxemburg, 2014: 151)

Luxemburg's attention to the significance of the disruption of indigenous relationships to land with the imposition of the modern European concept of taxable personhood allowed her to immediately see the hypocrisies of so-called "infrastructure development" and "aid" given to actively underdeveloped colonized nations. Similar tactics were taken in the United States to procure more land for settlers and to assimilate and individualize indigenous people and their land into taxable and governable units, for example, the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887.

At the time of Luxemburg's writing, Great Britain received from its largest colony, India, 1,000 million marks, and in exports another 1,200 million marks worth of goods. Luxemburg writes, "the 'surplus' is nothing more than the economic expression of the colonial exploitation of India by British capitalism" (Luxemburg, 2014: 112). While the British tried to hide behind

the idea of “aid” and “loans” for “alleviating poverty” and “improving infrastructure,” Luxemburg is quick to point out the hypocrisy of offering aid that is primarily used to make India’s exploitation easier for Britain rather than better the lives of Indians. These goods or finances “are not sent for exchange, but for the production of profit” (Luxemburg, 2014: 114). What we find primarily exchanged is not concrete “goods” but rather *capital* which doesn’t serve to “fill ‘certain gaps’ in other countries’ ‘national economies,’ but quite the reverse—opening up gaps, rifts and splits and acting like gunpowder to transform these ‘national economies’ sooner or later into heaps of rubble” (Luxemburg, 2014: 115–6). Loans from colonial metropolises doubly exploit currently or formerly colonized territories by monopolizing trade and collecting interest on debt repayments—and the irony is that the funds used as loans are manifestations of capital first accumulated by the expropriation of the very countries that they are being given to at a higher cost.¹⁷

Her attention to this was what set her apart from many others in the Second International. Against SPD leadership, Luxemburg resolutely understood that anything calling itself socialism eliding questions of imperialism was not positively revolutionary and instead opened the door for reactionary and fascistic forces to gain power. For Luxemburg, revolutionary socialism *must* be connected to an internationalist struggle because on-going practices of dispossession, extermination, and exploitation are exactly what allow our so-called “national economies” to run. In Luxemburg’s words:

Looking *within* imperialist policy for remedies and solutions to its conflicts, wanting to oppose its *Sturm* and *Drang* by trying to scale things back to past conditions, is not proletarian but petty-bourgeois policy, a hopeless policy that boils down to a constant defense of the imperialism of yesterday against the imperialism of today. (Luxemburg, 2011: 470)

Whether one is a trade unionist and sees “job potential” in militarization—or one is a politician playing on popular support for war in order to win office—Luxemburg will expose the ultimately fascistic elements of these desires.

Luxemburg points out that, from the perspective of the capitalist class, it is both politically strategic and profitable to spend state funds on the military

¹⁷ As Luxemburg writes in *Accumulation of Capital*, “Public loans for railroad building and armaments accompany all stages of the accumulation of capital: the introduction of commodity economy, industrialization of countries, capitalist revolutionizing of agriculture as well as the emancipation of young capitalist states. For the accumulation of capital, the loan has various functions: (a) it serves to convert the money of non-capitalist groups into capital, i.e. money both as a commodity equivalent (lower middle-class savings) and as fund of consumption for the hangers-on of the capitalist class; (b) it serves to transform money capital into productive capital by means of state enterprise—railroad building and military supplies; (c) it serves to divert accumulated capital from the old capitalist countries to young ones” (Luxemburg, 2003: 400–1).

rather than “public goods.” While it may seem like a short-term solution to the unemployed and the working class, it is averse to their long-term interests. Responding to Max Schippel,¹⁸ a reactionary opportunist SPD journalist writing in support of militarism as an “economic release,” Luxemburg writes:

By accepting militarism, the worker prevents his wages from being reduced by a certain amount, but in return is largely deprived of the possibility of fighting continuously for an increase in his wage and an improvement of his situation. He gains as a seller of his labour, but at the same time loses his political freedom of movement as a citizen, so that he must ultimately also lose as the seller of his labour. He removes a competitor from the labour market only to see a defender of his wage slavery arise in his place; he prevents his wages being lowered only to find that the prospects both of a permanent improvement in his situation and of his ultimate economic, political and social liberation are diminished. This is the actual meaning of the ‘release’ of economic pressure on the working class achieved by militarism. Here, as in all opportunistic political speculation, we see the great aims of socialist class emancipation sacrificed to petty practical interests of the moment, interests moreover which, when examined more closely, prove to be essentially illusory. (Luxemburg, 1974: 82)

Luxemburg wrote this in 1899 prior to her longer works on imperialism, but already we can see how she clearly understood how the economics of militarism bolster the interests of the capitalist class, in general, and the colonial nation-state, in particular. This ideology of militarism that says it helps the working class by offering an “economic release” is the very same ideology that was mobilized by the trade union labor aristocracy to thwart international solidarity with the colonized. It was used to convince the proletariat in colonial metropolises of the legitimacy of war and the continuation of their nation-state’s colonial and neo-colonial policies.

The “labor aristocracy” is a concept developed largely in response to World War I to understand why the proletariat of industrialized nations would side with their national bourgeoisies instead of waging an international proletarian revolution. But even before World War I, Luxemburg was critical of the ability of trade unions in European metropolises to do anything revolutionary because of their *objective* interests in the continued prosperity of their own imperialist nation-state. This is why the mass strike would be a critical

¹⁸ Schippel studied political economy with Adolph Wagner, a conservative economist who branded himself a “State socialist” and was a major influence on the economic politics that got Germany into World War I. Ironically, W. E. B. Du Bois would also elect to study political economy with Wagner when he first went to Berlin. Wagner wrote a critique of Marx’s *Capital*, to which Marx wrote a lengthy response (Marx, 1989).

tool for class war. Luxemburg's analysis of the mass strike is "stretching" the Marxist concepts of "class warfare" and "the proletariat" to include labor and gender-based struggles within the home, within social institutions, by those who are unemployed or involved in "black markets," the struggles of the colonized, and all of those who live outside industrialized metropolises. In other words, *everyone* deprived of access and control of the means of production should be part of revolutionary class struggle. While Luxemburg does not explicitly expand the concept of the proletariat in this way, my argument is that her political theory organically lends itself to this expansion.

There was a specific crisis in Morocco that spurred Luxemburg into another series of conflicts given her Party's inability to effectively fight against imperialism. The 1911 "Agadir crisis" occurred when French troops occupied Morocco, leading Germany to send warships protecting their trade interests—in turn triggering Britain to back France in fear of further German encroachment. This was a scramble over colonial and imperial control of Morocco, and Germany was pressed by a financial crisis to make sure they were not going to lose out. Luxemburg wanted a conference with the International Socialist Bureau to assess this situation, but the SPD refused to hold such a conference. Luxemburg wrote a scathing report of their reactionary attitudes in her pamphlet "Concerning Morocco."¹⁹ There she named the SPD's hypocrisy: while it was willing to support anti-colonial Moroccan uprisings, and even protests in *other* countries, they were too worried about the coming elections to make a public statement condemning German imperialism.

In particular, she criticized SPD support of the Sultan of Morocco who was just an imperialist puppet. She writes, "Bernstein [a major leader of the SPD] only noticed the equal right of all 'trading nations' in Morocco, and he quite strangely overlooked the fact that, besides European traders, there is still another factor, which also has, as it were, 'certain rights:' the native people, the tribes of Morocco, who are now rebelling" (Luxemburg, 2011: 469). The Party executive in Berlin wrote in response: "If we were to commit ourselves firmly too soon and to stress the Moroccan Question at the expense of all questions of *domestic policy* in such a way that an effective electoral slogan could be used against us, then the consequences cannot be anticipated" (Luxemburg, 2004a). Luxemburg responds:

We have heard so much about the "splendid situation" . . . [of] the Reichstag elections, and at the same time we have been warned repeatedly against spoiling this "situation" by some imprudent action . . . [but] the best way of throwing away the advantage of this 'situation' would be to begin to consider all party life

¹⁹ Published in *Leipziger Volkszeitung* July 24, 1911.

and all tasks of the class struggle simply from the perspective of the ballot-box. (Luxemburg, 2004a)

Taking a strong position against German imperialism could have educated the public and fortified the resolve of a *revolutionary* anti-imperialist socialist party. But instead, the SPD was focusing on what would make them most likely to achieve electoral wins and that many Germans would support imperial military efforts, for “job security” was not lost on the SPD.

Party leaders avoided talking about issues of imperialism by saying that they were “foreign” affairs, while they needed to stay focused on “domestic” issues. But Luxemburg would point out the myopia of this position:

The duty of Social Democracy is not to reassure public opinion, but to do the very reverse, to rouse it and warn it against the dangers lying dormant . . . *we can only count on the resistance of the enlightened masses. . . . the stagnation of social reform [is] organically bound up with militarism, naval policy, colonial policy, and with personal rule and its foreign policy. Any artificial separation of these spheres can only present an incomplete and one-sided picture of the state of our public affairs.* (Luxemburg, 2004a)

Luxemburg shows that the ultimate success of the party lies in “the resistance of the *enlightened* masses” through collective empowerment and *not* in the cooptation of bourgeois electoral power organized by bureaucratic leadership. The idea that socialism can be “voted in” without radically altering the social relations of capital and labor obfuscates the issues and evacuates the agency of the masses in political action. It is because Luxemburg has an *organic* rather than mechanistic understanding of imperialism, capitalism, and militarism that she is able to see the farce of advocating an electoral path to socialism. She is able to show this precisely because she is clear on *organic unity* of colonial policy, militarism, and capitalism, and because she so highly values mass political education as essential to class warfare.

MOVING WITH AND BEYOND LUXEMBURG: RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA AND C.L.R. JAMES

While Luxemburg showed sensitivity to the suffering of the colonized in her analysis of imperialism and capitalism, her imagination for socialist revolutions stopped in Eastern and Western Europe. Luxemburg would not fully appreciate the significance of the revolutionary self-activity and self-determination of colonized peoples against capitalism. As Raya Dunayevskaya succinctly puts it, with respect to Luxemburg’s account of the Boer Wars,

Although Luxemburg described concretely how the war between the Boers and the English was fought “on the backs of Negros,” she did not draw any conclusions about the Black Africans being a revolutionary force. That revolutionary force was reserved for the proletariat alone . . . As we saw, during the 1910–11 debate with Kautsky, Luxemburg’s revolutionary opposition to German imperialism’s barbarism against the Hereros was limited to seeing them as suffering rather than revolutionary humanity. (Dunayevskaya, 1982: 37)

Luxemburg’s inability to understand anti-colonial battles waged by the colonized against European colonial capitalist forces as fundamentally revolutionary lead to her underestimation of the role of these struggles in class warfare. Her limited understanding of the role of national consciousness, that isn’t “narrow nationalism,” is something that continues to hinder her work’s wider use within Third World anti-colonial struggles. Had she ever investigated the Haitian revolution with the detail and care that someone like C.L.R. James had, perhaps she would have had a different understanding of where and under what conditions revolutions would be more likely to happen. Instead, her abstract insistence against national self-determination as a critical tactic for building international socialism among colonized populations emerged from the fact “that she could not see that the absolute opposition to imperialism was not non-capitalism, but the masses in revolt, in the oppressed as in the oppressor country” (Dunayevskaya, 1982: 42).

With respect to Luxemburg’s understanding of the necessity of “enlightened masses” over an electoral political party for revolutionary class struggle, she has much in common with James. In 1960, after breaking with Eric Williams and the People’s National Movement (PNM) in Trinidad, James gave a mass political education lecture series aimed *not* at developing Trinidadian “party politics,” but rather at creating accessible public education about history, politics, economics, Marxism, and culture.²⁰ Concluding the last lecture, James admits the depressing facts of how many people have been mobilized to fight in imperialist wars while remaining optimistic:

properly encouraged and given a sense of history and a sense of destiny, [the masses] will do all they now do for war, for the sake of improving the normal life and relations of human beings. But this will come only when people are their own masters. That for me is what Marxism is . . . anyone who tries to prevent you from knowing, from learning anything, is an enemy, an enemy of freedom, of equality, of democracy. (James, 2013: 154)

²⁰ These lectures were suppressed by Eric Williams and confiscated in a guarded warehouse in Port of Spain Trinidad. For more background on this lecture series and its relation to Eric Williams and the PNM see Kent Worcester (1992).

While there is much overlap between Luxemburg and James, particularly on questions of proletarian democracy and the creativity of the masses as the motor of revolution, there are also significant differences.²¹ Luxemburg's account of "what is to be done" included a vision of the first step toward socialism as the nationalization of key industries just as James's vision would be for developing Pan-Caribbean socialism. In "The Socialization of Society" Luxemburg writes,

The first duty of a real workers' government is to declare by means of a series of decrees the most important means of production to be national property and place them under the control of society. Only then, however, does the real and most difficult task begin: the reconstruction of the economy on a completely new basis. (Luxemburg, 2004b: 346)

However, Luxemburg's vision of a "completely new basis" of the economy is couched in the idea that what distinguishes a socialist organization of the economy to a capitalist one is planning. She will everywhere counterpose "laws of capitalist anarchy" against "rational planned" organization. While in other places she is so careful to operate on an organic account of social relations over a mechanistic one, here we see her mistakenly think that the contradiction causing capitalist crisis is "anarchy," rather than understanding that capitalism *has a logic*, for example, of capital accumulation—even if it is not rational with respect to the continuance of life or the creation of humanized social relations. While noting that there are advantages to nationalizing industries, the only *fully rational* production is production coordinated by *freely associated people*, "it is totally beyond state planners of any kind, whether with or without parliamentary democracy" (James, Dunayevskaya, Boggs, 2013: xxxiv). Developing a vision of "freely associated people" coming together for mutual preservation and flourishing means we have to re-envision forms of life that do not hinge on exploitation and dehumanization.

Another point of tension between Luxemburg and James is around the issue of the "vanguard party." While Luxemburg is sometimes posited as the "antithesis" of Lenin, she actually had much in common with him—including his theory of the vanguard party. It is significant that her remarks on freedom of speech, democracy, and plurality of opinion occur within the broader Left, and within the party form, not in the abstract universality of bourgeois democracy. While she criticized Lenin and Trotsky on these terms, she did

²¹ Though interestingly, James would never support Luxemburg's critiques of Lenin in her 1918 manuscript "The Russian Revolution." This is largely because, for James, Lenin was supposed to be the antithesis of an authoritarian—this is a point that eventually Dunayevskaya would disagree with. Thank you to Peter Hudis for pointing this out to me.

not disagree with the concept of the vanguard party in total. James, on the other hand, had a reading of Lenin that divorced the core of his political philosophy from the concept of the vanguard party. James's position was that the vanguard party made sense for 1917 Russia, but it was no longer useful for the present: "Lenin's theory and practice of the Vanguard Party, the party of the elite, of the leaders, was admirably adapted to the period 1903–1923. Progressively from that time, it has been a millstone round the neck of the modern proletariat in its struggle for socialism" (James, Dunayevskaya, Boggs, 2013: xxxv). James would specifically criticize modern-day Marxist–Leninists (including Black radical iterations of Marxist–Leninism), on the grounds that it was really the self-organization of the people that gave any organization power, not its leadership.²² For James, Lenin was fundamentally a democratically minded leader who acted by watching the masses closely and first and foremost was concerned with the common people—especially their literacy, and not just for political or cultural participation, but for economic progress.²³

The "enlightened masses" that Luxemburg saw as essential to building a new world from the bottom up would be sacrificed to the elite intelligentsia of vanguard parties. As James would write with the Johnson-Forest Tendency: "The crisis of production today is the crisis of the antagonism between manual and intellectual labor. The problem of modern philosophy from Descartes in the sixteenth century to Stalinism in 1950 is the problem of the division of labor between the intellectuals and the workers" (James, Dunayevskaya, Boggs, 2013: 96). When Luxemburg realized that the Russian peasantry was becoming skilled at revolution well beyond the decades-old German trade unions, she was coming to articulate what would become part of James' critique of Trotskyism. The crisis is not in finding the right well-intentioned leader for the masses but to develop the masses for their own creative self-activity and self-determination. As James put it in *State Capitalism and World Revolution* with Grace Lee Boggs, "philosophy must become proletarian" (James, Dunayevskaya, Boggs, 2013: 108–13) and that is exactly what he saw happening in the self-activity of Black people in the United States and among colonized peoples throughout the world. Luxemburg's holistic understanding of organization, struggle, and radical self-determination through revolutionary political education enabled her to challenge the imperialistic tendencies of her contemporaries. Read through the best of a Marxian and decolonial critique of political economy, Luxemburg's work points toward a

²² For more on this see Kimathi Mohammed (2013).

²³ For example, see James's discussion of Lenin in his article "Lenin and the Problem" (1982) written originally in 1964 for a political journal in Ghana.

globally oriented democratic society organized from below against capitalist imperialism in all of its forms.

CONCLUSION

While the full impact of these insights in Marx and Luxemburg remain in outline, many of those thinking from colonial contexts have further elaborated and theorized what it means to understand culture and history within a non-stadial account of history in the plural. Reality forced Marxist thinkers to abandon the idea that the first socialist revolutions would be successful in the most technologically advanced places—and we can go back and watch Marx, Engels, Luxemburg, and Lenin see this reality unfold and be *forced* to alter their conceptions of agency, progress, and history to meet reality. As James would write, “dialectic for Hegel [and Marx] was a strictly scientific method” (James, 1992: 154). As a scientific method, whatever “inevitable laws” it might purport must be accountable to reality—meaning that as history and reality unfolds, theories need to keep developing to match that reality.

On another register, Marx thought of his work as a science [*Wissenschaft*] in the speculative philosophical sense à la Kant and Hegel—in other words, science as *critique* with respect to the relationship between *appearance* and *reality*. As Enrique Dussel explains it,

For Marx *science* is primarily the critique of appearances (of the pure phenomena that appear on the surface in the world of commodities: in circulation); to refer the appearances to the essential world of the real internal movement (in this case the valorization of the value of capital); and from there to develop the ‘concept’ of capital through categories. (Dussel, 2001: 188)

The fetishism of capital lies in the *appearance* that it alone creates and increases value as if it contained a “self-moving” principle operating above and beyond humanity, when in *reality* all value is a product of *living labor*. Capitalism has made what should be social relations into object relations—what should be consciously determined by social, historical, and cultural human needs is *unconsciously* determined by the laws of capital accumulation “behind the backs of producers” (Marx, 1992a: 135). As we further develop our understanding of capital accumulation from the standpoint of the colonized, we see that the living labor most exploited and dominated by global capitalist relations is that of the colonized in the Global South and the colonized within colonial metropolises. What it will take to achieve decolonization on the terms of Fanon, making “the last become first,” will require us to both build on and beyond Marx.

While Marx and Luxemburg did well to unveil the fetishistic nature of capital, the mystifications of bourgeois political economy, and the organic relationships of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and militarism, they *only briefly* began to rethink and renegotiate their relationship to colonial understandings of history, progress, and the liberation of the colonized. It is not entirely their “fault,” in the sense that what decolonization and ending capitalism would look like in colonial and settler colonial contexts is still in the process of being worked out. However, the idea that we must develop some kind of philosophy of histor(ies) remains important to decolonial struggle, in general, and articulations of decolonial and Black radical theory, in particular.

In comments on developing “Negro history,” James identifies the problem of mainstream historians in the United States unable to accurately understand post–Civil War Black history. That historians consistently misinterpret Black history and Black people making history, by falling back on the narrative that Lincoln and the bourgeoisie ended slavery, is *not* about a lack of facts. Rather, as James explains:

It eludes them because historical facts, as facts, can do so much and no more. They have to be organized in the light of a philosophy of history. To be quite precise, they have to be consciously organized in the light of a correct philosophy of history. For whether a writer knows it or not, he is always using a philosophy of history . . . [and] history is a part of the class struggle. (James, 1996: 127–8)

For James, the correct philosophy of history must be able to test itself against reality, evolving over time as it tracks the creativity of the masses forging a new world where democracy and freedom are finally substantively realized. To deny the need for a philosophy of history that understands the dialectical development of humanity, “is to say, the denial of a method of thought, for which the only name is irrationalism or mysticism” (James, 1992: 159). What James means by “irrationalism” and “mysticism” here is not about spirituality or a degrading conception of reason relying on a continuum of humanity where people are “empirically” measured for their “reasonableness.” But rather, he means that to pretend there is no way of systematically understanding reality is disempowering because it puts people in a passive rather than agential position with respect to their own history. For James, “the main challenge is not to escape from the ‘Muse of history’. . . it is to ‘place ourselves in history,’ . . . anything is what you choose to make it, and history almost automatically becomes not only non-sense . . . but is usually a defense of property and privilege,”²⁴ when colonial bourgeois historians write it *on behalf of* power, property, and privilege.

²⁴ C.L.R. James, “The West Indian Intellectual,” quoted in Mathieu Renault (2016).

At her best, Luxemburg embodied this revolutionary philosophy of history and worked to put its power into the hands of those most dispossessed and dehumanized by the current world order. Putting capitalism and imperialism into fundamental and direct relation, focusing on the existential dimensions of Euromodern forms of dispossession, and committing to popular education and self-activity of the masses makes her writing an easy resource for further enrichment by decolonial thinkers and thinkers within the Black radical tradition. This is the critical basis for her insistence on the inevitability of “socialism or barbarism,” and she is in agreement with James that to remain agnostic with respect to the inevitability of socialism or barbarism is to become a revisionist denying the bankruptcy of colonial bourgeois democracy—as some of her contemporaries did, for example, Karl Kautsky.²⁵

However, in those places where she remained abstract and failed to identify the mechanistic and Eurocentric elements in the socialist thinking of her time, we must remain critical and ask the kinds of questions allowing us to put her theories and analyses to the test. Luxemburg traced the development of the colonial regimes that would soon be overthrown in revolutions she had not anticipated, because she failed to see the colonized as a progressive revolutionary force. She would fall into some uncritical Eurocentric traps when it came to thinking about “primitive communism,” and while she did understand Russia to have the conditions for socialism, it was largely because she saw it as a place that had *not* been colonized but was still connected to European commerce (Araujo, 2018: 70). But the richness and continued utility of Marx and Luxemburg lies in their flexibility and openness—never positing their thinking as the final word nor seeing themselves as possessing the “master-key of a general historico-philosophical theory,” they leave open the theoretical and practical space for a reevaluation of power and a decolonial critique of political economy.

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²⁵ Kautsky would eventually espouse a theory of “ultra-imperialism” where the most industrially advanced countries would form a cartel and inaugurate world peace—which meant for him that the future was not socialism or barbarism but rather peaceful imperialist capitalism. See Karl Kautsky (2011).

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REVOLUTIONARY SUBJECTS

Chapter 4

Walter Rodney's *Russian Revolution* and the Curious Case of Rosa Luxemburg

Robin D. G. Kelley

In 1971, the Guyanese Marxist historian Walter Rodney had begun work on a book about the Russian Revolution and the political lessons it could offer revolutionaries in Africa and the Caribbean. He drafted what amounted to twenty typewritten lectures before setting the project aside in order to work on his pathbreaking *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. He never returned to the Russian material. In 1974, Rodney returned to Guyana and immersed himself in the struggle to challenge the dictatorial rule of President Forbes Burnham—a decision for which he paid the ultimate price. On June 13, 1980, the brilliant 38-year-old historian was assassinated.

His wife, Pat Rodney, fled Guyana with her children and temporarily left Walter's papers with Edward Alpers, a professor of African history at UCLA. In 1984, Alpers hired me as his graduate assistant and tasked me with organizing, transcribing, and annotating Rodney's lectures on the Russian Revolution with the intention of completing the book. Thirty-four years later, following a very long hiatus and help from my co-editor Jesse Benjamin, the book was published as *The Russian Revolution: A View from the Third World* (Verso, 2018).¹ Covering the gamut from pre-revolutionary movements to Stalinist economic planning, Rodney masterfully examines the challenges of socialist transformation in a “backwards” empire, the consolidation of state power, debates within Marxist circles over the character of Russia's revolution, and the ideological bases of historical interpretation. Rather than produce a narrative history, Rodney chose to interrogate the meaning, representation, and significance of the Russian Revolution as a world historical

¹ The history of the manuscript and its construction are detailed in Kelley and Benjamin (2018).

event the reverberations of which profoundly shaped Marxist thought, Third World liberation movements, and theories of socialist transformation.

Impressive as it is, *The Russian Revolution* is an unfinished work.² We will never know what arguments he would have developed or revised if given the opportunity to complete the book. Yet, even in its unfinished state, one facet of the book struck me as curious: his brief, uncharacteristically dismissive treatment of Rosa Luxemburg. After all, Luxemburg was a celebrated radical thinker, the author of *The Accumulation of Capital* whose insights on imperialism anticipated Rodney's own approach to theories of underdevelopment, and the first Marxist sympathetic to the Bolsheviks to raise critical questions about the direction of the October Revolution. In just over three pages, Rodney took Luxemburg's lengthy pamphlet, *The Russian Revolution* (drafted in September 1918), to task for criticizing Bolshevik policy—namely, Lenin's decision to suspend the Constituent Assembly, limit suffrage, and severely restrict the press; Lenin's support for the right of self-determination for nations within the Russian empire; and the Bolshevik policy of land redistribution to the peasantry on the grounds that it would not challenge private ownership of property. With respect to land policy, he agreed with Luxemburg in principle but not in practice. "On strictly theoretical grounds, she was correct," he added, "but it was precisely in the interest of promoting a democratic alliance of workers and peasants that the Bolsheviks agreed to suspend collectivization of the land" (Rodney, 2018: 115). Thus, while acknowledging her bona fides as a "revolutionary Marxist," Rodney regarded Luxemburg as a bundle of contradictions and naïve about the requirements for seizing and holding state power. "So Rosa Luxemburg was against democracy for the peasants and she was against independence and autonomy for nationalities. She was in favor of democracy for the bourgeoisie, refusing to agree with the Bolsheviks that they should be disenfranchised" (Rodney, 2018: 116). He grudgingly conceded that her naïve expectations for the present may have enabled her to foresee the future problems of the Stalinist bureaucratic state: "In a curious way, Luxemburg's criticisms had more relevance to the future than to the time she wrote. It was the long-term consequences of the dialectical relations between Lenin and the Central Committee, between the Central Committee and the members, between the bureaucracy and the people" (Ibid).

² The "manuscript" consisted of about twenty lectures, most written out in prose with schematic sections without footnotes or citations beyond an occasional parenthetical reference to an author. I reorganized the lectures into nine coherent chapters, eliminated duplication or repetition, and furnished all of the footnotes. See Kelley and Benjamin (2018).

Rodney followed this observation with a chilling and peculiarly gendered assertion tying her failed analysis to her own assassination in 1919. "This refusal to see," he wrote,

that in a revolution one had to realize that a class opponent was a mortal enemy led to Luxemburg's own death. Her party in Germany was caught up in a revolutionary situation in 1919, and she was slow to act. Instead, the bourgeois reactionaries captured her and murdered her in cold blood. That was the price which she paid for not recognizing that a revolution is not a tea-party. Her own subsequent experience tragically and cruelly exposes the limitations of her analysis of the Russian situation in 1918. (Ibid)

I've always found this passage discomfiting, not only because his impetuous comment that political misjudgment led to her death mirrors the story surrounding Rodney's own assassination, but because it is out of character with Rodney's political orientation. Indeed, Luxemburg and Rodney share eerily parallel political trajectories. Both were intellectual wunderkinds from middle-class families under colonial, racial, ethnic, and/or religious domination. Luxemburg, a Jew from Tsarist-controlled Poland, earned her doctorate in economics at age 26; Rodney, who grew up in British-ruled Guyana, earned his doctorate in African history at the age of 24. Both were committed Marxist internationalists who moved seamlessly between the academy and the streets, brilliant stump speakers capable of conveying the most complex ideas to working people without condescension or jargon. Both deepened their politics in exile: Luxemburg in Switzerland and Germany; Rodney in England, Jamaica, and Tanzania. Most importantly, both embraced an orientation toward working-class self-activity and mass insurgency as the driver rather than consequence of revolutionary thought. And while Rodney has never invoked or cited Luxemburg in his other published work, during his last years in Guyana, he wrestled with the very questions she posed about democracy, dictatorship, national liberation, and world revolution from her jail cell and in the streets of Berlin. I want to suggest that, as Jane Anna Gordon has written about Frantz Fanon's relationship to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Rodney "might be understood as a kindred spirit" and perhaps a "better intellectual heir" to Luxemburg than to Lenin (Gordon, 2014: 9). They lived in different times and places but found through praxis—the dialectical engagement with Marxist thought and working-class self-activity—the condition of possibility for revolution.

LUXEMBURG AND THE BOLSHEVIKS

Rosa Luxemburg spent much of her adult life supporting, writing about, and criticizing revolutionary movements in Russia as well as Russian Social

Democratic leadership. From her 1904 essay “Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy” to her assessment of the 1905 Revolution in *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* (1906), to her pseudonymous *The Junius Pamphlet* (1915), she had been both a champion and unsparing critic of Russia’s revolutionary leadership, including the iconic Lenin. Yet, she was often ideologically closer to Lenin than to the leadership of her own German Social Democratic Party (SPD). When Karl Kautsky, the SPD’s main theorist, concurred with party leader Edouard Bernstein that socialist revolution would come about through the inevitable growth of the socialist vote, 28-year-old Luxemburg was the lone dissenter in the party’s inner circle. Anticipating some of Lenin’s arguments in *What Is to Be Done?* (1902), in 1900 she published the pamphlet *Social Reform or Revolution*, which argued unequivocally that socialism cannot be voted into power, that revolution is unavoidable, and that capitalism’s illusory stability was the result of imperialist expansion.

When the February revolution broke out in 1917, resulting in the overthrow of the Tsar and the creation of a provisional government, Luxemburg was confined to a jail cell in Poland’s Wronki prison. In 1914, she had broken with the SPD over its support for war and joined Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehring, and Clara Zetkin to form the militantly anti-war movement “The International,” later renamed the Spartacus League. Their effort to organize a general strike against the war landed Luxemburg and Liebknecht in prison. By July, as the Bolshevik slogans of “Peace Land, and Bread” and “All Power to the Soviets” gained adherents from the masses and provoked strikes and mutinies by soldiers, sailors, and workers, Luxemburg was transferred to a prison in Breslau where she was subjected to even greater restrictions. Nevertheless, through correspondence and press reports, she followed events in Russia with great enthusiasm as well as caution (Nettl, 2019 [1966]: 679–690; Kemmerer, 2016: 855–856). She applauded the Bolshevik seizure of power in October but worried that unless revolution spreads to Europe, its future might be in jeopardy. In a letter to Luise Kautsky dated November 24, 1917, she conceded that hindering the Bolshevik’s struggle to establish a socialist state and advance the cause of proletarian internationalism was the toxic nationalism and imperialism that led Europe to war in the first place. If the Bolsheviks fail, she wrote, it will be “because the Social Democracy in the highly developed West consists of miserable cowardly dogs, who, while looking on calmly, will let the Russians bleed to death. But a downfall like that is better than ‘living on for the Fatherland’” (Luxemburg, 2011: 452). Lenin certainly agreed. In his “Report on Peace” issued immediately after the seizure of power, Lenin directly appealed “to the class-conscious workers” of Great Britain, France, and Germany to join the revolution and resist the war, implying that the fate of the Russian Revolution depends on

their “comprehensive, determined, and supremely vigorous action” (Lenin, 1917a). A few months later, Lenin put it more succinctly: “without the German revolution we shall perish” (Serge, 1949 [1930]).

Initially, Luxemburg had reason to be optimistic. By 1917, opposition to the war was widespread across the continent. In Germany, the Independent Social Democrats, former SPD members expelled for anti-war activism, formed an alliance with the Spartacus League. Mutinies occurred in the French and British armies as well as the German navy, and some 200,000 German metal workers went on strike. In January 1918, a wave of strikes swept through Austria-Hungary and Germany, involving half a million metal workers in Vienna and Berlin. Then on March 3, 1918, Lenin made an about face and signed the Brest-Litovsk treaty with Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire, acceding to Germany's terms of annexation in exchange for peace. Lenin signed the treaty believing that it would be short-lived, annulled by the success of the impending German Revolution (Smith, 2017: 157). And the fledgling state needed a respite from war. Luxemburg was incensed. A genuine peace agreement between Russia and Germany was unthinkable under SPD rule. The treaty, she predicted, would choke the German proletariat, strengthen German militarism under the SPD, and leave Russia in an especially vulnerable position. Luxemburg was hardly alone in her assessment. The Brest-Litovsk treaty generated the Bolshevik's greatest political crisis to date. Nicolai Bukharin, who led what was then identified as the Left Communist faction, took a position identical to Luxemburg, arguing that signing the treaty meant abandoning the German revolution. Trotsky also did not back a peace agreement, and he and his supporters ultimately abstained from the vote. Lenin prevailed but by a very slim majority (Ibid; Trotsky, 2008 [1932]: 898–899).

The Bolsheviks paid dearly for what turned out to be a temporary peace. The treaty granted Germany possession of the Baltic provinces and a large part of Belorussia and Ukraine, depriving Russia access to one-third of its agricultural land and railways, virtually all its oil, and three-quarters of its coal and iron deposits. Luxemburg empathized with Lenin's difficult position but considered the treaty “a capitulation of the Russian revolutionary proletariat before German imperialism.” It strengthened Germany's militarists, set back the revolutionary movement, and rather than end war with Germany, the treaty “merely hastened the beginning of a new phase of it” (Nettl, 2019 [1966]: 696). Against the wishes of her Spartacus comrades, Luxemburg decided to publish a short piece on the consequences of Brest-Litovsk in the *Spartakusbriefe* (Spartakus letter) in September 1918. Titled “The Russian Tragedy,” she argued that the agreement encouraged counter-revolutionary movements, turning Finland, the Baltics, Ukraine, and the Caucasus into potential counter-revolutionary outposts, and that it deprived Russia of its

“sources of life” (granaries, coal mines, iron-ore mines, and oil supplies) and made Germany the arbiter of Russia’s “political and economic destinies.” In other words, this short-term German–Russian alliance could result in the liquidation of the Bolsheviks (Nettl, 2019 [1966]: 696; Schurer, 1962: 370).

It did not. But neither did the treaty grant the Bolsheviks the respite they sought. Nor did its annulment in the wake of Germany’s defeat appear to make much of a difference. Lifting the German blockade in the Baltic and Black Seas simply opened the door for foreign troops from formerly Allied countries to wage war against the Bolsheviks. The result was an increase in military personnel and weapons being brought into Soviet Russia. The Allied blockade imposed after Brest-Litovsk was maintained after the war ended (Smith, 2017: 173).

Luxemburg drafted a second letter, but the editors of *Spartakusbrieife* refused to publish it. So she vowed to write a much longer pamphlet. Paul Levi, her comrade and an editor of *Spartakusbrieife*, traveled to Breslau prison just to dissuade her, arguing that her critique—no matter how well-meaning and genuine—could be used against the Bolsheviks by counter-revolutionaries. She ignored his entreaties and wrote it anyway, dispatching a draft to Levi with the proviso that “I am writing this pamphlet only for you and if I can convince *you*, then the effort isn’t wasted” (Nettl, 2019 [1966]: 698; O’Kane, 2015: 117).

Levi did receive the pamphlet in September of 1918 but he sat on it until 1922, choosing to publish it under the title, *The Russian Revolution* after his expulsion from the German Communist Party. Ironically, Levi wielded it precisely as a weapon against the Bolsheviks, though clearly this was never Luxemburg’s intention. As her comrade and first biographer, Paul Frölich, put it: “She was always sparing with her hymns of praise, but she never spoke of people or of a party with so much enthusiastic approval as she did the Bolsheviks in this work” (1972: 242). The pamphlet opens celebrating the triumph of the October Revolution as “the very first experiment in proletarian dictatorship in world history.” She acknowledged the tremendous challenges ahead—civil war, isolation, foreign aggression from the capitalist countries, the absolute necessity for revolution in the West—and conceded that “it would be a crazy idea to think that every last thing done or left undone in an experiment with the dictatorship of the proletariat under such abnormal conditions represented the very pinnacle of perfection.” At the same time, she insisted that critical reflection is not only necessary to advance the revolution but does not diminish its accomplishments (Luxemburg, 1940 [1918]; Nettel, 2019 [1966]: 698–705; Frölich, 1972: 243–252; O’Kane, 2015: 116–120).

Besides reprising her assessment of the German–Russian peace agreement, she focuses her attention on three issues: land policy, national self-determination, and democracy. As we have already seen, Walter Rodney accuses her

of being against democracy for the peasants, because she opposed redistribution in the form of private plots. But what was Luxemburg arguing for? She believed that the expropriation and nationalization of large estates would become the bases for modern “methods of agrarian production,” which in turn would “serve as the point of departure for the Socialist mode of production on the land.” But she was hardly absolutist on this score. “Of course,” she adds, “it is not necessary to take away from the small peasant his parcel of land, and we can with confidence leave him to be won over voluntarily by the superior advantages of social production and to be persuaded of the advantages first of union in cooperatives and then finally of inclusion in the general socialized economy as a whole.” Ironically, Rodney echoes Luxemburg here in his critique of Stalin’s policy of collectivization of agriculture just a few pages after eviscerating her position on Bolshevik land policy. He supports socialist or collective forms of agricultural production but opposes the use of state compulsion: “as socialists desirous of transforming a rural society into a socialist society, we have to take a stand against the use of force in this context. That is a matter of principle” (Rodney, 2018: 120).

In fact, Luxemburg did not demand that the Bolsheviks move swiftly to nationalize the land or introduce socialist production techniques. Any moves in this direction were impossible under the circumstances. “That the Soviet government in Russia has not carried through these mighty reforms—who can reproach them for that! It would be a sorry jest indeed to demand or expect of Lenin and his comrades that, in the brief period of their rule, in the center of the gripping whirlpool of domestic and foreign struggles, . . . to expect that under such circumstances they should already have solved, or even tackled . . . the most difficult task of the Socialist transformation of society!” Instead, she took issue with the chaotic manner in which “land reform” was occurring. The Bolsheviks left it to peasant committees to simply expropriate the big holders and redistribute land however they wished. Luxemburg’s concern was that this reproduced both the sanctity of private property and continued inequality, especially since this haphazard policy of redistribution enabled those with resources and power to secure larger landholdings. The policy also incentivized a portion of the urban proletariat to return to the countryside seeking land to own, which drained much-needed labor from cities. And she makes the prescient observation that “any attempt at socialization of agrarian production” now will face the enormous obstacle of a “newly developed and powerful mass of owning peasants who will defend their newly won property with tooth and nail against every Socialist attack.”

Luxemburg’s sharp criticism of the Bolshevik’s policy of granting nations within the old Tsarist empire the right of self-determination should not have surprised anyone familiar with her. She had been debating Lenin on the “national question” for at least a decade, dating back to her book-length essay

originally titled “The National Question and Autonomy,” published serially across five issues of the *Social Democratic Review* between 1908 and 1909 (Luxemburg, 1909). Her critics tend to paint her as dogmatically anti-nationalist, because she opposed Polish nationalism out of fear that nationalist organizations led by petit-bourgeois and bourgeois elements would overtake socialist and working-class organizations. But in “The National Question and Autonomy,” Luxemburg neither universalizes the Polish example nor is she hostile to all nationalist movements. She raises more general questions about the right of national self-determination, such as: Who constitutes the nation? Who can actually exercise that right when nations are governed by bourgeois political powers who singularly claim to express the national will? Rejecting the notion that the nation is a “homogenous sociopolitical entity,” Luxemburg concludes that in the historical present and in the struggle to dismantle class society, genuine “self-determination” should rest not with the “nation” but the proletariat—which is to say, the dictatorship of the proletariat.³ And when military conflict engulfed Europe, she watched in horror as nationalism fueled the fires of imperialism and war. As she argued in *The Junius Pamphlet* (1915), imperialism displaced “the old bourgeois democratic program” of national development with the drive for expansion and colonial exploitation. “Today the nation is but a cloak that covers imperialistic desires, a battle cry for imperialistic rivalries, the last ideological measure with which the masses can be persuaded to play the role of cannon fodder in imperialistic wars. . . . [I]n the present imperialistic milieu there can be no wars of national self-defense” (Luxemburg, 1916; Munck, 1986: 52–53).

Not surprisingly, Lenin strongly disagreed. In his response to *The Junius Pamphlet*, he was less willing to declare bourgeois democracy dead or nationalism a dead end, especially in the colonies and “semi-colonies.” For oppressed people groaning under the weight of imperialism, national wars of liberation were no cloak but revolutionary and “inevitable” (Lenin, 1916).⁴ On the latter point, Luxemburg partially agreed and expressed support for anti-colonial struggles in the past. In 1896, for example, she supported Crete’s revolt against the Turkish Empire. But her position was closer to that of Indian Communist leader M. N. Roy, who distrusted the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois elements leading anti-colonial nationalist movements. Conceding that proletarian revolution was out of the question, Roy believed that workers and peasants under the guidance of a disciplined Communist

³ The late Narihiko Ito penned a brilliant and thorough reading of Luxemburg’s “The National Question and Autonomy.” See Ito (2010: 4–68).

⁴ To be sure, Lenin’s take on the national question was far more sophisticated and nuanced, but this is not the place to elaborate. In fact, a careful reading of the complete works of Lenin and Luxemburg will reveal more points in common than what we see on the surface. For an incisive analysis of Lenin’s shifting position on “the national question,” see Tamas Krausz (2015: chapter 4).

Party would invariably infuse nationalism with a revolutionary character. Whereas Lenin was willing to support nearly all anti-colonial movements, Roy feared that the petit-bourgeois leadership of the respective nationalist movements “would compromise with Imperialism in return for some economic and political concessions to their class” (Roy, 1964: 378).⁵

After the Bolshevik seizure of power, the “right of nations to self-determination” took on an additional valence, and Luxemburg knew it. Her pamphlet on the Russian Revolution revealed a keen understanding of Lenin’s strategy of extending the right to self-determination in order to win over “the many foreign peoples within the Russian Empire to the cause of revolution.” In Luxemburg’s view, however, the strategy backfired since Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, and the Baltic countries ended up allying with German imperialism against the Revolution. The losers, she insisted, were the working classes in those states bordering Russia. Nationalism hindered working-class solidarity across the old empire and strengthened the hand of the bourgeoisie in those border states.⁶

Behind land policy and the national question stood the central problem that she believed threatened the future of the first socialist state: the suppression of democracy. Just as Rodney wryly noted that she supported democracy for the bourgeoisie, but not for peasants and oppressed nations, Luxemburg charged the Bolsheviks with undermining popular democracy while championing “the ‘popular vote’ of the foreign nationalities of Russia on the question of which land they wanted to belong to, as the true palladium of all freedom and democracy.” Her point was that building democratic institutions in Russia better advances the socialist project than promoting the self-determination of nations when the bourgeoisie still rules those nations.

Luxemburg’s sympathetic critics attribute her assessment of Russia’s situation to being imprisoned and thus unaware of the dire circumstances facing the Bolsheviks in 1917–1918, or, as we shall see, they argue that she changed her mind.⁷ But what actually happened? How dire were the circumstances? Why did Lenin abolish the Constituent Assembly? The Bolsheviks

⁵ See also John Haithcox (1971: 14–15). A copy of Roy’s theses is available in V.B. Karnik (1978: 107–110). For Lenin’s views on Roy’s supplementary theses, see (1967: 30–37).

⁶ She held fast to this position until her death. In the last few days of her life, she penned a short note critical of Woodrow Wilson’s peace settlement that allowed for the creation of several new nation-states in Central Europe under the guise of national self-determination. Exhorting that national unity and harmony is predicated on “class harmony” or the arresting of class struggle, she complained, “Nationalism is at this moment the victor. On all sides nations and national groups are ganging up to claim their rights to create their own states. Mouldering corpses emergence from centuries’-old graves . . . historyless peoples, who have never formed states, are filled with a fierce drive for statehood” (Luxemburg quoted in Talmon, 2017 [1981]: 446).

⁷ I discuss the debate surrounding her alleged “mistakes” and the question of her isolation below. See also Nettl (2019 [1966]: 703–705); Lukacs (1971: 277–280); Zetkin (2017 [1922]); Schurer (1962: 361–362).

were simply overwhelmed with crises. The new regime was beset by war on multiple fronts—the White Army (former Tsarists, right-wingers, and representatives of the *ancien regime*); foreign powers, including former Allies, concerned about a Russian–German alliance (France, England, the United States, Japan, etc.); Ukrainian and other nationalists and anti-colonial movements hostile to Bolshevik rule. After the seizure of power, the Bolsheviks were expected to participate in elections to the newly created Constituent Assembly announced before the October Revolution to replace the Provisional Government. Lenin was reluctant to participate, preferring instead the Soviet model of direct elections of workers by workers over parliamentary democracy, which he viewed as an instrument of bourgeois rule.⁸ But the Bolsheviks decided to proceed with elections knowing that they probably would not get a national majority. Of the over 48 million men and women who went to the polls, 19.1 million cast their votes for the largely peasant-based Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), the Bolsheviks won 10.9 million, the Kadets 2.2 million, the Mensheviks a mere 1.5 million, and the remaining 7 million votes went to non-Russian socialist parties (mostly in Ukraine). Though dwarfed by the SRs, the Bolsheviks managed to gain the majority of workers’ and at least 42 percent of the soldiers’ votes.⁹ When the Constituent Assembly held its opening session on January 5, 1918, tensions were high. Even before delegates sat down, Bolshevik Red Guards fired on a group of demonstrators outside, killing twelve people. The Bolsheviks insisted that the Assembly recognize Soviet power and its political program. When SR leader Viktor Chernov, the Assembly’s elected chair, put forward his own agenda instead, the Bolshevik delegates walked out. The next day Lenin dissolved the Constituent Assembly.

Contrary to Rodney’s accusations, she did not defend the bourgeoisie’s right to vote or the Constituent Assembly as an instrument of proletarian democracy. She cautioned, “he who tries to apply the homemade wisdom derived from parliamentary battles between frogs and mice to the field of revolutionary tactics only shows thereby that the very psychology and laws of existence of revolution are alien to him.” Accordingly, she defended the Soviets and the party’s mandate, “All Power in the Hands of the proletariat

⁸ In *The State and Revolution*, written between August and September of 1917, Lenin wrote, “the dictatorship of the proletariat . . . as the ruling class for the purpose of suppressing the oppressors, cannot result merely in an expansion of democracy. Simultaneously with an immense expansion of democracy, which for the first time becomes democracy for the poor, democracy for the people, and not democracy for the moneybags, the dictatorship of the proletariat imposes a series of restrictions on the freedom of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists. We must suppress them in order to free humanity from wage slavery, their resistance must be crushed by force; it is clear that there is no freedom and no democracy where there is suppression and where there is violence” (Lenin, 1917b).

⁹ These figures come from Smith (2017: 155).

and peasantry,” which she contended “insured the continued development of the revolution.” Rather, she argued that the annulment of the Constituent Assembly should have been followed by new elections. Securing the revolution, she insisted, required not less democracy but more: “[T]he more democratic the institutions, the livelier and stronger the pulse-beat of the political life of the masses, the more direct and complete is their influence.” She opposed bourgeois democracy but found the policy of extending the franchise “only to those who live by their own labor” to be flawed. The problem with this formulation, she countered, was that it excluded the unemployed, people uprooted by economic dislocation, the urban proletariat returning to the countryside in search of land, and peasants (small landholders). And, even before Lenin implemented his New Economic Policy, Luxemburg observed elements of the *petit-bourgeoisie* were recruited to manage factories and run sectors of the economy. She could not fathom how they were expected to play an economic role and not demand political rights. She was not against crushing counter-revolutionary opposition by whatever means necessary, including “the deprivation of political rights, of economic means of existence, etc.” What troubled her was the general disfranchisement of broad sections of the populace, “not as a concrete measure for a concrete purpose but as a general rule of long-standing effect.” What’s worse, she adds, was the Bolsheviks suspension of other forms of democracy—press freedom, freedom of association and assembly. She asserts: “it is a well-known and indisputable fact that without a free and untrammelled press, without the unlimited right of association and assemblage, the rule of the broad masses of the people is entirely unthinkable.” The Bolsheviks made the cardinal error of substituting the dictatorship of the party for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

For Luxemburg, democracy was not reducible to the granting of liberal rights but principally a form of praxis. Rights shorn of mass political activity leave the old power relations intact while producing only a chimera of liberty. Socialist democracy can only be created through collective political activity involving the broadest participation of the masses. Socialism cannot be decreed. In one of the pamphlet’s most powerful passages, she writes:

The negative, the tearing down, can be decreed; the building up, the positive, cannot. New territory. A thousand problems. Only experience is capable of correcting and opening new ways. Only unobstructed, effervescing life falls into a thousand new forms and improvisations, brings to light creative new force, itself corrects all mistaken attempts. . . . Socialism in life demands a complete spiritual transformation in the masses degraded by centuries of bourgeois class rule. Social instincts in place of egotistical ones, mass initiative in place of inertia, idealism which conquers all suffering, etc., etc. No one knows this better, describes it more penetratingly; repeats it more stubbornly than Lenin. But he is

completely mistaken in the means he employs. Decree, dictatorial force of the factory overseer, draconic penalties, ties, rule by terror—all these things are but palliatives. The only way to a rebirth is the school of public life itself, the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion. It is rule by terror which demoralizes.¹⁰

In the end, she never broke ranks with the Bolsheviks. She wanted the Revolution to succeed but not through authoritarian, anti-democratic means—a point she had been making since her 1904 critique of Lenin’s of party “centralism” (Luxemburg, 1904, 1915).¹¹ But as her biographer J. P. Nettl observed, she “was far more afraid of a deformed revolution than an unsuccessful one” (Nettl, 2019 [1966]: 702). A deformed revolution, she feared, could become the model for future socialist struggles, and the only way to redirect the Russian experiment and release the masses’ democratic energies was to crush the counter-revolution. And only revolution in Germany and throughout Europe could accomplish this. In other words, the European proletariat bore the primary responsibility for direction of the Russian Revolution. She made this point in a letter to her comrade Adolf Warski penned soon after her release from prison:

The [Bolshevik] use of terror indicates great weakness, certainly, but it is directed against internal enemies who base their hopes on the existence of capitalism outside of Russia, receiving support and encouragement from it. With the coming of the European revolution, the Russian counter-revolutionaries will lose not only support [from abroad] but also—what’s more important—their

¹⁰ There has been much written on Luxemburg’s understanding of socialist democracy, especially over the course of the last two or three decades. One of the most brilliant treatments I’ve read is an unpublished paper by Camila Vergara, “The Materialist Constitutional Thought of Rosa Luxemburg,” presented at “The Political Philosophy of Rosa Luxemburg. A Critical Assessment”. Berlin, January 10–11, 2019. See also, O’Kane (2015); Bronner (1987); Dunayevskaya (1991); Nixon (2018).

¹¹ Published originally in *Iskra* under the title, “Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy,” she repeats the point even more fervently in *The Junius Pamphlet* (1915), in which her focus was not Russian but German social democracy. She wrote: “Revolutions are not ‘made’ and great movements of the people are not produced according to technical recipes that repose in the pockets of the party leaders. Small circles of conspirators may organize a riot for a certain day and a certain hour, can give their small group of supporters the signal to begin The existing degree of tension between the classes, the degree of intelligence of the masses and the degree or ripeness of their spirit of resistance – all these factors, which are incalculable, are premises that cannot be artificially created by any party. That is the difference between the great historical upheavals, and the small show – demonstrations that a well-disciplined party can carry out in times of peace, orderly, well-trained performances, responding obediently to the baton in the hands of the party leaders. The great historical hour itself creates the forms that will carry the revolutionary movements to a successful outcome, creates and improvises new weapons, enriches the arsenal of the people with weapons unknown and unheard of by the parties and their leaders” (Luxemburg, 1915).

courage. Thus the Bolshevik use of terror is above all an expression of the weakness of the European proletariat. Certainly, the agrarian relations that have been established are the most dangerous aspect, the worst sore spot of the Russian revolution. But here too there is a truth that applies—even the greatest revolution can accomplish only that which has ripened as a result of [historical] development. This sore spot also can only be healed by the European revolution. And it is coming!¹²

And it was coming. As the German empire's defeat by the Allies appeared imminent, the country was beset by strikes, demonstrations, and mutinies throughout 1918, calling for the overthrow of all monarchs and the creation of a socialist republic. Workers' and Soldiers' Councils were formed in Munich, Bavaria, and other parts of the country. On November 9, SPD leader Philipp Scheidemann proclaimed a new German republic. The next day, the SPD and some leaders of the Independent Socialists (USPD) formed a government and surrendered to the Allies. Meanwhile, two hours after Scheidemann's declaration, Spartacist leader Karl Liebknecht proclaimed a "free socialist republic" and the "world revolution" before a mass crowd from the balcony of the imperial palace. Rosa Luxemburg was released from prison on that same day, and the stage was set for a showdown between the SPD and the revolutionary Left represented by the Spartacus League, elements of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, a faction of the USPD, and other left radicals. In December, they came together to found the German Communist Party (KPD).

The SPD leadership sought to replace the Soviet-styled Workers' and Soldiers' Councils with a Constituent Assembly and called for elections in January. Worried that the revolutionary Left and an insurgent workers' democracy might contest its power, the presumptive "socialist" government turned to the military for help. Seeing the forces of reaction lining up behind the SPD, Luxemburg opposed participating in the Constituent Assembly elections. Although her comrades, defenders, and detractors would argue that her opposition to the German Constituent Assembly elections proved that she had changed her mind about Lenin's decision to disband the Constituent Assembly in Russia, Luxemburg clarified in her speech to the founding congress of the KPD that the Russian and German cases were significantly different, in that an anti-Communist government ruled Germany (Nettl, 2019 [1966]). Then in January, elements on the radical Left misread rising workers' discontent as an opportunity to seize state power. Luxemburg and her comrades in the KPD and Spartacus strongly disagreed, but once the masses hit the barricades, she and Karl Liebknecht believed it was politically and ethically important

¹² Letter to Adolf Warski, late November or early December, 1918, in Luxemburg (2011).

to support the rebellion—even if it was doomed. They resisted any attempts to negotiate with the ruling party over the heads of the masses. Targeted by the state as the masterminds behind the failed “putsch,” on January 15, 1919, Luxemburg and Liebknecht were tracked down and murdered by the military. Luxemburg was never taken to jail; a concocted tale circulated that she had escaped custody and disappeared into the crowd. Five months later, her mutilated and decomposing body was discovered in a canal. Pro-government and conservative newspapers justified their deaths in the name of national security, reinforcing a state of emergency that strengthened the military and severely weakened democracy. One paper declared their deaths “proper expiation for the blood bath which they unleashed” while another described them and their party as “criminals pure and simple who without any self-restraint had long lost all power to distinguish between good and evil” (Ibid).

THE CURIOUS HISTORY OF A PAMPHLET

Sometime in December of 1921 or January of 1922, after all of the speeches, tributes, and eulogies memorializing Rosa Luxemburg began to fade into the background, her old comrade Paul Levi decided to publish her pamphlet on the Russian Revolution that he had vowed to suppress. Levi had just been expelled from the KDP and decided to deploy Luxemburg’s critique as a weapon to expose Soviet errors. The publication sparked a firestorm of reaction throughout the Left. The Mensheviks immediately read the document as confirmation of their position. Menshevik leader Lulii Martov enthused in a letter to S. D. Shupak that the pamphlet “matches Kautsky in the way it raises the question of dictatorship and democracy letter-for-letter, so the effect of this publication is colossal.” He grossly mischaracterized Luxemburg’s position, but it didn’t matter—Martov used the occasion to validate his own position.¹³ Lenin himself dispatched a brief, caustic response attacking Levi as a “publicist” and opportunist and pointing out that Luxemburg was “mistaken” on every point on which they disagreed: the national question, her theory on the accumulation of capital, and her entire assessment of the Russian Revolution. He concluded, however, by calling her “an eagle” in the Communist movement and one of the great Marxist thinkers who began to gain clarity on Russia after her release from prison. For Lenin, revealing the depths of her understanding made the release of her papers an urgent matter (Lenin, 1965 [1922]).

¹³ According to Krausz (2015), the letter is dated December 21, 1921, which calls into question the generally accepted publication date of January 1922. It is possible that Martov had access to an advance copy.

The first wave of critiques came from fellow Communists, either elaborating on Lenin's remarks or doubling down on the idea that Luxemburg had abandoned her earlier position and never wanted the work published. Weeks after its publication, Georg Lukacs penned a serious and respectful, but no less damning, assessment of the document. He concludes that she was simply wrong on the national question. On the land question, she overestimated the proletarian character of the revolution and the Bolsheviks capacity to control the situation, leaving them with no choice but to mobilize "the liberated energies" of the peasantry or oppose them and therefore "isolate the proletariat . . . and thus to help the counter-revolution to victory." On democracy, she ignored the overthrow of parliamentary institutions in past revolutions and he (mistakenly) accused her of treating the Soviets as anachronistic since they anticipated a system of governance for the future socialist society rather than the present (Lukacs, 1971: 273).

Adolf Warski and Clara Zetkin, Luxemburg's longtime friends and comrades, were tasked either by the KDP or the Comintern to publish critiques of *The Russian Revolution*—Warski (1922) produced a substantial pamphlet, Zetkin an entire book (2017 [1922]).¹⁴ They are largely responsible for promoting the narrative that Luxemburg had changed her mind on the eve of her death. Zetkin recalled Leo Jogiches, Luxemburg's partner, telling her, "Rosa no longer wanted to come out with her old criticism. She intended to write a new, larger treatise on the Russian Revolution." Having succumbed to an assassin's bullet in March of 1919, he could neither confirm nor deny the conversation. She also quoted a 1921 pamphlet by Comintern secretary and leading Polish Communist Karl Radek, asserting that by the time Luxemburg left her jail cell, "the disagreements between her and us came to an end, which is the best assurance of the fact that they were anyway not of a fundamental nature" (Zetkin, 2017 [1922]: 10–11). But Zetkin went further, waging a systematic attack on each of her arguments, even those she allegedly had abandoned. While lauding Luxemburg for her courage, commitment, and theoretical brilliance, she nevertheless took her to task for her "abstract and naïve" view of democracy and her inability to grasp the real essence of proletarian dictatorship. Much to the surprise and disdain of her old Spartacus comrades, it read very much like an apologia for the Soviet Union. At one point, Zetkin agreed with Luxemburg that:

¹⁴ As former allies of Paul Levi, taking down Luxemburg's *The Russian Revolution* was also a strategy to distance themselves from Levi and pledge fealty to the party line. When the Nazis outlawed the KDP in 1933, Zetkin fled to Moscow where she died at aged seventy-six. Warski also fled to Moscow, but was executed in 1937, a victim of Stalin's "Great Purge."

The party should not become an isolated authority-wielding, oppressive entity, issuing commands to the masses. It is an indisputable fact that in Soviet Russia there are indications that the opposite is true. . . . No other party than that of the Bolsheviks so keenly spots its deficiencies and mistakes, admits to these with scrupulous honesty, and energetically seeks to overcome them. (Zetkin 2017 [1922]: 52–53)

It was an absurd claim that would become more absurd over time.

The Russian Revolution did not appear in English until 1940, and by then a more complete version of the manuscript had been discovered in the hands of a comrade who had held on to it for safekeeping (Frölich, 1972: 241). The English version was translated by Bertram D. Wolfe, a founding member of the Communist Party of America and former editor of the paper *Labor Unity*. Wolfe rose rapidly within the ranks of the Communist International and briefly served on the Executive Committee of the Mexican Communist Party before being deported back to the United States. In 1929, he was expelled from the Party for refusing a Comintern assignment and joined up with the Jay Lovestone faction, the Communist Party (Opposition). By the time he translated *The Russian Revolution*, the Lovestone faction was on the verge of dissolution and he was living in Provincetown, Massachusetts, hanging out with writers associated with the anti-Stalinist *Partisan Review* crowd. Luxemburg's text appeared in May of 1940, as a fifty-six-page pamphlet issued by the Lovestoneite Workers Age Publishers.¹⁵

Wolfe's introduction to this edition not only heaps unreserved praise upon Luxemburg and the document but extols it as "an amazing example of the fruitfulness of the Marxist method at its best for the understanding of history in the making" (Wolfe, 1940: iv). He explains the circumstances surrounding the publication of the less complete version, the attacks leveled against it, how the German Social Democrats used it against the Communists and how the Communists dismissed it as misguided and error-filled. For Wolfe, it was a potential beacon for a very different path to socialism but instead "was made into a faction football and kicked around by everyone" (Wolfe, 1940: v). However, in his summary and assessment of the document, Wolfe points out Luxemburg's "mistakes" and, regarding her treatment of the agrarian and national questions, sides with Lenin. Overall, Wolfe comes across as an independent Marxist still committed to socialism.

Walter Rodney read Wolfe's translation, but he read it under the imprint of the University of Michigan Press. Published in 1961 with a new Introduction by Wolfe, the book now bore the title *The Russian Revolution, and Leninism*

¹⁵ On Bertram D. Wolfe, see Wolfe (1981); Treadgold (1979: 335-348); and on the Lovestoneites, see Alexander (1981); LeBlanc and Davenport (2015).

or Marxism? The title reflected the addition of a second document, her 1904 essay "Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy," which Wolfe changed to "Leninism or Marxism?" Wolfe had remade himself into an anti-Communist Cold War warrior and Luxemburg's texts were radically reframed as weapons in the Cold War. He preserved or paraphrased a few passages from his 1940 Introduction, eliminating any agreements with Lenin or his sharpest criticisms of Luxemburg's judgment. In fact, he frames his essay as a comparison with Lenin, the latter as the embodiment of totalitarianism and the former as the angel of democracy. He even stooped to deliberately misrepresenting their respective positions. On the war, for example, he paints a gendered portrait of her as a pacifist whose anti-war activism was motivated by the suffering of the working classes, and Lenin as aggressor bent on turning the imperialist war into a civil war! (Wolfe, 1961a: 10)¹⁶ Wolfe went so far as to suggest that the newly formed German Communist Party had been "Russified" against Luxemburg's better wishes and better judgment, forcing her to assume leadership of a Party whose tactics she found disagreeable. Assuming a melodramatic tone, he writes: "In vain did she try to convince them that to oppose both the Councils and the Constituent Assembly with their tiny forces was madness and a breaking of their democratic faith. They voted to try to take power in the streets, that is by armed uprising. Almost alone in her party, Rosa Luxemburg decided with a heavy heart to lend her energy and her name to their effort" (Wolfe, 1961a: 16–17).

Little wonder why Walter Rodney approached the document with a fair share of suspicion.

WALTER RODNEY IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF RED ROSA

Walter Rodney returned home in 1974 to head the History Department at the University of Guyana. The appointment never materialized, however. President Forbes Burnham pressured the university Board of Governors to rescind the appointment. Burnham correctly perceived the brilliant, charismatic Rodney as a threat to his regime and believed that by denying him employment he would go away, perhaps back to Africa. He was mistaken.

Rodney had just devoted several years to reading, writing, thinking, and teaching about revolution and the challenges of socialist transformation while living in Tanzania, a declared socialist state. President Julius Nyerere deemed their brand of non-aligned African socialism "Ujamaa." The University of Dar es Salaam had been a hotbed of radical scholars in an era characterized

¹⁶ A version of the "Introduction" was reprinted in Wolfe (1961b).

by armed struggles for decolonization and socialist revolutions in the Third World. Tanzania served as the base for several anti-colonial and liberation movements in exile, and the competing models of Soviet and Chinese societies were common topics of discussion and debate. Though keenly aware of his status as a guest in Tanzania, Rodney was not afraid to criticize the government. He often supported student radicals on campus when they clashed with the government and helped launch the journal *Cheche*, Swahili for “Spark” or *Iskra* in Russian, named after the organ of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. *Cheche* was mildly critical of Ujamaa and the bourgeois character of university education (Shivji, 2012; Markle, 2017; Lewis, 1998: 124–153).

Rodney spent a great deal of time analyzing peasants and the land question, a prominent issue, as we’ve already seen, in debates surrounding the Russian Revolution. For Rodney, the issue was unavoidable since this was the fundamental question for post-independence Africa, especially in Tanzania where Ujamaa entailed the creation of collective villages. In his studies of Russia, he wrestled with the question of collectivization. He wrote a provocative essay that argued that President Julius Nyerere’s concept of Ujamaa was not “African socialism,” as he described it, but an expression of scientific socialism. The parallel he drew with Russia was not of forced collectivization but a vision of direct peasant socialism promoted by the Narodniks in which the *mir* (village communes) and *artel* (artisans’ cooperatives) might lay the foundations for socialism in the Third World—a position, incidentally, with which Luxemburg would have vehemently disagreed.¹⁷ His point was that stages of development are not fixed; Africa, notably Tanzania, could leap over the capitalist stage and move directly to socialism through Ujamaa villages. He was not promoting some kind of atavistic form of communalism but rather collective ownership and production in the countryside that could benefit from the technological advances of industrial socialist and even capitalist countries (Rodney, 1972: 61–76).

Rodney came home armed with an impressive knowledge of the history of socialist revolutions and an even more impressive record of revolutionary praxis. He immediately threw himself into the work of organizing the newly formed Working People’s Alliance. It was not a cadre organization but a mass-based multi-racial political movement that mobilized Afro- and Indo-Guyanese, as well as Indigenous groups. The two major parties in the country were divided largely along racial lines: Cheddi Jagan’s People’s

¹⁷ According to Norman Geras (1976: 85), since at least 1903 Luxemburg argued against the populist idea that the peasant commune can be the bases for building socialism. She held on to the stages of development, not dogmatically, but because Russia was already on a path to capitalist development.

Progressive Party (PPP) had a substantial Indian (South Asian) following, whereas Burnham's People's National Congress (PNC) was predominantly Black. But like Luxemburg's revolutionary Germany, Guyana's major parties identified as social democrats or socialists. Burnham proclaimed his country a "cooperative socialist republic" and enjoyed close ties with Havana and Moscow; Jagan, the country's first Chief Minister, was a Communist who also had some Soviet ties. In fact, the social democratic turn was a regional phenomenon, not limited to Guyana. During the 1970s, Eric Williams of Trinidad and Jamaica's Michael Manley had at least cast out in the direction of social democracy. Manley's efforts to build socialism through parliamentary measures and redistributive policies funded through deficit finance collapsed under the weight of mounting debt, internal violence, and IMF-imposed structural adjustment policies.

But just as Luxemburg had declared German Social Democracy a "stinking corpse" in 1915, exactly sixty years later in the pages of *The Black Scholar*, Rodney said much the same thing about the presumptive leaders of Caribbean social democracy. Rodney singled out Burnham and Manley as "pseudosocialists" who promoted policies of nationalization, state repression, racial divisions, and "the deliberate distortion of revolutionary concepts" as means of consolidating power. "[N]eo-colonial politics," Rodney cautioned, "have entered a new operational phase in which pseudo-socialism is adjudged to be more effective than anti-socialism as a means of maintaining control over the working people . . . Pseudosocialism is especially concerned with its image at home and abroad and seeks support from the socialist camp and from revolutionary sectors of the imperialist world" (Rodney, 1975: 20).

Pseudosocialism had to be contested by the working classes, according to Rodney, and that meant building workers' democracy. In 1978, he published an editorial in the inaugural issue of *Transition*, a journal he and some of his WPA colleagues founded. Echoing Luxemburg's critique of the Bolsheviks, he argued that workers' democracy was an essential element, if not a precondition, in the struggle for socialism in the Third World. He criticized the undemocratic practices of Marxist regimes in Africa—notably, the People's Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville), Ethiopia, Somalia, and Guinea under Sekou Touré. In these states, he contended, "Marxist intellectuals have been silenced, workers' representatives have been eliminated and the working class as a whole excluded from democratic participation in social reconstruction. For transition to have validity, it must include the widespread promotion of socialist education without caricature and it must rely firmly on workers' democracy" (Rodney, 1978: 8; Lewis, 1998: 217). The voice of Luxemburg could not be any clearer.

One of the first serious challenges to Burnham's "pseudosocialism" came that same year. In July, the Burnham regime held a referendum to allow the

government to change the Constitution with only a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, bypassing the referendum process. Some of the proposed changes would have limited certain civil liberties, such as freedom of speech and assembly, and given the PNC control over critical aspects of the electoral process rather than an independent Elections Commission. Mass protests convinced the people to boycott: between 10 and 15 percent of the electorate turned out. The defeat of the referendum only intensified Burnham's antipathy toward the WPA. And to complicate matters, the deepening political conflict coincided with the Jonestown massacre in which over 900 Americans died by mass suicide under orders of the Reverend Jim Jones, though the tragedy did nothing to dampen U.S. support for the Burnham regime (Lewis, 1998: 225–227; Gibbons, 2011: 188–189).

The WPA organ, *Dayclean*, declared 1979 “the year of the turn,” by which they meant a turn “from dictatorship over the masses to democracy of the masses.” That year witnessed revolutions in Nicaragua, Iran, and—most significantly for the people of Guyana—Grenada. The New Jewel Movement's (NJM) overthrow of Eric Gairy's regime on March 13, 1979, marked a sea-change, not only for the Left in the Caribbean but throughout the hemisphere and around the world. Two months later, a popular uprising in Dominica forced a regime change. St. Lucia followed with the election of the left-leaning Labor Party. And in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, three opposition parties formed an alliance to defeat the virulently anti-communist Milton Cato government (Roopnarine, 2010: 14–15; Gibbons, 2011: 196). Andaiye (2020), editor of *Dayclean* and a founding member of the WPA, vividly recalled how the Grenadian Revolution emboldened the movement in Guyana to take on the Burnham regime, but much of the Guyanese left was reluctant since Burnham still controlled the military.

Then, on July 11, 1979, the Office of the General Secretary, People's National Congress and Ministry of National Development was burned to the ground. Several WPA members and associates were arrested, including Rodney, Rupert Roopnarine (filmmaker, poet, writer), Bonita Harris, Kwame Apata, Omawale, and Karen De Souza. A week later, a mass rally in Georgetown drew some 5,000 in defense of the arrested WPA leaders, all of whom had been released on bond. Rodney spoke last and electrified the crowd by calling for the overthrow of Burnham “by any means necessary” (Lewis, 1998: 229; Kwayana, 2008). On July 27, the WPA officially constituted itself as a political party under a program called “Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Guyana.” Rodney backed the decision to create a disciplined cadre organization so long as it maintained a broad democratic character as opposed to a vanguard party.

Rodney's opposition to vanguardism may seem counterintuitive given his defense of Lenin over Luxemburg, but events in Grenada had exposed its

limitations. Rodney was especially critical of Maurice Bishop, leader of the NJM, because he dismissed press freedoms and “notions of parliament” as “bourgeois rights.” Rodney vehemently disagreed. According to Andaiye, “His point was that the rights that left-wing Caribbean people referred to, dismissively, as ‘bourgeois-democratic rights’ were rights which, in the Caribbean at least, had been fought for and won by working people” (Lewis, 1998: 225, 232). Bishop did not take kindly to Rodney’s criticisms, once referring to him as “a pain in the ass!” Andaiye, too, pointed to the decline of mass organizations in Grenada under Bishop, which she attributed in part to the anti-democratic character of the Marxist–Leninist cadre party. As early as 1982, elements of the Caribbean Left had begun to quietly break with Bishop over the lack of democracy in Grenada. Seeing the writing on the wall, as it were, the WPA abandoned its plans to become a cadre organization and opted instead to remain a mass party with a robust electoral strategy (Andaiye, 2020).

The fact that Forbes Burnham *supported* Bishop and the NJM and even provided their cadre members with military training may have put the WPA in an awkward position, but they never wavered in their support for the Grenadian Revolution—at least not publicly. Few on the Left had Rodney’s or Andaiye’s temerity to criticize the revolution openly, much to the movement’s detriment. In his assessment of the overthrow and subsequent collapse of the NJM in 1983, Clive Thomas, one of Rodney’s closest comrades, argued that failing to hold free and fair elections eroded popular support. But he also laid part of the blame on the Caribbean Left, including the WPA, for withholding public criticism for fear of splitting ranks, undermining the revolution, and opening the door for a U.S. invasion. Their silence did not stop the invasion, and the NJM was not held to account by its comrades (Thomas, 1984: 7, 23; Meeks, 1993).

In many ways, the PNC resembled the SPD after the German Revolution, in that Burnham’s ties with Havana, Moscow, and the NJM in Grenada provided left-wing cover for his authoritarian regime. It also allowed Burnham to paint the WPA as “ultra-Leftists” much as the SPD treated the Spartacists. Again, here was Rodney’s Luxemburgian moment: the WPA’s independent analysis of the class forces and material conditions in the region exposing the “pseudo-socialist” leadership of Manley and Burnham led to its isolation and vilification by the Soviet-oriented left. Even Cheddi Jagan of the PPP regarded the WPA as “adventurists” (Lewis, 1998: 215–223). So as the “year of the turn” evolved into the year of rebellion and repression, WPA leaders had targets on their backs and few international allies. The established world Communist powers—the USSR, China, and Cuba—refused to come to their defense since Burnham was their man. And the PPP made the fateful decision to abandon its opposition to the PNC and instead offer the ruling party

“critical support,” especially for policies consistent with their Marxist and anti-imperialist agenda (Lewis, 1998: 212–213). To the WPA leadership, Burnham issued a chilling warning: “Prepare your wills” (Gibbon, 2011: 196).

And so it began. In July, Father Bernard Darke, a Jesuit priest and journalist critical of Burnham, was stabbed to death by members of the pro-PNC gang, the House of Israel, as he took photos of demonstrators protesting the arrests of Rodney and other WPA members for arson. Throughout the summer and fall, the police arrested, beat, and shot dozens of WPA activists, the most prominent casualties being Ohene Koama and Edward Dublin. Strikes erupted across the country involving some 20,000 workers, primarily in the bauxite and sugar industries. Rodney and Clive Thomas had begun to hold political education workshops with bauxite workers, for which they were arrested several times. Rodney’s home was also ransacked by police, who seized valuable papers and books (Gibbons, 2011: 195–205; Kwayana, 2008; *Black Scholar*, 1979).¹⁸

Eusi Kwayana identified the insurgency as the “civil rebellion.” In 1979, the civil rebellion peaked near the end of the summer, early fall, but then lost momentum—partly as a result of growing state repression. While few, if any, WPA leaders believed the overthrow of Burnham was imminent, they did not rule it out. The spontaneity of the rebellion even caught veteran organizers, such as Eusi Kwayana, by surprise. Rupert Roopnarine recalls “attempting to equip ourselves, essentially ready ourselves, and ready the masses for an insurrectionary attack on the state. . . . It’s no secret we were accumulating weapons. We were accumulating equipment of various kinds, and a certain amount of that was coming from the military” (quoted in Chung, 2012). Rodney had delivered a powerful speech, “People’s Power, No Dictator” which the WPA turned into a pamphlet and issued in October of 1979. He exposed Burnham’s “cooperative republic” as a brutal dictatorship in socialist clothes, absent any credibility or legitimacy. He charged the regime with abrogating all of the basic rights for which generations of Guyanese working people fought and called for non-cooperation and civil disobedience, national unity, and popular resistance on every front. The text could have served as the needed spark to expand the civil rebellion since “People’s Power, No Dictator” had become a popular slogan, but the WPA only had funds to print about 2,000 copies, and by fall the insurgency began to dwindle.¹⁹

¹⁸ For an excellent overview of the repression and civil rebellion in 1979–1980, see Canterbury (2005).

¹⁹ The pamphlet has been reprinted numerous times. See, for example, Walter Rodney (1981). This version includes a fine introduction by Trevor Campbell.

Similar to Luxemburg, Rodney blamed leadership for the lull in popular activity. In a letter dated May 2, 1980, he wrote, “the leadership—whether of the other left political party, the progressive trade unions or of the other anti-dictatorial parties and groups—did not see the possibilities that were present in the simultaneous explosion of mass militancy and worker action; they were in fact, overwhelmed by their sense that in the face of all this, the power of the state nevertheless remained intact” (Lewis, 1998: 239). But he also conceded that the state was weakening, evidenced by Burnham’s desperate efforts to reorganize the armed services and police, firing civil servants, resulting in the creation of private armies in the face of uncertainty. Even during the lull, state repression intensified. In the two weeks leading up to Rodney’s assassination in June 1980, at least thirty-nine people were arrested for “suspicion of political action” and some thirty homes searched (Lewis, 1998: 240).

Rodney knew he was a marked man. Many of his comrades had already died at the hands of the state. Rupert Roopnarine barely survived an assassination attempt, and Clive Thomas had escaped a kidnapping. The Guyana Police Force had its own steel band that performed an original piece titled “Run, Rodney, Run,” and posters bearing the same title appeared throughout Georgetown (Gibbons, 2011: 207). On June 13, he was blown up by a bomb hidden in a walkie-talkie. As with Luxemburg, the government and press reports blamed Rodney for his own demise. The official government line was that Rodney was planning to blow up the prison but the explosive device detonated prematurely. The day after his death, unsigned leaflets circulated in Georgetown declaring, “He who lives by the bomb shall die by the bomb. Rodney blows himself up on the way to blow up prison. WPA don’t look for scapegoats now” (Lewis, 1998: 245).

TAKING POWER IS NO TEA PARTY

C.L.R. James, the renowned Trinidadian Marxist, cultural critic, and former mentor to Rodney, gave a lecture at UCLA just months after Rodney was assassinated in Guyana. Titled “Walter Rodney and the Question of Power,” it was supposed to be James’s sober assessment of the reasons for his premature death. For James it was a political question: “Walter had not studied the taking of power.” And to whom does he turn to make his case? Lenin and the Russian Revolution, primarily his speeches and writings following the 1905 Revolution on the eve of the October Revolution. It is odd to read given what I know about Rodney’s deep and thorough reading of the history of the Russian Revolution. Perhaps James was unaware? Or perhaps he knew all too well? But one of the striking points he makes, drawing on Lenin, is that insurrection is not a conspiracy and it depends not on a party but on “an

advanced class,” which is to say, a popular insurgency of a politically conscious people. And most importantly, that advanced class must be in conflict with the ruler. In Guyana, James asserted, this was not the case since Forbes Burnham continued to enjoy broad support. He goes on to explain why and how Burnham was able to maneuver as a faux socialist and Cheddi Jagan, with all of his Soviet credentials, was in retreat. As James put it, “[Walter] did not wait for the revolutionary people and the revolutionary class to be in conflict with the government before he could start the question of the insurrection” (James, 1982).²⁰

Clearly, James was wrong. Rodney understood that taking power was not on the horizon and he knew fully well how Burnham was able to maneuver behind the cover of what had begun to appear as a dying old Left. But an insurrection did occur, however fleeting, uneven, and unsustainable. In fact, Rodney knew something Maurice Bishop apparently did not: that the masses are the driver of revolution, not the party, and their energies require the oxygen of radical democracy.

Even in defeat, he learned, as Rosa Luxemburg had learned generations earlier, that authoritarian rule rests on a shaky foundation and people’s power will prevail. Rosa Luxemburg’s final printed words before her death vowed that:

[A] future victory will blossom from this “defeat.” “Order rules in Berlin.” You stupid lackeys! Your “order” is built on sand. Tomorrow the revolution will rear ahead once more and announce to your horror amid the brass of trumpets: “I was, I am, I always will be!” (Quoted in Nettl, 2019 [1966]: 772)

Rodney learned a great deal in the struggle for Guyana, and much of what he learned brought him closer to Luxemburg than perhaps he realized. Eusi Kwayana’s observations about Rodney’s views on spontaneity and self-emancipation are instructive here:

His views on spontaneity were related to his views on the self-emancipation of the working people. He saw the role of the revolutionary party, armed with a body of scientific political culture, as crucial. Scientific theory has its necessary relevance. Its role is to organize the experience of the working people worldwide and to compare it with a particular experience which is then enriched. Theory imparts awareness and enlarges the vision but revolutionary energy comes from the bowels of the oppressed and is an indispensable element of people’s struggle.

²⁰ The essay first appeared in Edward A. Alpers and Pierre-Michel Fontaine (1982).

Self-emancipation, then, does not mean the separation of theory from the masses of working people but the union of theory with the revolutionary instincts and experience of working people and with the revolutionary party so organized and so rooted that it is willing to take instructions from the working people's representatives. Negative vanguardism, then, is not the quality of a revolutionary party working from its base within the working people but a body giving orders to the working people and ignoring their best instincts as ill-informed or superstitious (Kwayana, 2008; James, 2017).

The final point I wish to make here is that James's critique of Rodney is eerily similar to Rodney's critique of Luxemburg. James virtually repeats Rodney's charge against Luxemburg: his failed analysis led to his death. In both instances, the fatal outcomes were interpreted by both men as the consequence of tactical missteps arising from errors in revolutionary judgment, not as casualties of a messy and asymmetric class war. Perhaps their cold political calculus masked a kind of survivor's guilt in the face of revolutionaries willing to pay the ultimate price for their commitment? Rodney's praxis in Guyana helped him see and embrace Rosa's understanding of democracy as praxis, and I suspect the later Rodney would have toned down his criticisms of Luxemburg—especially the line blaming her for her own murder. James, on the other hand, had come around to Rosa's position on democracy as praxis before Rodney was born. In the history of the Communist International published in 1937, James wrote of Luxemburg, "time has proved that her views foresaw only too well the dangers of excessive centralism and the glorification of the idea of dictatorship" (James, 2017: 136–137). Had Luxemburg and Liebknecht lived, he conjectured, "they and they alone could have prevented the corruption from Moscow of the German party leadership which began during Lenin's last illness and ended in the ruin of 1933." And yet he, too, attributed her violent and untimely death to her own tactical blunders, calling their decision to remain in Berlin after the state crushed the German Revolution "the greatest mistake of all" (James, 2017: 141–142).

While James's posthumous criticisms of Rodney, like Rodney's critique of Luxemburg, were misguided to say the least, studied together they do pose a larger question. Did we err in releasing Rodney's unfinished manuscript? Given his experiences with the WPA and the evolution of his thinking, would he still have wanted to publish the lectures in their original state? Will we witness similar tribunals surrounding this text on how "wrong" or "correct" he was on this or that matter? Will it be used as a defense of Stalinism? Will those of us who revere the martyred Walter Rodney have the temerity to read the book critically, situating it within its historical and political context? And will we recognize how far Rodney moved from those heady days in Dar es Salaam when the defeat of capitalism seemed imminent, to his final years in

Guyana when he and his comrades creatively mobilized the masses against a repressive regime calling itself socialist?

In life and death, Rosa Luxemburg and Walter Rodney were kindred spirits. Their work was always unfinished, always in motion, always an expression of the collective desire for freedom, and always a project of creolization. Neither separated their writing from praxis, which is why Luxemburg ended her life practicing the principles behind her critique of the Bolsheviks. The struggle to build proletarian democracy imbued with the energies of the people transformed her perspective on the revolution and informed her critique of Lenin's centralism. Similarly, Rodney proved to be a "better intellectual heir" to Luxemburg than he even realized because even when he sought to understand and even justify Soviet policies, his own political practice centered on building people's democracy. He knew that "laws of development" were not fixed or even "laws" in the formal sense, and that real movements were guided by more than theory but improvisation, imagination, will, an ethical commitment to the oppressed, and a willingness to die in struggle so that others might one day live free.

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Chapter 5

A Political Economy of the Damned

*Reading Rosa Luxemburg on Slavery through a Creolizing Lens*¹

Jane Anna Gordon

For Rosa Luxemburg, slavery was not a footnote to the prehistory of capitalism.² Growing with the war-making integral to building and maintaining empires, in her account, enslavement introduced the mythic divide between those who labor and those who think—and make consequential political decisions. This division was reified in the emergence of the state as a coercive, authorizing power of ruling classes. Since, for Rosa, to be viable, capitalism requires ongoing imperialism, slavery would continue to be an essential part of it. In enslavement were basic principles of domination upon which capitalism continues to elaborate. For Rosa, understanding slavery's mode of organizing society was central to analysis of the development of global political economy. Undoing that mode of organizing society was foundational to the project of socialism.

At the same time, in her writings explicitly focused on enslavement, Rosa errs in two ways that require rethinking. First, she *accepts* the view

¹ I am grateful for the opportunity to have presented this book chapter in draft form at the Columbia University Political Theory Workshop in fall 2019. Special thanks to Joshua Simon for the invitation, to Charles Thibault Battaglini for handling the logistics, and to Isaac Stethem for his excellent and thought-provoking commentary. Much appreciation also to Jean Louise Cohen, Jon Elster, Turkuler Isiksel, Jaby Mathew, Shaunna Rodrigues, and Nadia Urbanati for their engagement. Special thanks to John Comaroff and Lewis Gordon for their feedback on the penultimate version of this chapter.

² Marx (1941) himself was an exception to this rule. This was especially evident in his journalistic writings that documented plantation slavery in the U.S. south, emphasizing its indispensability to the development of capitalist industry in England.

that enslavement achieved the radical separation of corporeal from cerebral labor, with the implication that slavery created conditions necessary for the generation of ideas that would culminate in capitalism and then socialism. Put differently, the physical labor of the enslaved enabled the intellectual developments that would free their descendants. Or, *there could be no socialism without the history of enslavement*. Second, while Rosa celebrated the fact that the enslaved pioneered remarkably large and self-organized uprisings and daily acts of subterfuge—ones that might inspire subsequent revolutionary action—she saw the results of their actions as ultimately futile.

In what follows, I explore Rosa's writings focused on enslavement along with select writings by Ottobah Cugoano and C.L.R. James. I argue that the crucial insight in her magnum opus *The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to an Economic Explanation of Imperialism*—that Marx's "so-called primitive accumulation" is a permanent feature of capitalism—demands a creolizing of the dialectic at the center of Marxist projects. Creolizing requires us to challenge the orthodoxy that enslaved people cannot make historic political theoretical contributions through word and deed. Consistent with doing so is Rosa's expansion of actors indispensable to revolutionary action to include the living surroundings we share. She thereby seems to invite the kind of reworking for which I am arguing.

ROSA ON ENSLAVEMENT

Rosa's reflections on enslavement appear primarily in her *Introduction to Political Economy* and her text titled "Slavery," both of which were composed while she worked as a teacher of history, economics, and social theory at the German Social-Democratic Party's school between 1907 and 1914.³ The school was created to educate party cadres and trade unionists whose interest in radical ideas had been ignited by the 1905 Russian Revolution. Rosa quickly became one of the most popular and hard-working instructors—lecturing five days a week for two hours each day. The only woman on the educational staff, as her biographer J. P. Netti (1962) claimed, constant discussion with her students helped Rosa clarify her own ideas (Hudis, 2014a: xii).⁴

³ "Slavery," written sometime after 1907 as a course lecture, sat in the Russian regime's archives until the 1990s. Published for the first time in 2002 by Narihiko Ito, it appears in full in Volume 1 of *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*.

⁴ Paul Levi reflected in his memorial address delivered in the Teachers Union building in Berlin on February 2, 1919, "I believe there was scarcely a more pleasant memory in Rosa Luxemburg's life than in 1913 when Eduard Bernstein sought to have her dismissed from this post. Man for man (these were grown-up students), whether they remained her supporters or subsequently turned

Rosa's main claims about historical enslavement combine the familiar and the controversial. First, she argues that slavery "carried through [conclusively] the division separating mental and physical labor. This has remained true to the present day, and is a fundamental fact, or reality, for the entire forward development of class society" (Luxemburg, 2014b: 326). Before the normalization of enslavement, Rosa writes that knowledge was collective and concentrated in production in which everyone was engaged. No one doubted that scientific knowledge was necessary in order to cut a stone or to manufacture tools. For Rosa, Aristotle's discussion of natural slaves offered the best reflection of this permanent transformation: with the normalization of enslavement, natural slaves were considered only fit to undertake physical labor, the aims of which were posited by their masters. As non-citizens or foreigners, they were expected to have no political obligations and to play no part in public life. Free male citizens, by contrast, who were masters of the household, dealt mainly in affairs of state.

There were considerable "mental-spiritual" benefits to these arrangements, in Rosa's account. Radically separated from physical labor, aristocrats could "float freely in the air" (Luxemburg, 2014: 312b) in ways that set the conditions for the blossoming of the arts. "Aristotle would not have been capable of becoming what he was without slavery" (Ibid). For her, without it, there would have been no Greek philosophy. Without Greek philosophy, Christianity would not have emerged. Without Christianity, there could be no thought of/in the Middle Ages or the development of capitalism. And so, by implication, for Rosa, there would be no possibility of socialism if it weren't for the mental/physical labor separation introduced by slavery. It was a necessary evil for the greater self-realization of humankind, if not of individual human beings. Still, socialism, to be socialism, would have to eradicate just this divide.

At the same time, Rosa also describes slavery as disintegrating slave societies. The exclusion of slaves from the domain of "mental life" enabled the development of a distinct set of rulers or a dominant class that did not take part in the production process. They created laws that only benefited their interests but that everyone, including the slaves, had to honor. (Rosa reminded her students that it was not different in their times.) In other words, the state as the coercive power in class society also arose on the basis of slavery (Luxemburg, 2014b: 312, 326).⁵

against her, the students supported Rosa Luxemburg and gave such testimony for her that even the German party leadership had to abandon the idea of dismissing her" (quoted in Jacob, 2000: 122).

⁵ As we state in this book's introduction, Rosa agreed with Marx that "Freedom consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it" (*Critique of the Gotha Programme IV*).

Last, in terms of Rosa's main arguments, slave revolts were the first immense, world-historical class struggle against "the exploiters." That assessment, in her view, could not be made of peasants or the people whom she calls "the proletarians of Rome."⁶ Still, if these slave revolts involved, in one instance, the mobilization of 70,000 people, they were, in her estimation, "completely without results" (Luxemburg, 2014b: 327). Most slaves, enslaved as prisoners of war, simply wanted to return to their homelands or to break free from society entirely by joining robber bands or becoming pirates.⁷ Rosa writes that the struggle they engaged in was not:

based on any trend of economic development. The development of the economy at that point had ended in a blind alley. The decline of the Roman Empire meant in the most precise sense that it was compelled to return to previously existing forms. Therefore, the uprisings of the slaves had been futile. The economic form exhausted itself, it did not allow for a higher form of economic development. (Luxemburg, 2014b: 327)

In this circumstance, seemingly teeming with potential for emancipatory reconstruction, the mass mobilization of enslaved people represented a historic eruption, but little more. The enslaved either returned to their prior circumstances or sought to exit political life altogether. The economic form that emerged out of the immensity of the Roman Empire and had relied on their labor power exhausted itself rather than being dialectically transformed. Whether Rosa thought this case of the futility of slave resistance was more generally applicable remains ambiguous.

On the one hand, Rosa does not examine the consequences of other specific, historical instances of collective slave resistance, in Haiti or elsewhere. On the other hand, she asks explicitly of the Roman case, "Why could the slaves not produce a higher culture, using the concept of culture in the broadest sense, as a whole, since they did constitute labor power?" (Ibid). In other words, could they have acted as a revolutionary proletariat before the historical emergence of such?

She answers that the slaves destroyed their crude tools, removing any incentive for providing them with improved ones; that the slave relation was a fetter on technological development.⁸ In addition, she states, "The inner tendency of slavery is to develop into the self-destruction of labor power" (Ibid).

⁶ Rosa writes: "*The slave revolts were the first immense, world-historical class struggles against the exploiters. Not the free peasants, not the proletarians in Rome*" (Luxemburg, 2014b: 327, italics in the original).

⁷ In the language of Neil Roberts (2015), Rosa thought some enslaved people who had freed themselves sought only a perpetual *marronage* or flight.

⁸ The history of slavery in North and South America discredits this claim.

At the same time, Rosa immediately says, of capitalism and the proletariat of her own day, “This is also true today” (Ibid). But there is a difference:

other circumstances also bring with them the fact that the condition of capitalist society itself ordains that this will happen. Otherwise a deadly stagnation would set in that would destroy society. (Ibid)

Presumably, “other circumstances” include those factors (actors, conditions, trends of economic development) that keep conflict and destructiveness from leading only to stagnation. As an example of deadly stagnation, Rosa mentions when enslavement is remade in a capitalist mode. She writes: “In the southern states in North America, as a result of the introduction of cotton, sugar, and rice plantations, exploitation on a purely capitalist basis was driven so far and to such an extent that the slaves on average were worked to death in seven years” (Ibid).⁹ While she concludes that this example “is proof that capitalism too has the tendency to destroy labor power,” she adds that with “this tendency toward the destruction of labor power [that] existed under slavery, it is therefore a given that economic development could advance no further” (Ibid).

Rosa explores these central arguments through examples of the Incan Empire, of Crete and Sparta and then Greece more generally, of Rome, of the Muslim world, and the Spanish-, French-, and Anglo-Americas. She claimed what most subsequent historians of slavery have affirmed: that it was war that supplied potential slaves. It is for that reason, she argues, that through its study one sees early examples of different ways that societies created an organizing relationship of exploitation and servitude toward an outside. A frequent result was that, in its forceful incorporation, inhabitants of the “outside” were rendered landless and made to labor to feed their conquerors. The conquered therefore worked on newly foreign soil—because they had been dispossessed of the land that was the basis of their social cohesion—as labor power assigned to others. However, Rosa emphasizes, how conquest was undertaken and the aftermath was driven by the respective social formations of the conquerors and their needs.

When Rosa transitions to describing the first full realization of true enslavement in Greece and Rome, she emphasizes the precipitating influence of the Near East and Northeast Africa—Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, and Phoenicia. Specifically, she claims that what led to the increasing division between the masses of people and the aristocracy was the obsessional desire of the latter for the fine linen, perfumes, and purple robes of the East.

⁹ This could be considered an instance of “so-called primitive accumulation” within capitalism.

These desires were so determining that they ultimately would lead the aristocracy to exit production that was reoriented to focus almost entirely on generating goods for the purpose of trade. These changes also transformed their political geography. As aristocrats no longer worked in fields where the bulk of labor took place, they became concentrated in *the ancient city*. What emerged was the first instance of class domination in the original form of domination over the land or rural countryside by the city (Luxemburg, 2014b: 305–307).¹⁰

For Rosa, Rome was an even more extreme example of the same, with most aristocrats doing neither mental nor physical labor. She bases this claim on the huge numbers of prisoners of war who had been citizens in their own political communities, who, as Roman slaves, served as bookkeepers, accountants, teachers, artists, actors, dancers, musicians, and architects. In short, there was no sphere of public life in which slaves did not engage. This reality was represented in what Rosa describes as the Roman conclusion that everything related to work was slave work.

Rosa acknowledges that there was enslavement in Arab and non-Arab Muslim territories that profoundly implicated the east coast of Africa, leading to slave raids, depopulation, and the destruction of villages. At the same time, she makes clear that the destructiveness of this system, which had

¹⁰ Rosa writes,

“In order to be able to understand all the events of the ancient world in Greece and Rome, the influence of the Orient must, generally speaking, be taken into account . . . *Exchange of goods with the Orient was critical*. Luxury items were exchanged for the refinement of [the upper strata’s] way of life. The reason for the exchange was in order to get their hands on these items. . . . Exchange with the Orient led to two things: 1. Provided an incentive to the [Greek] aristocracy to have *various products manufactured*, which could be exchanged for luxury items from the Orient. Among these were oil, wine, and metals. 2. Spread, in association with exchange, the *money economy* in place of the earlier natural economy, since metal as a means of exchange comes from the Orient. In a natural economy, all goods are produced only for subsistence and in fact mainly by people who themselves consume, sell, or exchange them Yet, once the leaders become an aristocracy and the money economy is in place, the fees had to be paid in money and in kind. This creates a situation where the peasantry falls into debt [to] the large landowners The refinement of the lives of the aristocracy led to an increasing division between them and the peasantry. It developed into, on the one hand, the mass of peasants, who bore the brunt of the work, and on the other hand, the small body of aristocratic families, who saw as their only occupation the conduct of war and trade, with the latter helping to enhance their way of life. *Eventually, the aristocracy ceased to participate in the production process*. . . . In conjunction with this, a new social form emerged, *the ancient city*. This was the area in which the aristocrats lived. . . . Living in the city meant that one was not a participant in the production process, since the fields, the key source of production, lay further out.” (Luxemburg, 2014: 305–306, italics in the original)

existed for centuries beforehand, was intensified by European colonization and enslavement. This was because European invaders were the first who did not only subjugate and exploit those they conquered but who systematically seized their means of production in ways that completely unmoored existing social orders, unleashing a fundamental “uncertainty of social existence” (Luxemburg, 2014a: 234). In most cases, the sudden arrival of Europeans as settlers or trading colonies spelled nothing short of catastrophe: common property in land was violently abolished, broken up into private property for encroachers. In these circumstances, Rosa argued, those made Indigenous through their dispossession were turned into slaves, something resembling slaves, or simply exterminated. These outcomes were seen as the range of available options. With the first, in an implicit commentary on John Locke, Rosa observes that with the rise of money and commodity production, there was no outer limit on the degree of exploitation as had been the case when what was being produced could perish.

Rosa draws on the writings of Bartholomé de las Casas to explore the sloppy combination of genocide and varieties of forced labor in Spanish America. Documenting the twelve to fifteen million Indigenous people killed within only a few years of invasion, she describes instances of importing Indians from the Bahamas to what would become Haiti to replenish supplies of people who could be enslaved. She also emphasizes the many Indigenous people who drowned or hung themselves or aborted their children to escape laboring in the mines away from families. What limited their extreme exploitation for a time was not the moral protests of Catholic clergy or Spanish kings but the possibility of replacing Indigenous with African enslavement. Still, Rosa offers an important reminder that the freeing of Indigenous people from slavery did not last long. With the rise of *encomiendas* (a system of rewarding invaders with permission to enslave non-Christians) through which *encomenderos* (beneficiaries of that system) acquired the right to demand “moderate payments in money and in kind” (Luxemburg, 2014a: 210), there was no land that was not determined to be the property of Europeans. The result was Indigenous people forced to leave land they had inhabited since ancient times. In another interesting turn on Lockean argumentation, Rosa cites Alonzo de Zurita, who wrote: “Cultivated land was often seized from [Indigenous people], under the pretext that this was being utilized only to prevent its acquisition by the Europeans” (Luxemburg, 2014a: 211). In the place of literal and recognized slavery came a system of forced wage labor, introduced at the beginning of the seventeenth century by the Spanish crown. The law explained that the Indians would not work voluntarily and that, without them, the mines could only be run with great difficulty. This was true despite the presence of African slaves.

Last, in her account of Anglo North America, Rosa emphasizes Indigenous genocide and land dispossession and the indispensability of the products of African enslavement for the growth of factories in Lancashire, England, and the construction of railways in the U.S. north.¹¹ These developments in turn facilitated the creation and growth of industry and a bourgeoisie that would come to want more modern forms of labor exploitation. In addition to stressing the sheer numbers of implicated African people and the frequency of enslaved people being killed by those who enslaved them, Rosa pinpoints the hypocrisy of U.S. northerners who more easily opposed the plantation system because their climate prevented its adoption or duplication. She still credits the north with instigating slavery's abolition, while recognizing the extent to which this injured the "deepest feelings" of southerners (Luxemburg, 2014a: 117). At the same time, she states without qualification that prior to its formal abolition, it was through its heavy reliance on enslavement that one continent after another came under the rule of a capitalism that immiserated, proletarianized, enslaved, and produced a generalized insecurity of existence.

QUIBBLING WITH ROSA

Several features of Rosa's work on slavery are remarkable. First is the global quality of her account—she moves seamlessly from Peru to Greece to Phoenicia and, when considering the Americas, comments on the full hemisphere. In this context, she explores the relationship between land dispossession and Indigenous and African forced labor and challenges the view that the latter clearly and permanently displaced the former since, as Patrick Wolfe (2006) would later argue, enslavement and extermination remained related options. Second, while acknowledging the long histories of enslavement, including in the Muslim world, Rosa clearly marks the distinctiveness of European enslavement as tied to its capitalist character and its brand of conquest as catastrophic—shattering existing ways of living with a suddenness never experienced by Europeans themselves. It is in the midst of this discussion that she comments on German genocide in the early 1900s in what became Namibia. In a way that anticipated Aimé Césaire's (2000) argument about the Holocaust in Europe being a return of what Europeans did abroad, Rosa documents that it was the German general, who oversaw the sub-Saharan political program, who would become an important mentor to Adolph Hitler. Third, she draws on an impressively diverse range of sources, including a figure such as Las Casas, to argue—long before it became a point

¹¹ For fuller and more recent exploration of the second point, see Walter Rodney (1974).

of scholarly consensus—both that it was the African alternative that led to the temporary diminishing of Indigenous enslavement and that the fruits of African enslaved labor were foundational to the development of English and northern U.S. infrastructures and industry. In a parallel observation, she observed that U.S. northerners only criticized enslavement because they could not duplicate it and only sought to eradicate it when they had become rich enough through it to displace it. Finally, Rosa repeatedly emphasizes slave rebellion and refusal, including through infanticide.

At the same time, Rosa's claim about enslavement achieving the total separation of mental from physical labor appears to mistake Aristotelian *ideology* for historical reality. Of course, enslaved people did exhausting, corporeal work. However, it was figures like Aristotle, who sought, in the face of criticism, to rationalize enslavement, who wanted to argue that the work of slaves had no intellectual dimensions and that enslaved people mechanistically carried out tasks willed by others. The implication was that slaves, when laboring, developed no insights (including the development of tools) relevant to their work or to the understanding or organization of the societies to which they marginally belonged.

As we will see in the next section, the historical record demonstrates that enslaved people were thinking human beings. In addition to developing innovations connected to their physically demanding work, many enslaved men and women also challenged the project of trying to establish a sharp divide between full-fledged people who were citizens and their opposites. As Rosa's own examples illustrate, this divide has always been malleable, reflecting the political economic arrangements of a given society. Recall, for instance, her discussion of Rome, in which anything that required exertion was considered the domain of slaves. In those cases, enslaved people, who supposedly were only physical beings, made decisions and could appear in courtrooms on behalf of their masters. Unless it is *who* undertakes a task that determines its nature, the distinction between enslaved people who do strictly physical work and the free who engage only with their minds and spirits, is incoherent.

Similarly, while time and energy are required to pen works worth reading, there have always been thinkers who wrote under the most arduous and unlikely of circumstances. For those who had and have ample time, their work usually reflects this situation. Aristotle was either unable or unwilling to imagine non-slave societies or other ways of organizing the meeting of material and political needs. He had no interest in considering social arrangements that might have enabled a fuller range of people to contribute to the fulfillment of economic demands while also reflecting systematically on how such demands were understood and prioritized. While the products of the minds of slaveowners are vaunted century after century, their position of mastery

was not a requirement for writing. Slaves also wrote and, when they did, they often asked the kinds of questions Aristotle would not touch.

Rosa also exhibits a Greco-Roman-*philia* based in an uncritical acceptance of the ideology of European exceptionalism rooted in the supposed *sui generis* upsurge of intellectual and aesthetic brilliance in fifth-century Athens. It simply is not true that there were no other contemporary societies that produced philosophy and art or that occupants of Greek-speaking islands did so in isolation. Indeed, much of the greatness of what emerged from these territories was tied directly to how thoroughly porous and creolized they were—*much like the Caribbean, the world met in them*.

Finally, while Rosa's characterization of enslaved people seeking to escape through a flight from organized society is of contemporary salience to debates over the desirability of fugitivity as a model of political freedom, it seems wrong, especially given her otherwise global focus, to speak of the emancipatory potential of the actions of the enslaved only on the basis of the example of Rome. In addition, could it be true, despite the hordes of multinational enslaved people who engaged in historic acts of resistance, that the fall of that empire only represented a return to life as it had been? Are the "other circumstances" that enable the conflicts at the core of capitalism to result in something other than deadly stagnation necessarily absent from the slave system, *especially when slavery is not its own economic formation*, but rather one that combines with and refracts the socio-political-economic conditions in which it is practiced?

One of Rosa's primary contributions in *The Accumulation of Capital*, which she would author after her works on enslavement and which stirred up controversy as well as lasting admiration, was her claim that capitalism relies on "pre-capitalist" modes of production for its effective and ongoing expansion. Although there are disagreements with Rosa as to why this is so, her formulation makes the relationship between capitalism and imperialism fundamental. This crucial insight makes settler colonial plantation societies key examples, as they bring capitalist and pre-capitalist spheres together in immediate geographic proximity. In other words, unlike Europe, where the metropole and colonies enjoy a physical and resulting psychic separation, in the Americas and in South Africa, the pre-capitalist and capitalist domains existed together in ways that fundamentally enmeshed caste or race with class formations. For these reasons, had Rosa lived beyond the age of 47, her interest in the U.S. plantation system and Civil War, as well as Latin America, suggests this hemisphere might have become a fuller focus of her research and theorizing.

But the relevance of plantation societies is still larger. If one follows Rosa's argument about the reliance of capitalist on non-capitalist realms, surely it requires a reworking of the traditional dialectic—and Rosa's account—of

who could emerge as historic political actors. Put differently, a dialectic that centers on the proletariat as revolutionary subjects would suffice if the story were only about a capitalism that eradicated all other forms of life. As we have seen, it certainly shatters them.¹² However, if capitalism exists in an ongoing dependent relationship with pre-capitalist forms—so much so that it seeks them out and will need them even when they are seemingly exhausted—it cannot be the proletariat alone who are able to exercise decisive leverage. On their own, the proletariat would lack proper and sufficient globality if they fail to articulate themselves in relationship to the distinct forms of leverage of those indispensable actors in the “pre-capitalist” spheres.¹³ For those who sought or seek to return to those spheres through fleeing enslavement to their original homelands, their efforts have not only been backward-looking. They have also included seeking to construct new social forms that offer different bases for connecting people in increasingly transnational ways, constructing other forms of economies for meeting multidimensional needs through different kinds of global relations.

CREOLIZING ROSA

Rosa’s attention to the political importance of enslavement—especially her tracing the emergence of coercive states to it and emphasis on the resistant action of enslaved women and men—merits engagement. So, too, do the seeming limitations of her treatment. In all of these regards, reading her together with the writings of enslaved people and other members of the Black radical tradition is highly fruitful.

For instance, in ways that had much to do with the global, capitalist nature of the trans-Atlantic slave trade—rather than the slavery of the Roman Empire that was Rosa’s focus when assessing the transformative potential of slave revolt—Ottobah Cugoano (1757–1791) understood enslavement as reconstructing transnational political-economic relations in ways that could not simply be reversed. Captured at thirteen in Agimaque, present-day Ajumako, Ghana, and made to labor for nine months as a plantation slave in Grenada before being taken to London, he became a free and innovative abolitionist voice. He had no expectation that he and the millions of other enslaved African people could, in any coherent way, simply return home. Indeed, as

¹² This point is explored in Jeff Guy’s chapter in this volume.

¹³ Rosa’s analysis seems especially amenable to such a move when one considers, as Jon Nixon reflects, that “she defines ‘worker’ so as to include within that category state employees such as army and naval personnel, railroad and postal workers, and those working outside the industrial sector” (J. Nixon, 2018: 86). When arguing for the form that workers’ councils should take, she insisted that they be geographically inclusive so as to include agricultural workers.

Adam Dahl has astutely shown, Cugoano reoriented “the concept of natural liberty away from a focus on self-possession, private property, and individual rights toward transnational obligations to African polities and enslaved Africans” (Dahl, 2020: 909).¹⁴

Cugoano did so by demonstrating that the political values spoken in the language of natural liberty were not distinctively European. After all, throughout the Fante Federation, he claimed, people were born as free as the citizens of Britain. However, unlike those citizens, he observed, West African nations “may boast some more essential liberties than any of the civilized nations in Europe enjoy; for the poorest amongst us are never in distress for want” (1999: 103). If Cugoano romanticized Fante structures in his reflections on the political and military structure of his home through “imputing notions of equal freedom onto hierarchical systems of power,” as Dahl claims, he did so to “level powerful criticism at the slave trade by pointing to relations of solidarity that it destroyed” (Dahl, 2020: 913). Cugoano’s family came from an elite group of officials. This social location gave him unique insights into the range of trade networks, including that in slaves, that connected West Africa to global markets. But crucially, Cugoano did not draw on experience in Ghana, “for the sake of nostalgic return to a precolonial state.” He sought instead “to pry open new possibilities for solidarity and political responsibility” (Ibid).

Dahl analyzes Cugoano’s multiple political-theoretical moves, two of which I emphasize here. The first was to advance a distinct account of property and its relationship to natural liberty. The second, as already mentioned, was to construe a transnational public. In the first, Cugoano stressed the distinction between property in things and property in persons. With the latter, which he framed as much more significant, the harm was not to the owner himself or to the thing taken but instead to the ways in which its forcible seizure disrupted social relations that could not be easily mended. As Dahl

¹⁴ One could ask about the representativeness of someone as extraordinary as Cugoano and whether I am mistaking his unique ideas for broader political thinking of enslaved Africans of this period; *whether I am mistaking a singular biography for historical reality*. There is no question that Cugoano’s intellect and interest in political theoretical discursive engagement was exceptional, as is true of other enslaved men and women who emerged, despite their circumstances, as historic intellectuals. (The same could be said, to a degree, of intellectuals of any political location and period.) One could also ask whether his elite status made him unlike other enslaved people. As was true in Greek and Roman slavery, people enslaved in Africa came from a range of social, economic, and political locations. It was not only those who came to the Americas with existing education who emerged as intellectual leaders, however. At the same time, the resources that the enslaved brought with them were crucial for the way they navigated the lives that followed. The transnational political economic relations that gave rise to Cugoano’s situation, which became the object of and rooted his reflections, was shared by other enslaved people. In addition, many of the arguments that he and other Black intellectuals made—that addressed transnational audiences and critically engaged with natural rights and republican ideas—were in print circulation in original and popularized form among free and enslaved Black readers and spoken from the pulpit.

explains, in Locke's thought, it is not only that we are born free and equal but also that it is through our individual labor or our self-possessed bodies that we create value. As this understanding "establishes the equivalence between the possession of property and self-possession," it also "erroneously collapses the distinction between the theft of people and the theft of property, thus failing to provide an adequate model of political obligation in the context of African slavery" (Dahl, 2020: 909).

By contrast, Cugoano does not root the right to property in individual self-possession. Rather, it is based in "common rights" that "are culturally rooted in the kinship and communal social relations of pre-colonial African communities" (Dahl, 2020: 913). Common rights are both "generally and rationally agreed upon" and given force by tradition. This has ramifications for who is implicated by enslavement. For Locke, because "individuals have property in their person, and because property in chattel comes from self-ownership, the aggrieved individual is within the bounds of natural law to take the life of the thief as both punishment and reparation in a state of war" (Dahl, 2020: 914). However, as Dahl also emphasizes, Locke explores these violations primarily in dyadic situations. Into these situations, Cugoano "introduces a third party, the innocent bystander who does nothing" (Ibid). For Cugoano, this absence of intervention makes him or her complicit "in the larger crime of theft" as they fail "to resist evil in another, in order to prevent others doing evil" (1999: 59). The resulting assessment is clear: "contemporary citizens who remain passively opposed to slavery perpetuate the persistence of the slave trade and are complicit in the evil it sustains" (Dahl, 2020: 914).

There are additional implications. Because Cugoano roots natural rights—and their violation—in a relational ontology, he also offers a different diagnosis of harm. If understood in collective terms, when rights are breached, it is the social relations from which they are derived that have been damaged. As Dahl puts it, "slavery is a form of theft that involves the displacement of communal social relations that culturally and spatially ground the expression of individuality in the first place . . . [the] disconnection of kinship relations and relational webs of interdependence that define collective life" (Dahl, 2020: 916). In these ways, Cugoano politicizes the destruction of kinship and frames the "struggle against slavery" as one of repairing "webs of social interdependency" (Dahl, 2020: 918).

Still, Cugoano's reflections make it clear that repair cannot be achieved through the restoration of past relations. Those who bear witness to the trans-Atlantic slave trade are a global network of people interconnected through commercial dealings. This includes those in the metropole and those imperial subjects in the colonies as well as implicated members of coastal African nations, whether they be slaveholders or slave traders, "idle drones" or

“Colonians” stationed in Britain. All profit from the interconnected colonial economies of the slave trade (Dahl, 2020: 911).

In Dahl’s persuasive description, Cugoano was a creolizing thinker, whose arguments brought together elements of his interpretation of what he considered valuable European ideas with African ones and others that emerged out of the cauldron of enslavement in the Caribbean. His experience, which took him from West Africa to the Caribbean and to England, made him more of a global person and citizen, in terms of his vantage on the world, than many of his counterparts who were masters with ample free time to think. As Dahl writes:

In speaking from the perspective of an Afro-Christian tradition, Cugoano does not speak as an actual or even prospective citizen of national polities like Britain or the United States. He repeatedly positions himself outside of Britain by flagging his status as a native of Africa. Although he speaks to national communities, he does not speak as a member of them. Unlike the American jeremiad, the transatlantic jeremiad does not require shared membership in a bounded political community. . . . The slave trade thus spurred distinctive traditions of political thought that sought to rethink the foundations of political obligation from a transatlantic perspective. (Ibid)

These are the kinds of political reflections that emerged historically from people who had been treated as property. The fact that they were not free informed what they made the objects of their analysis. Shaped by direct exposure to the many implications of a globally transformative trade, the results were far-reaching.

More than a century later, Afro-Trinidadian C.L.R. James (1901–1989) also grappled with the world wrought by the trans-Atlantic slave trade as he shared many elements of Rosa’s Marxist commitments. What makes him an especially illuminating interlocutor in this context is his stress on both the historic ideas evident in (even unsuccessful) political action—as he explored in the case of the Haitian revolutionary slaves in *The Black Jacobins* and his generative slogan that “every cook can govern” (James, 1956).¹⁵ While James

¹⁵ This phrase, taken from the name of a magazine article published by Lenin in 1917, served as the title for James’s essay, “Every Cook Can Govern: A Study of Democracy in Ancient Greece Its Meaning for Today,” which was published in June 1956 in *Correspondence*, Vol. 2, No. 12. It is available here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1956/06/every-cook.htm>. *The online document does not include page numbers.* All of the following passages quoting James can be found there. In a similar spirit, Lenin had written: “Is there any way other than practice by which the people can learn to govern themselves and to avoid mistakes? Is there any way other than by proceeding immediately to genuine self-government by the people? The chief thing now is to abandon the prejudiced bourgeois-intellectualist view that only special officials, who by their very social position are entirely dependent upon capital, can administer the state.”

also engages in a Greco-philia based on many historical errors, the riff, borrowed from Vladimir Lenin—*every cook can govern*—affirms that those who labor can and do offer necessary insights into political life.¹⁶ We might read him as suggesting that crafting of emancipatory law and legitimate political institutions must draw on the indispensable knowledge of workers who are not only capable of self-rule but who bring insights to it that those who do not labor sorely lack. In this regard, we might recall Aristotle: that those who only ruled were very bad at being governed by others. Perhaps mastery was not good preparation even for self-rule.

James uses his understanding of fifth-century Athenian democracy to impugn “the average CIO bureaucrat or Labor Member of Parliament in Britain [who] would fall in a fit if it was suggested to him that any worker selected at random could do the work that he is doing.” Unlike Rosa, he thought this form of direct, participatory democracy, rather than enslavement, enabled the flourishing “of the greatest civilization the world has ever known.” In it, “the word *isonomia*, which meant equality, was used interchangeably for democracy.” Although specially qualified citizens were selected for certain posts, such as commanders of the fleet, the public assembly of all citizens retained authority over the most important decisions. All officials were determined by lot and their time of service was limited. They “believed in rotation, [in] everybody taking his turn to administer the state.” In addition, people were paid for the political work they did so that politics “was not the activity of your spare time, nor the activity of experts paid specially to do it.”

In James’ account, while intellectuals like Plato and Aristotle hated this system, it in fact produced them. After all, James writes, “it was the Greeks who invented playwriting,” through structuring theatrical opportunities in which authors had to please the populace. It was the jury of citizens “who repeatedly crowned Aeschylus and Sophocles, and later Euripides, as prize winners.” James comments, “It is impossible to see how a jury consisting of Plato and his philosopher friends could have done any better.” Greece also

¹⁶ It is certainly worth considering why Rosa and James, who were otherwise such consistently independent thinkers, repeated certain dimensions of the “Greece as the birthplace of philosophy and art” dogma so uncritically. One might excuse them by saying that, even with the widespread availability of revisionist histories that undermine this view, it is still repeated uncritically by many leading minds today. Each did so for the sake of making an otherwise critical point: Rosa about the societal disintegration and political illegitimacy introduced with enslavement and James to insist, against contemporary skeptics, that direct democracy was not only possible but had effectively been practiced with historic results. Still, both do appear to reinscribe the view that, while theoretically relevant suffering and action can emerge everywhere, Europe had a unique purchase on intellectual production. This is especially ironic given that this portion of the Mediterranean (“Greece”) was not coherently part of what later came to be called Europe and, as already stated, was marked by its heavy creolization.

produced philosophers and statesmen and fought and won great battles. In James's view, in inventing "this unique form of human equality in government," they "laid the intellectual foundation of Western Europe," creating the language of logic and dialectic, democracy, and rhetoric still in use today. Plato could think and speak and write freely because of these conditions. This was because they achieved what Karl Marx had imagined as the fully developed person of socialist society "to whom the different social functions he performs are but so many modes of giving free scope to his own natural and acquired powers" (Marx as quoted in James, 1956).

Against those who would claim that direct democracy in mass societies as impossible, James offers several counterarguments. First, it was not true that there was anything simple, primitive, or easy about Athenian society. Instead, its condition of possibility was trust and confidence in "the intelligence and sense of justice . . . of the common people." Whether a grocer, candlestick maker, carpenter, sailor, or tailor, James writes, whatever "the trade of the individual, whatever his education, he was chosen by lot to do the work the state required." Second, these Greek democrats had certain advantages over "the modern democrat." In James's depiction, they "did not understand individualism as we know it. For [them] an individual was unthinkable except in the city-state . . . [They] could not see [themselves] or other people as individuals in opposition to the city-state. That came later when the democracy declined." At the same time, this absence of extreme individualism was coupled with freedom, openness, and tolerance in private life and a severe respect for the law. Finally, if any individual citizen showed signs of becoming too powerful, he was quickly handled.

To those who would object that this was a democracy based on slavery, James first sneers that their concern was not with the injustice of enslavement but with discrediting democracy. But he goes on to suggest that, at least in its early days, Greek slavery was small in scale with slaves largely working in individual households. In this period, James writes, many slaves "although denied the rights of citizenship, lived the life of the ordinary Greek citizen." He cites as evidence Plato's complaints about democracy making it impossible to distinguish a slave from a free citizen. For James, it was only as Greek commerce and industry grew that slavery did, in turn degrading both free labor and the vaunted Greek democracy.¹⁷

In sum, "the most varied, comprehensive and brilliant body of geniuses that the world has ever known" emerged out of the fullest range of people occupying the fullest range of governing stations. This political situation

¹⁷ James also identifies objections regarding the circumscribed and highly unequal place of women in Greek Democracy, suggesting that emergent scholarship would successfully challenge this account.

was rooted in a “belief in the creative power of freedom and the capacity of the ordinary man to govern” (James, 1956). The differences between Rosa and James, then, ultimately turn on how they periodize the rise and fall of Athenian democracy and the specific place of advanced enslavement in it. Rosa might take James as affirming that the capacity of workers to rule only existed prior to widespread enslavement. At the same time, he would say that it was not the freeing up of aristocratic time and energy through forced labor that generated the so-called heights of civilization. It was the opposite, Marxist ideal: the rare conditions for most people to be more fully realized. The implications raise questions about the viability of the rationalization of slavery as facilitating the fuller flourishing of humankind (if not enslaved individuals) as a whole. It would also seem to offer evidence that there is nothing intrinsic to the particular station of a person that erodes their ability to contribute to political life. Instead, it would seem, there is a commitment to not hearing what such a vantage point might reveal. The point is not that James is right and Rosa is wrong. It is to illustrate the ways in which their shared socialist commitments, informed by different and more specific challenges, led them to read the same example with different effects. Given the arguments that Rosa would make about the indispensability of the self-activity of the masses to their political maturation—and the claim that revolutionary activity is never premature—it would seem that she, like James, sought resources for thinking about how to undo the ideological division at the core of slavery’s original class domination.

ROSA’S SELF-CREOLIZING WORK

There are elements of Rosa’s work that suggest a sympathy to being read through these kinds of lenses. Among them is her observation, which challenges her assessment of major slave revolts in Rome, about the relationship of the legal abolition of enslavement in the U.S. Civil War to the struggle of workers for the eight-hour workday. The idea was that Black slaves attempting to secure their emancipation played a critical role in the development of the post-Civil War U.S. labor movement.¹⁸ Second is Rosa’s tireless defense of the value of the self-organization of the masses and of popular education of the most sophisticated and far-reaching kind.

¹⁸ Peter Hudis (2014b: 272 note) explains: the first U.S. National Labor Union, formed to promote the fight for an eight-hour day, began its work in 1867. At its founding, members declared, “The National Labor Union knows no north, no south, no east, no west, neither color nor sex on the quest of the rights of labor.”

In addition, in a way that broke from many Marxists, if not from Marx himself, Rosa loved nature and understood radical social change as transforming not only relations among people but also those of people to the Earth as a whole.¹⁹ She reflected that, like every person, every creature had only one life, so that the careless swat of a fly brings an entire world to an end. And that, with patience and love, one could hear language in other-than-human animals as well.²⁰ This orientation is perhaps most evident in her published writings in a very short essay from 1902 following the eruption of the Mt. Pelée volcano in Martinique.

At one level, what is noteworthy about this piece is her identification of sheer hypocrisy. There was an outpouring of European and Euro-American grief over the 40,000 who suddenly died when they—the English, French, Russian, and the American—had mowed down members of these same communities in equivalent numbers in exactly these (and other comparable) territories not long before. Their response seemed to suggest that some human beings could wreak such havoc, but not nature.

More striking still is Rosa's description of the volcano itself. She writes of it as an "angry giant. . . . Great-hearted in his wrath, a true giant, he warned the reckless creatures that crawled at his feet. He smoked, spewed out fiery clouds, in his bosom there was seething and boiling and explosions" (Luxemburg, 2004b: 123). Indeed, it was only when hubristic people remained unmoved, assured by the government in Europe that there was no cause for alarm that the "old, long-suffering titan of Martinique paid no heed to the reports of the honorable commission" (Ibid). In the early hours of the day following the governor's reassurance of the people, "in the crater of the revolutionary volcano fiery lava was gathering for the fearful eruption." In minutes, countless human lives had been swallowed up in "the fiery exhalation of his indignant heart" (Ibid).

¹⁹ On this point, see John Bellamy Foster (1999). Jon Nixon describes the poignant beauty of Rosa's letters from prison, which many subsequent readers, including Walter Benjamin, described as moving them deeply. Nixon reads in them expressions of Rosa's own vulnerability which she saw mirrored in the vulnerability of the natural world (J. Nixon, 2018: 37). He cites her letter to Hans Diefenbach from March 1917 in which she wrote: "I feel like a frozen bumblebee; have you ever found a bumblebee like that in the garden after the first frosty morning, lying on its back quite cold and still as though dead, lying in the grass with its little legs drawn in and its little fur coat with hoarfrost? . . . I always made it my business to kneel down next to such a frozen bumblebee and waken it back to life by blowing on it with my warm breath" (Luxemburg, 2004a: 384–385).

²⁰ These formulations come from "Rosa Luxemburg: A Thousand More Things," an exhibit organized by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung and held at the Goethe Institute in New York City in January and February of 2019. It explored Rosa's seventeen notebooks with pastings and notes about plant specimens. The exhibit description emphasizes Rosa's "care and attention for [the world's] small, seemingly insignificant aspects . . . how her gentleness toward all living things reflects back on her notion of radical social change." See <http://www.rosalux-nyc.org/exhibition-rosa-luxemburg-a-thousand-more-things-2/>.

Perhaps surprisingly, for Rosa, the volcano's avenging of "the slight to his primordial power" achieved the unleashing of human beings. Out of the ruins, she claimed, rather than lords and bondsmen, Blacks and whites, rich and poor, plantations owners and wage slaves, emerged a brotherhood of people, all made similarly vulnerable by the sheer magnitude of nature's potentially disruptive force. Rosa writes that the giant volcano had worked a miracle—"a resurrection of humanity on the ruins of human culture" (Luxemburg, 2004b: 124).

Nature functioned *ex nihilo*. With no regard for human-introduced distinctions, it could undo the catalyzing and intensification of stratified distinctions of race, class, and nation set in motion by enslavement, colonization, capitalism, and anthropogenic climate change.²¹

Rosa closes by suggesting that a day will come when another volcano will sweep "whole sanctimonious, blood-splattered culture from the face of the earth" (Luxemburg, 2004b: 125). And that it will only be in the ruins meted out by blind, deadly nature that nations will come together in true humanity.

While there are social movements that argue for just this—a universal politics focused on managing climate disaster lest we all meet our end with that of the Earth—the actual consequences of environmental destruction remain unfairly distributed. It is the Global South that is consistently hardest hit and its environmental activists who most regularly face threats to their lives as they mount constructive responses (R. Nixon, 2013). In addition, it is clear that members of capitalist elites see themselves as having already worked out ways that they, in relative isolation, will survive as our planet becomes uninhabitable to most human beings.

At the same time, Rosa's clear openness to the active, acting, living wisdom of the natural world and its ability to communicate with us—if *only we will listen*—is the basis of many forms of Indigenous environmentalism that stress precisely the relational ontologies that we discussed through the work of Cugoano. One example of the effort, like Cugoano's, to make these central to contemporary forms of emancipatory politics is in the work of George Manuel and Michael Posluns (1974) when they describe the organizing responsibility of the land-based cultures of all "aboriginal" peoples and charge North Americans to consider a version of democracy that is in "relationship to the earth upon which we walk and the plants and animals that give us sustenance." They urge:

Developing a sense of ourselves that would properly balance history and nature and space and time is a more difficult task than we would suspect and involves

²¹ I thank Isaac Stethem for making this point.

a radical reevaluation of the way we look at the world around us. Do we continue to exploit the earth or do we preserve it and preserve life? Whether we are prepared to embark on a painful intellectual journey to discover the parameters of reconciling history and nature is the question of this generation. (Manuel and Posluns, 1974: 59)

Another instance is Glen Sean Coulthard's account of Indigenous self-determination as necessarily anti-capitalist in ways that alone hold promise for an earthly future (Coulthard, 2014). Others still are the efforts to give rights to nature in the Bolivian and Ecuadoran constitutions with a primary role ascribed to Indigenous people to assist with interpreting how those rights may be enacted.

Such work suggests that, rather than a punitive nature that functions only as a blind and deadly force, undoing the radical insecurity of existence inaugurated by catastrophic land and personal dispossession requires nurturing broader solidarities rooted in constructive and forward-looking insights born out of constructive resistance. Doing so requires an enlarged dialectic—of the kind Rosa invited in *The Accumulation of Capital* and in her role as pedagogue in and beyond the classroom—that centers on the pivotal relations of the proletariat, enslaved, and colonized with all the varieties of living beings with which we share the still-living Earth.

IN CONCLUSION

Some might argue that Rosa should rightly be understood as a critical rather than creolizing thinker. For Paget Henry, this is because her Jewishness or gender were not explicit sources in the generation of her thought.²² Others might instead emphasize her failure to see anti-colonial nationalist movements as historic.²³ This failure might be read as mirroring her limited assessments of the potential of slave revolt. Both might imply a limitation in her capacity to recognize who could emerge as historical political actors through struggle, especially in the Global South. I respectfully disagree with these assessments.

When others called on Rosa to emphasize the specificity of Jewish persecution, she refused, writing,

What do you want with this particular suffering of the Jews? The poor victims on the rubber plantations in Putumayo, the Africans with whose bodies the

²² See Henry's chapter in this volume.

²³ This position is exemplified by Peter Hudis's and Alyssa Adamson's chapters in this volume.

Europeans play a game of catch, are just as near to me Oh, this “sublime silence of eternity” in which so many screams have faded away unheard. It rings within me so strongly that I have no special corner of my heart reserved for the ghetto: I am at home wherever in the world there are clouds, birds and human tears. (Feb 16, 1917 quoted in Dunayevskaya, 1991: 63)²⁴

In other words, rather than a standpoint epistemological perspective, Rosa, as many Jews before and since, thought her Jewishness connected her to countless others who faced comparable forms of persecution. This was not an empty universalism but a rooted appreciation of the distinct and related uses to which oppression is put. Similarly, Rosa considered the nationalist struggles in other parts of the globe through her own formative experiences in Russian-occupied Poland, where she witnessed that nationalist movements—*on their own*—did not shift relations of dependence. As Hudis (2014a) explains, the country’s independence seemed foreclosed by the economic reality that industrial development depended on Western European goods and skills and on Russian markets opened through penetrating Asia. Furthermore, while her stance on nationalist movements would be challenged by the anti-colonial leaders of the 1960s, many seeking constructive ways to fight neo-colonialism today begin with the limitations she diagnosed and anticipated (Bose, 2019; Valdez, 2019).

Rosa was not always correct. But her work was anchored by a fundamental insight in creolizing thought (Gordon, 2014). Unlike most of her contemporaries, she deliberately put the different, fractured dimensions of capitalist exploitation into conversation with one another. Even though, as Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) and Patrick Wolfe (2016) observe, the different ways that colonizers managed subject populations created important distinctions for anti-colonial resistance, Rosa sought to bring all of them into the same intellectual and political frame.

At the time of her brutal murder, she had not reworked her account of the dialectic through the lens of the arguments outlined in *The Accumulation of Capital*. That may well have come, especially given that, unlike many of her contemporaries, she would likely have studied emerging works in Black Marxism as carefully as she did the full range of texts already mentioned here.

It is no accident that, whether or not she is formally cited or substantively engaged, many contemporary theorists of racial capitalism and of contemporary primitive accumulation/dispossession are tied genealogically to Rosa Luxemburg and her indispensable creolizing insights and orientation.

²⁴ This passage is also cited in Nigel Gibson’s chapter in this volume.

Whether the centrality of enslavement to human history, the depiction of imperialism as fundamentally intertwined with capitalism, the description of colonization as world shattering, or her tireless belief in what the masses of humankind could do, her commitments—as articulated in her words and deeds—remain all too relevant resources.

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Chapter 6

One Hundred Years of Rosa Luxemburg's Marxism

*Imperialism and Lessons in Democracy for the Contemporary South African Left*¹

Gunneth Kaaf

It has now been 100 years since Rosa Luxemburg, together with Karl Liebknecht, was murdered by German mercenaries. Rosa was a Polish-born revolutionary who was the leader of the left-wing movement in Germany. After completing her studies and obtaining a PhD in Switzerland in 1898, she lived in Germany most of her adult life and until her death in 1919. She was a prominent leader of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), and her main activities were concentrated in political education at the party school and in writing for the party publications. She was a leading left theoretician of the German SPD. She tenaciously fought against the reformist drift of the SPD for more than twenty years, sometimes almost single-handedly.

In her fight for genuinely radical socialist strategies and the expansion of democracy—as is the basic proposition of Marxism—she locked horns in heated debates on various policy questions and issues of strategy and tactics with leading figures of the Second International such as August Bebel, Eduard Bernstein, Karl Kautsky, Vladimir Lenin, and Wilhelm Liebknecht.

Her fight against right-wing reformism within the German SPD ended in the ultimate capitulation of the SPD when it supported the German government in pursuit of its imperialist ambitions at the outbreak of World War I.

¹ This paper is a revised version of a talk delivered at Wits University on the March 7, 2019 and subsequently published in *Amandla!*

Rosa and her comrades formed the Spartacus League and later the Communist Party of Germany in December of 1918.

Grigori Zinoviev, speaking three days after Rosa and Liebknecht's murder at the session of the Petrograd Soviet that paid tribute to them, referred to Rosa's discussions with the Bolshevik leaders after 1905 and praised her as one of the first European Marxists in the West able to evaluate the Russian Revolution correctly as a whole (Zinoviev, 2019 [1919]). This is despite her criticism of some of the key policies of the Bolsheviks, including vanguardism. This was important because Rosa inspired the necessary hope about the possibility of a revolution in western Europe, particularly Germany, since the leading personnel in the Bolsheviks—including Lenin and Leon Trotsky—were banking on the victory of the socialist revolution in Germany in order to defend and sustain the Russian Revolution against the onslaught of global capitalism. She was killed by German soldiers who were supporters of Friedrich Ebert, an SPD leader who had become the German chancellor. She was killed in a climate of suppression of radical political activity following the workers' uprising and an atmosphere of fear among the ruling classes following the Bolshevik revolution in Russia a year earlier.

Rosa was certainly no less than a giant, both as a revolutionary and an intellectual. As Mary-Alice Waters (1970) points out, Rosa was born in 1871, a few days before the Paris Commune was proclaimed by French workers, and she died a little more than a year after the Bolsheviks came to power in the Great October Russian Revolution. Her life thus spanned a great historical epoch, the five decades which opened with the first dress rehearsal for socialist revolution in France and closed as a new era in the history of humankind was being born in Russia.

Throughout her life—from her political awakening as a schoolgirl in Warsaw until her murder in Berlin 1919—Rosa dedicated her immense energies, talents, capacities, and intellectual prowess to the goal of the world socialist revolution. She understood that, with the fate of humanity on the line, the stakes were high. As a woman of action, she gave herself completely to the great historic battle for human emancipation.

Rosa was certainly a product of her times, but because she was such a great revolutionary and intellectual, her talent enabled her to act and look way into the future instead of being consumed by the immediate demands of her times. That is why her actions continue to have resonance and why her ideas remain relevant more than 100 years after she was murdered.

Rosa made some invaluable contributions to the understanding of imperialism and democracy. Both were very important in her time because of the capitalist crisis that led to a crisis of democracy following the defeat of European radical socialists, the capture of democratic institutions by bourgeois forces, and the rise of fascism and imperialism that fully developed in the interwar

years after Rosa's murder. Actually, it can be argued that Rosa was murdered by fascists in their nascent state.

We now see history repeating itself with the deepening crisis of global capitalism that began in the 1970s after the post–World War II growth cycle was exhausted and slipped into a downturn of stagnation that reached its apogee with the 2008 Great Recession that has now turned into a Long Depression, as Michael Roberts (2017) and other economists from both mainstream and heterodox persuasions appropriately call it.

Today, democracy—as practiced in official political systems of the Global North and Global South—is also in crisis. In the North, the liberal establishment is tumbling and falling apart, and has transformed the liberal consensus democracy into a democratic fraud that is in a state of decay. This is why we had a right-wing buffoon such as Donald Trump as the United States president and right-winger Boris Johnson in Britain. In the Global South, formal democracy, with its features of a democratic fraud, has tended to be a caricature of democracy as practiced in the North. It is largely limited to a representative democracy with very little, if any, meaningful participatory democracy. That is why democracy in Africa has been fraught with manipulations by former liberation movement parties and by right-wing parties or why a “legal” coup d'état in Brazil could lead to the election of Jair Bolsonaro.

If, in both the Global North and South, we see the rise of fascism from the decay of formal liberal and caricatures of democracies, we have to analyze the similarities and divergences from the interwar period. For, even in instances where history repeats itself, it never does so in identical ways. I will consider this question through discussing Rosa's account of imperialism and then the role of participatory democracy in approaching the challenges of the South African left.

ROSA LUXEMBURG'S RADICAL CONCEPTION OF IMPERIALISM

Rosa Luxemburg's conception of imperialism was deeply connected to her understanding of capital accumulation. In turn, her theory of capital accumulation was largely based on her crisis theory of capitalism. Rosa's main proposition was that capitalism, as a closed system, produces more than its available capacity for consumption. That is, capitalism has a problem of underconsumption or overproduction.

Rosa's major economic theory is laid out in her 1913 seminal book, *The Accumulation of Capital*. Those who think of Rosa primarily as an economist refer to this work as Rosa's magnum opus. Rosa found Marx's accumulation schema, as outlined in *Capital*, had a shortcoming. She appreciated that

Marx's research for this volume was incomplete but that did not sufficiently explain the problem in his accumulation theory. Remember that Marx's initial plan was to write six volumes of *Capital*: Volume One on the general mode of capitalist production, Volume Two on landed property, Volume Three on wage labor, Volume Four on the state, Volume Five on international trade, and Volume Six on world market and crises (Mandel, 1990). Only Volume One was published during Marx's lifetime. Volumes Two and Three were published posthumously by Friedrich Engels, using the manuscripts Marx left behind.

The one volume Marx did complete and the two manuscripts he left behind for Engels to complete were therefore different from the initially proposed research agenda. Volume One dealt with the general mode of capitalist development, Volume Two focused on circulation, and Volume Three concerned crisis theory. *Theories of Surplus Value*, which was published in three volumes by Karl Kautsky between 1905 and 1910 from the manuscripts left by Marx, is sometimes regarded as Volume Four.

Rosa thought there was a shortfall in Marx's schema of capital accumulation in a closed capitalist system—that is, in accounting for the national output made up of constant capital, variable capital, and surplus value. This is because workers earn less than what they produce; thus, realizing surplus value on an ongoing basis becomes a difficulty, which creates an imbalance between production and consumption—the problem of an effective demand. Using Marx's expanded reproduction scheme, she discovered difficulties in the realization of surplus value on an ongoing basis, capital accumulation. This is because under the expanded reproduction scheme, capitalists don't consume all the surplus value. They only consume half and then invest or capitalize the other half back into both departments of production for capital and consumer goods. This means there will be overproduction because production capacity has been increased without the necessary increase in consumption capacity and thus without a corresponding increase in the aggregate demand. There is therefore a problem of effective demand in the economy.

The realization of surplus value under the simple reproduction scheme is an easy matter: the variable capital (which pays for wages) and constant capital (which pays for plant, machinery, and equipment) are simply restored to their original capacities. The remainder of the revenue, which is surplus value, is all consumed by capitalists. So the cycle goes on under the simple reproduction scheme. But matters become different and difficult under the reproduction scheme, which is the one that should really explain actually existing capitalism, the law of motion of which is driven by endless capital accumulation.

Even after she included the consumption expenditure by capital, there was still a shortfall in overall consumption (Sweezy, 1942). She therefore also explored the problem from the angle of the process of circulation of money

from Marx's analysis. However, she still encountered a difficulty in addressing the problem of realizing surplus value for capital accumulation to occur on an ongoing basis. To address this problem, Rosa thought of the world market, integrating non-capitalist or "backward" societies in a dependent way, as a solution. This was the nucleus of her imperialism theory. Rosa no doubt considered the wars, revolutions, and resulting instability in the world economy of her own time when she also included imperial rivalries and hence military expenditure. In this regard, she conceived militarism as a province of accumulation mainly in two ways. First, militarism brought about the conquest of colonies so as to exploit their labor at much higher rates and to plunder their natural resources. Second, militarism builds a large arms industry that benefits from state expenditures (Luxemburg, 2003).

I will not detail the controversies that her accumulation theory provoked within Marxist intellectual circles. It suffices to emphasize that Rosa did not just popularize Marx's work, stopping at his conclusions. She instead developed this project further. She therefore made a meaningful contribution to Marxist economic theory, particularly in the age of monopoly capitalism.

Rosa's views of imperialism put her on the side of the peoples of the Global South in the polarized global capitalist system that is predicated on accumulation of the countries of the North by dispossessing countries of the Global South. She also advanced internationalist solidarity between workers of the Global North and those of the Global South. This can be clearly seen in how she concluded her book, *The Accumulation of Capital*. Having found that accumulation of capital was impossible in mature capitalist countries without world markets in which non-capitalist countries are subordinated in a colonial way, she proposed that the way forward was that "the aim of socialism is not accumulation but the satisfaction of toiling humanity's wants by developing the productive forces of the entire globe. And so we find that socialism is by its very nature a harmonious and universal system of economy" (Luxemburg, 2003: 447) These commitments made her among the few socialists from Europe who did not support either of the sides in the South African Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902. She instead denounced the Anglo-Boer War as an imperialist war. Rosa had denounced colonization completely, never agreeing that it had a civilizing dimension, as did many European socialists who had succumbed to a Eurocentric worldview. When many European socialists sided with Britain as an advanced capitalist country that would help South Africa on the path of capitalist development, she rejected the trap of this socialist strategy of the Second International that proposed that countries must first undergo capitalist development before they proceed to the socialist stage of revolution. In essence, Rosa's accumulation theory—which proposed that it was impossible for mature capitalist countries to accumulate capital without world markets in which non-capitalist

countries are subordinated in a dependent way—made her one of the pioneering theorists of capitalism as a global system, instead of simply conceiving capitalism as a national mode of production. This vision was later advanced in the dependency school theories of Paul Baran, Samir Amin, and Immanuel Wallerstein that developed after World War II.

Rosa's economic views about the global expansion of capitalism—accumulation crises, lack of effective demand, the monopolies, increasing role of finance, stagnation—have dominated most of the economic debates from the post–World War II era into the twenty-first century. After all, these issues have been taken up by prominent economists such as Michal Kaleki² in his theories of business cycles and demand, John Maynard Keynes³ on effective demand, Joan Robinson⁴ in her leftist assessments and extensions of Keynesian economics, Josef Steindl⁵ in his work on stagnation in mature capitalist countries, and Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy⁶ in their work on monopoly capital.

Rosa was disappointed with the lack of support for and enthusiasm about the Russian Revolution from the western European workers' movement. She attributed this to the loss of revolutionary initiative by the workers in the West, following the bourgeois capitulation by Social Democratic parties in support of World War I. The main reason for this capitulation was the parliamentarism in which European Social Democratic parties were trapped at the time. Rosa criticized at length the pitfalls of parliamentarism as a tendency of bourgeois reformism in her speech at the founding congress of the German Communist Party in 1918.

ROSA LUXEMBURG AND DEMOCRACY IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICA

On democracy, Rosa's views take forward Marx's position that socialism is essentially a revolution of the majority by the majority for a radical social

² Jan Toporowski (2016) clearly links Kaleki and Standl's work to that of Rosa Luxemburg with regard to aggregate demand, although Kaleki, more like Keynes, shifted the basis of the problem of aggregate demand from underconsumption to underinvestment.

³ David Harvey (2006) cites Rosa Luxemburg as a theorist for capitalism's limit to aggregate demand that Keynes laid out in his work, *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, even though their approaches were different.

⁴ Joan Robinson, as a leftist Keynesian, held similar views as Rosa, although she did not entirely agree with her. She wrote an introduction to the first English translation of Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* in 1951.

⁵ As Jan Toporowski (2016) writes, "Kaleki and Steindl thus took on Marx's project and developed it for the conditions of twentieth-century capitalism, building on the work of Luxemburg and Hiferding."

⁶ John Bellamy Foster (2014) mentions Luxemburg, Baran and Sweezy as "leading surplus value realization crisis theorists".

change. In this sense, Rosa was the foremost leading advocate of democratic forms of workers' organization and popular struggles in her generation of theoreticians and revolutionaries.

Here, Rosa explains the dialectic of mass struggles in a capitalist reality in pursuit of a socialist vision:

The international movement of the proletariat toward its complete emancipation is a process peculiar in the following respect. For the first time in the history of civilization, the people are expressing their will consciously and in opposition to all ruling classes. But this will can only be satisfied beyond the limits of the existing system. Now the mass can only acquire and strengthen this will in the course of day-to-day struggle against the existing social order—that is, within the limits of capitalist society. On the one hand, we have the mass; on the other, its historic goal, located outside of existing society. On one hand, we have the day-to-day struggle; on the other, the social revolution. Such are the terms of the dialectic contradiction through which the socialist movement makes its way. (Luxemburg, 1970b: 173)

This is why she opposed Lenin's promotion of vanguardism. In what led to her being accused of being a naïve idealist, she asserted the right of all to freedom of opinion and freedom of speech and insisted that these were universal freedoms that must be defended.

She did not only expose the dangers of Leninism with regard to restricting democratic mass participation but also criticized harshly the illusions of bourgeois reformism and revisionism that were dominant in the Second International, as can be read in her polemical engagements with Eduard Bernstein (Luxemburg, 1970a). Her long-drawn ideological struggle against the reformism represented by Bernstein as one of the leading intellectuals of the SPD established her as an important left leader and intellectual in the SPD. In fact, it is one of her greatest historical achievements. This is partly because the German SPD was the biggest party in the Second International and was considered a model to follow: she was challenging the reformism that sought to introduce measures to merely reform capitalism instead of overthrowing it as proposed in revolutionary Marxism, which was the official policy of the SPD. Bernstein denied the materialist conception of history, the growing acuteness of capitalist contractions, and the theory of class struggle. He concluded that revolution was not necessary and that socialism could be achieved by gradual reform of the capitalist system through mechanisms such as consumers' cooperatives, trade unions, and the gradual extension of political democracy. Even though for a while such reformism was seemingly defeated through resolutions of congresses, what stopped it was only open declarations about this reformism *as* reformism. Reformist practices were

never defeated, though, which is why SPD made the final capitulation when they supported the German government in its imperialist aims.

History has vindicated Rosa on the failure of centralized left parties and her support for mass movements. This is evident when we consider the failure of left centralized parties in Soviet traditions. Similarly, as the examples of success of the mass parties in Latin America modeled around “Popular Movements Toward Socialism” suggest, mass initiative and organization have won the day for a genuine left renewal.

Rosa was apt when she said the following: “The working class demands the right to make mistakes and learn in the dialectic of history. Let us speak plainly. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee” (Luxemburg, 1970b: 175). South Africa is now undoubtedly in the throes of the worst crisis since the 1994 democratic breakthrough. This is a crisis of politics: poor governance, corruption, and no viable, progressive development strategy that would address worsening conditions in townships and rural areas. It is an economic crisis of stagnation, mass unemployment, and widespread poverty. It is an ecological crisis in which natural resources get depleted and nature is destroyed in a manner that threatens the survival of human life on earth. While the South African crisis has its roots in local historical conditions, it is also part of the global crisis of capitalism that worsened with the 2008 Great Recession and refuses to go away.

Two big potential outcomes seem likely to result from this deepening crisis: a tragic impasse or a responsive radical social transformation led by left forces. There is no third way, for as long as the crisis is not halted and reversed, we are headed for the worst. It is as if Rosa’s quip—that it is either “socialism or barbarism”—is coming to bear.

Only a meaningful social transformation can really save South Africa. This requires a genuine renewal of the country’s left. This will take enormous efforts because the left is currently very weak. Even with the establishment of the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SWRP) by the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA), the left has no presence in mainstream electoral politics. For those who might object that SWRP has only just begun its work and that it might help to develop coherent mass movements advancing formidable anti-capitalist struggles, the major problem is in its organizational model and its outlook. Specifically, the SRWP pursues the old model of Communist Parties that has failed. It has not demonstrated a commitment to democratic forms of mass organization and popular struggles from below. The fact that SRWP was founded by NUMSA—which has more than 340,000 members—and yet got only 24,439 votes in the May 2019 elections and could not even secure one seat in the national assembly says a lot about SRWP’s top-down approach and its lack of mass appeal.

The point here is that without work that builds strong mass movements and popular power, elections do not change much. The illusion of using elections without prior, sustained mass work actually reinforces the dominance of bourgeois parties. It is hard or impossible to break the electoral dominance of bourgeois parties without mass work.

People are tired of deception from politicians. That is why they did not vote for SRWP in the May 2019 general elections, in the same way that they will not vote for any other leftist party that mushrooms on the eve of elections. The SRWP only gives people their word that they will use parliamentary power to fight the corruption of the governing political party, the African National Congress (ANC), and neoliberal policies that advance capitalism. The question is: where is the SRWP in struggles that communities have been waging against poor delivery of public services and lack of development? SRWP's answer is: vote for us, and from now onward we will be with you in community struggles. Many potential voters will not accept that because it does not answer their central questions: *Where were you when we were waging community struggles? Why were you absent? Why do you suddenly spring up now?* There are no short cuts. For the left to have legitimacy in the eyes of our people, the left must immerse themselves in mass work and mass struggles to advance the social demands of popular classes. The strength of those mass movements and the weight of the popular power that will result will be decisive in changing electoral patterns in favor of the left.

Rosa Luxemburg's ideas have been vindicated by history, particularly on the centrality of mass work that is consistent with immediate and long-term socialist goals. We need to rethink how we rebuild socialism in the twenty-first century. We must abandon the old idea of Communist Parties—to which the SRWP remains married—that we must first conquer state power and then implement central planning and nationalization to build socialism. Instead, we need to build popular power for socialism on an ongoing basis and also implement audacious measures of social and economic transformation that transcend capitalism. Popular power must not be used as a route to gaining state power. Instead, it must be sustained *even when* the left has state power, complementing state power. The recent experiences in Latin America of popular movements toward socialism are instructive. Despite the current setbacks, theirs is an experience we should build upon. It is important that the left appreciate the diversity of these popular movements, regarding this diversity as a necessary feature rather than treating it as superfluous or simply wanting the movements to be homogenous. The unity of these movements must be a unity in diversity.

This is not to dismiss the immediate need for a left political party. The question is how to develop it in light of the failure of centralized parties. South Africa's political crisis has been driven by the failure of the ANC to

create a program of social transformation following the 1994 democratic breakthrough. The neoliberal policy approaches it adopted have been unable to resolve the structural faults in the economy, to address the many continued legacies of apartheid, or to ameliorate the social problems flowing from the post-1994 capitalist growth path. In addition, obscene corruption bodes and threatens—if it does not simply signal—the ANC’s decline. Even after the 2017 ANC national conference, with Cyril Ramaphosa at the helm, there is no halting and reversing the crisis, as the party pursues no renewal. Albeit at a slower pace, this is the same perpetuation of rot and crisis as in the Zuma years. We still see the intensification of the factionalist wars in the ANC and in many state institutions.

The way forward for the left is not to form a workers’ party or a vanguard party that will contest elections with a socialistic manifesto and hope to win or get some parliamentary seats. Any preoccupation with some centralized party of the left focused only on those who enjoy paid employment—given that our vision of socialism should include all the victims of capitalism, including the popular classes—will be a distraction, because we have a serious task of building mass formants into a large revolutionary movement that expands democracy as the goal and form of political expression.

The left must work with popular classes to wage a struggle for meeting the basic needs and social demands of popular classes that remain unachieved. Despite the promise of “a better life for all,” with unemployment as high as 29.1 percent in the third quarter of 2019 and 55.5 percent of South Africans living in absolute poverty, South Africa is “by any measure, one of the most unequal countries in the world” (StatsSA, 2018).⁷ The popular classes are victims of South African capitalism. They include the lowly paid, precarious workers in various sectors with cheap labor markets who form the large majority of the South African workers; the unemployed who suffer permanent unemployment; the rural poor that include the dispossessed peasants; the urban poor; the women, in socially engineered oppression; and the youth, who face forms of social discrimination.

The left must build strong grassroots and sector movements. Such movements must be anchored in fights for employment, a living wage, and sustainable livelihoods; quality health care; a better school education with improved outcomes and increased access to higher education; development for rural and urban township women, development for youth in rural urban areas, and sports development in rural areas and townships; resources and facilities for the production and appreciation of art and culture that are accessible to all and media and magazines that publish poetry and document people’s heritage and

⁷ Based on the upper-bound poverty line of \$70.9 per month. See *Poverty Trends in South Africa*, Statistics South Africa, 2017.

knowledge from below; development in townships and rural areas through the creation of seed banks, a solidarity economy, public goods and services, and access to public transport; housing that is decent and integrated with social and economic services; and renewable sources of energy. While those struggles should focus on immediate social demands, they must have a clear anti-capitalist outlook and seek to go beyond the limits of the current capitalist society.

Those struggles must express a yearning for a better society that is not capitalist. The organization of these struggles has to be non-vanguardist because it would be difficult for any genuine left party to break the electoral dominance of bourgeois parties without mass work, strong mass movements, and a popular power that will exert weight on the electoral system. Even after winning elections, such a genuine left party is going to be reliant on popular power. So popular power must be sustained and institutionalized for any left party in power to succeed in governing and implementing audacious measures that will offend the dominant sections of local and global monopoly capital.

This is not to lose sight of political power but rather to build popular power on the ground, on whose base genuine left political alternatives could be advanced. Rebuilding a new left alternative political pole must be based on mass struggles, mass movement, and a vision of democratic eco-socialism. The mass political party or parties that can emerge out of such efforts should be open-ended, linked fundamentally to mass movements without seeking to control them.

Struggles for immediate reforms in order to ameliorate people's current conditions are essential in building the enduring momentum for a genuine left renewal. These struggles should seek to advance and deepen the reach of the Constitution in the daily life of the majority of South Africans and other democratic rights and demands, including the regulation of the private sector. None of the above is possible without sustained development of activists through political education that builds a critical mass of conscious and confident people capable of conceiving of and carrying out the massive tasks ahead.

As Rosa reflected to her comrades just two weeks before her murder:

Today we can seriously set about destroying capitalism once and for all. Nay, more; not merely are we today in a position to perform this task, not merely is its performance a duty toward the proletariat, but our solution offers the only means of saving human society from destruction. (Luxemburg quoted in Waters, 1970: 7)

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Chapter 7

Rosa Luxemburg, Nature, and Imprisonment

Maria Theresia Starzmann

When wandering through the exhibition *The Pencil Is a Key: Drawings by Incarcerated Artists* at New York City's Drawing Center, I felt my heart break and break again. Many of the drawings, full of longing for the outside world and for loved ones, speak to the sorrow and pain caused by loss of freedom as a result of incarceration. Subjecting human beings to prolonged periods of captivity is an unusually cruel form of punishment that leaves many prisoners broken or scarred for life.

HISTORICAL CONFLUENCE

Among the wealth of drawings—some small in scale, others large, others yet using highly unconventional media or formats—a series of works by Egyptian artist Mahmoud Mohamed Abd El Aziz (Yassin Mohamed) caught my attention. Yassin portrays the dehumanizing conditions of his incarceration meticulously. Repeatedly arrested during the protests against the government of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and transferred from prison to prison, Yassin suffered from overcrowded cells and a lack of privacy. He constantly feared harassment by other prisoners.

Yassin's work left me feeling deeply unsettled. In one of his drawings, titled "The Flowers that Bloomed in the Prisons of Egypt" (2017), the tiled walls of a soiled privy, barely large enough to turn around in, seem to be closing in on the viewer (figure 7.1). The drawing immediately took a powerful hold of me. It did not simply draw me in because it accurately conveys a sense of emotional agony or even of physical pain. Rather, the intense effect of this image is owed, at least in part, to a disorienting detail. At the center of the drawing is a kind of distancing, a Brechtian alienation, the source

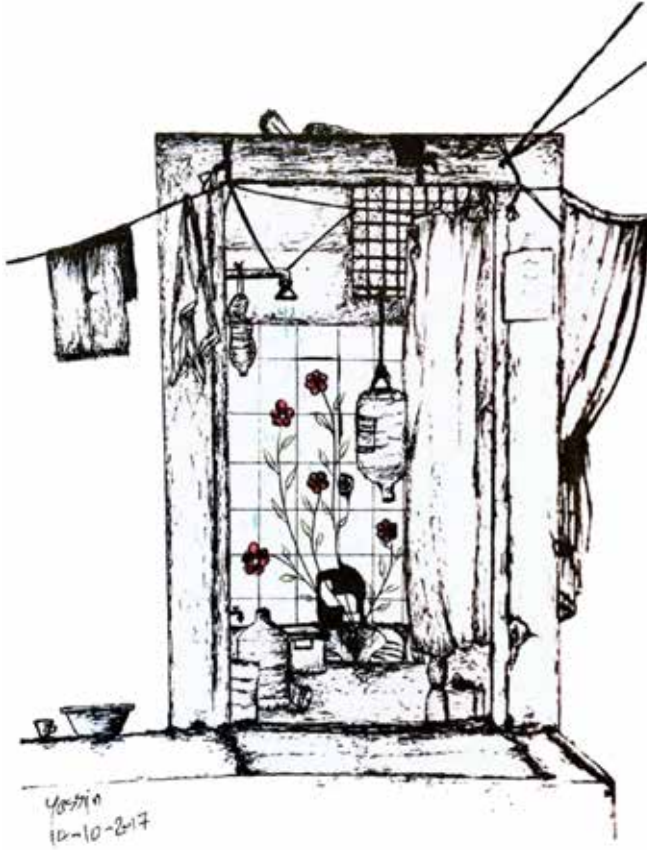


Figure 7.1 Mahmoud Mohamed Abd El Aziz (Yassin Mohamed), *The Flowers That Bloomed in the Prisons of Egypt*, 2017. Pen ink and color pencil on paper, 11 × 8 5/8 inches (27.9 × 22 cm) (courtesy: Yassin Mohamed).

of which is an intensely subjective and tender detail that the artist added to this prison scene.

There, from the dark opening of the grimy latrine, grows a flower. Thin-stemmed and delicate, with a few bright red buds, this plant is an exercise in economic existence. Taking up barely any room in the prison's landscape, it is a powerful reminder of life outside the prison walls and of the resilience of those on the inside.

Suddenly, I felt a confluence of historical forces. A hundred years earlier, socialist theorist and activist Rosa Luxemburg had spent more than three years imprisoned for her political ideas. During her time of captivity, caring for flowers and plants was what gave her hope and perspective. Between 1913 and 1918, which includes her years spent in prison, Rosa Luxemburg

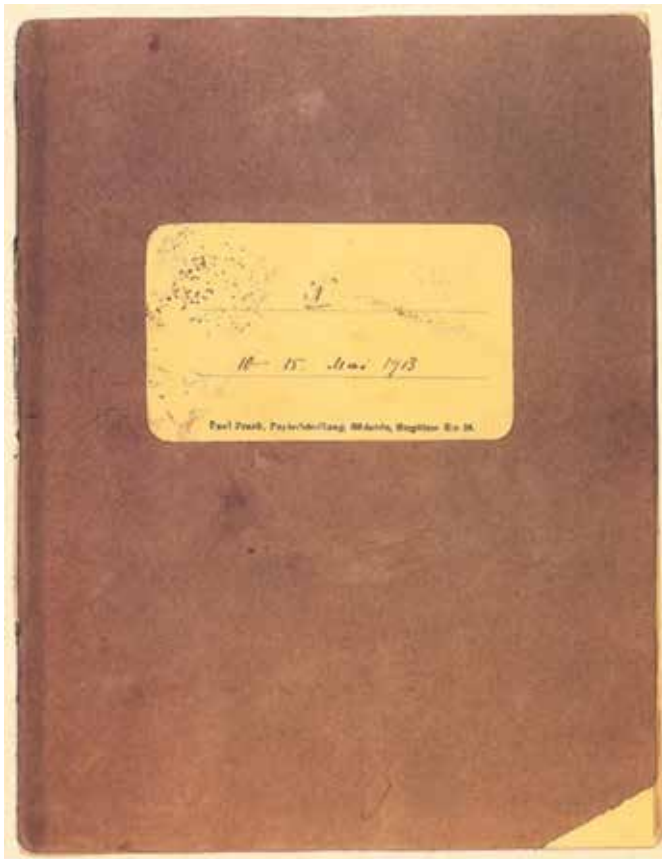


Figure 7.2 Cover of the First Notebook of Rosa Luxemburg’s Herbarium, Dated May 10-15, 1913. *Courtesy:* Karl Dietz Verlag.

produced a herbarium spanning seventeen notebooks (Wittich, 2016) (figure 7.2). For Yassin and Rosa alike, plants and flowers became objects of hope during their incarceration. As Yassin puts it, “In prison, plants and flowers are like life in the midst of death” (Gilman et al., 2019: 128).

DEPRIVATIONS

At the core of the experience of imprisonment is not so much the loss of freedom of movement as a deep isolation. Prisoners, especially when kept in solitary confinement or subject to no-contact visits, are frequently deprived of human touch, of sound, or of natural light. In some U.S. prisons today, in-person visitations are no longer allowed. All visits must be conducted by

video at a cost of \$12.99 for twenty minutes (Sims, 2017). Denied even the most fundamental sensory and intellectual stimulations, the prisoner's existence is exilic.

The deprivations of her imprisonment caused Rosa Luxemburg "painful irritation" (Adler et al., 2011: 378) and loss of her "inner equanimity" (Adler et al., 2011: 413). Although she was on occasion able to go for walks and receive visitors, and Wronki Prison even allowed her to cultivate a small garden in the prison yard, she was also frequently confronted with silence and a lack of human contact. On June 23, 1917, having spent almost a full year at Wronki Prison, she wrote to her friend Hans Diefenbach that, aside from few hurried visitations, "not one human soul do I see or hear" (Adler et al., 2011: 420).

To this day, isolation is a central technique of political violence. A stark example of this can be found in contemporary torture sites, like the notorious Saydnaya prison in Syria, of which no images or maps exist, and which has never been visited by independent monitors, such as Amnesty International or the Red Cross. When human contact is reduced to the bare minimum, sound and other sensory experiences become crucial means of resistance. In the case of Saydnaya, the U.K.-based research agency, Forensic Architecture, has used acoustic modeling in order to reconstruct the architecture of the prison based on detainees' memories of sound.¹

When acoustic fragments penetrated Rosa Luxemburg's isolation, these sounds would often intensify her sense of isolation. "Are you also familiar with the peculiar effect of sounds whose origins we don't know?" she wrote to Hans Diefenbach on June 29, 1917. She continues:

I have put this to the test in every prison [that I've been in]. For example, in Zwickau I was awakened every night at exactly two in the morning by the loud 'qua-qua-qua-qua!' of ducks that lived on a pond somewhere in the neighborhood. ... Awakened by this cry, I always had to struggle to find my bearings in the pitch dark on the stone-hard mattress, not knowing for the first few seconds where I was. It was always a slightly depressing feeling to realize I was in a prison cell. (Adler et al., 2011: 422)

RESILIENCE

While isolation is frequently used to break the political will of the incarcerated, prisoners also find ways of breaking through their isolation. The artists,

¹ For more information on the research project, see <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/saydnaya>.



Figure 7.3 Letter to Gertrud Zlottko from August 7, 1915. Courtesy: Verso Books.



Figure 7.4 Rosa Luxemburg's Cell in Wronki Prison. Courtesy: Karl Dietz Verlag.

whose works were exhibited in *The Pencil is a Key*, do so by expressing their experiences and feelings in drawings. Using any artistic tools available to them—from laundry pencils and ballpoint pen refills to food and bodily fluids—they put not just memories, but dreams, hopes, and entire imaginary landscapes on paper, or on scraps of cloth, on envelopes, and on discarded packaging.

In the case of Rosa Luxemburg, we can locate her strength and resilience in “the composition of long, detailed letters [that helped her] break through the confines of solitude and overcome it” (Adler et al., 2011: XVII). On occasion, she added drawings or sketches to her letters, too (figure 7.3).

Most frequently, however, Rosa Luxemburg carefully recorded the sounds she heard outside while unable to leave the prison. In her letters, she often described the voices of the birds who came to visit her. While incarcerated in a small cell in Wronki Prison (figure 7.4), she wrote to Sophie Liebknecht in



Figure 7.5 Last Entry in the Herbarium Dating to October 15, 1918. *Courtesy:* Karl Dietz Verlag.

May 1917 of how a blue titmouse “always stayed close to my window, came with the others to be fed, and diligently sang its funny little song, *tsee-tsee-bay*, but it drew out the sound so much that it sounded like the mischievous teasing of a child. It always made me laugh, and I would answer with the same call” (Adler et al., 2011: 412). The titmouse was for Rosa Luxemburg not just a visitor, but a way of being in touch with the natural world and of witnessing life’s natural cycle.

Aside from the sounds of nature, the quotidian sounds of everyday life also found their way into Rosa Luxemburg’s cell and conveyed to her a sense that human life has a reliable regularity and that the world continues to carry on even in the face of adversity:

Every evening, when I sit at my barred window . . . somewhere in the neighborhood there begins an industrious but muffled beating of a rug or something that sounds like it. I have no idea who is doing this household chore or where, but because of the regular repetition of these sounds I have already established, although somewhat indefinitely, an intimate relationship with that person . . . the sounds of rug-beating give me the feeling every time I hear them of a well-ordered and firmly marked-off realm of peace and quiet. (Adler et al., 2011: 421-422)



Figure 7.6 Women's Prison Barnimstraße in Berlin (October 1931). Courtesy: Bundearchiv, Bild 102-12436.

NATURE

To cope with her deep longing for the outside world, Rosa Luxemburg found strength also in the practice of collecting and studying plants. A former student of botany, she began collecting botanical samples in 1913 and continued this practice even through her years of imprisonment until the fall of 1918. Resulting in a series of journals with dried and pressed plants, the last entry in Rosa Luxemburg's herbarium dates to October 15, 1918—a white mullein (*Verbascum lychnitis*) that she had found in the farmyard of the prison complex in Breslau in Poland (figure 7.5).

While the practice of collecting is typically considered a means of categorizing and ordering, it can also be a way of engaging with the world. Collecting is a careful, painstaking, and sometimes tedious practice that requires attention to detail and care for the seemingly insignificant aspects of



Figure 7.7 Herbarium Entry of an Unidentified Plant Sent in a Letter by Ms. Rosenbaum on August 12, 1915. Courtesy: Karl Dietz Verlag.

the material world. While Rosa Luxemburg's handwritten notes on many of the pages of her herbarium seem merely to record botanical details, a closer read reveals that her journals contained additional comments that do not adhere to the standards of scientific documentation.

Some of these notes indicate that Rosa Luxemburg made an effort to keep her ties to the outside world. If the isolation of incarceration is aimed at preventing prisoners from cultivating social networks, prison correspondence and visitations can be vital for prisoners to maintain their will to live. In addition to regular letters, some of Rosa Luxemburg's pen pals sent her flowers and plants that she added to her collection.

On August 12, 1915, while incarcerated in cell 219 in the Women's Prison in Barnimstraße in Berlin (figure 7.6), Rosa Luxemburg recorded an uncategorized plant specimen that was annotated merely with a question mark and a comment that the leaves smelled strongly like peppermint: “? Blätter stark duftend nach Pfefferminze Von Frau Rosenbaum im Brief



Figure 7.8 Leaves from an Elm Tree, Added to the Herbarium on September 18, 1915. Courtesy: Karl Dietz Verlag.

12.8.15” (figure 7.7). She had received this tiny plant in a letter from Ms. Rosenbaum.

From other notes in the herbarium, it appears that Rosa Luxemburg was able to carve out small spaces of freedom for herself, whether it was by briefly leaving the narrow confines of her cell or by welcoming the outside world in. In September 1915, while incarcerated in the prison in Barnimstraße, she added five leaves from an elm tree to her herbarium that the wind had blown into her cell: “18.9.15 In die Zelle hereingeweht vom Wind aus dem Lazareththof. Rüster (Ulmus) Fam: Ulmaceae” (figure 7.8). For Rosa Luxemburg, a small opening to the world beyond.

And while imprisoned in Breslau, she noted on August 27, 1918, that she had collected a carrot leaf from the prison yard where she went for occasional strolls: “Daucus carota aus meinem Spazierhof Bresl. 27.8.18” (figure 7.9).

Another entry from August 1918 is of three dried specimens of the plant *Nigella*, which also lists the plant’s more commonly known German names.



Figure 7.9 Herbarium Entry of a Carrot Leaf from August 27, 1918. Courtesy: Karl Dietz Verlag.

Below the botanical description, a brief comment notes that the flowers were bought on the way to the dentist: “Braut m Haaren (Jungfer im Grünen, Gretchen im Busch, schwarz. Kümmel) *Nigella* (Fam: Ranuncul.) Gekauft unterwegs zum Zahnarzt Breslau 2. August 1918” (figure 7.10). Evidently, Rosa Luxemburg had seized her dentist appointment, which took place outside the prison, as an opportunity to get herself some flowers.

It is easy to conceive of these acts as attempts at escaping the dull monotony of life in prison, if ever so briefly. Just as in Yassin’s drawing, plants and flowers can disrupt the gray prison landscape—especially when we find them where they are not meant to be or where we did not expect them. The prison in Breslau seems to have had a farmyard (“Gemüsehof”) to grow vegetables for consumption in the prison. On September 9, 1918, Rosa Luxemburg added several pieces of dog’s tooth grass to her herbarium, which she had sowed at



Figure 7.10 Herbarium Entry of *Nigella* Flowers from August 2, 1918. Courtesy: Karl Dietz Verlag.



Figure 7.11 Specimens of Dog's Tooth Grass, Added to the Herbarium on September 9, 1918. *Courtesy:* Karl Dietz Verlag.

the perimeter of the prison's farmyard: "Hundszahn (*Cynodon dactylum*) Fam: Gramineae 9.9.18 Von mir ausgesät auf dem Rand des Gemüsehofes" (figure 7.11). In the strictly regulated world of the prison, in which even the vegetable garden would have been subject to some degree of monitoring, the unapproved growth of the slender dog's tooth grass became a subtle symbol of resistance.

If Rosa Luxemburg's collecting and note-taking was first and foremost an act of care toward the natural world, it was also a political tool and an archival practice. It allowed her to track as well as resist her experiences of incarceration. It is for us today a means of reconstructing these experiences. The herbarium should thus be read as a material expression of how Rosa Luxemburg's care for all living beings, human and otherwise, was folded into her political practice.

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**THE MASS STRIKE, PAST
AND PRESENT**



Figure 8.1 Image from *Red Rosa: A Graphic Biography of Rosa Luxemburg* by Kate Evans, Verso Books, 2015.

Chapter 8

“The Living Pulsebeat of the Revolution”

Reading Luxemburg and Du Bois on the Strike

Rafael Khachaturian

In her 1906 pamphlet *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, Rosa Luxemburg pointed to three revolutions—the French Revolution, the German Revolution of March 1848, and the Russian Revolution of 1905—as the touchstones of the modern class struggle. Together these events formed a “continuous chain of development in which the fortunes and the end of the capitalist century are to be seen” (Luxemburg, 2008b: 164). The Revolution of 1905, especially, marked the closure of the liberal period and the opening of a new phase of proletarian class struggle. It was in that moment that the Russian proletariat had first realized the potential of the mass strike, thereby introducing “a new epoch in the development of the labor movement” (Luxemburg, 2008b: 112).

However, Luxemburg’s formulation ignored another monumental period in the history of nineteenth-century class struggles: the U.S. Civil War, emancipation, and the attempted social revolution of the Reconstruction. In itself, this omission is not surprising. The United States appears only sporadically in Luxemburg’s works. Moreover, at the time of her writing *The Mass Strike*, interpretations of Reconstruction were dominated by the nascent pro-southern Dunning School. It was not until the appearance of W.E.B. Du Bois’s monumental *Black Reconstruction in America* in 1935 that the Civil War and the Reconstruction era were treated as a social revolution and an emancipatory class project.¹ Like Luxemburg, Du Bois was interested in the strike as

¹ I adopt the notion of the Reconstruction as a failed social revolution from the work of Eric Foner, whose understanding of the Reconstruction converges with Du Bois’s on this point. See Foner

it related to class struggles and capitalist development, albeit in a context that she did not explore in detail. Among his most original—as well as controversial—insights was that enslaved persons were a “black proletariat” whose abandonment of the plantations in a “general strike” played a decisive role in the Union victory.²

Luxemburg and Du Bois were born only three years apart, in 1871 and 1868, respectively, although the abrupt end of her life and the longevity of his may obscure the fact that they were contemporaries. Their trajectories also involve something of a missed encounter, for Du Bois spent 1892–1894 studying in Berlin, while Luxemburg moved there in 1898. Given that Du Bois frequented the meetings of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) during his time there, it is likely that they would have crossed paths if their timelines had overlapped even slightly (Lewis, 1993; Du Bois, 1998b). They also shared the experience of writing from geographic and cultural margins: Luxemburg as a Polish Jewish woman in the heavily male Second International, Du Bois as a black man who spent his entire life grappling with the legacy of slavery and the shadow of Jim Crow (Hudis and Anderson, 2004; Mullen, 2016; Lewis, 1993, 2001). Finally, both had complicated relationships to the dominant interpretations of Marxist theory and politics during their times. In life, Luxemburg forcefully pushed back against the evolutionary tendencies of German Social Democracy in the years following the adoption of the Erfurt Program in 1891, while in death Communist orthodoxy painted her as an intellectual ally of Trotskyism (Geras, 2015: 43–45). Du Bois’s relationship to Marxism and the Communist movement was even more fraught, as in his most pessimistic moments he concluded that racial divisions between the interests of the black and white working classes were an irreconcilable obstacle (Du Bois, 1995). As a result, at the time of *Black Reconstruction*’s publication, neither Du Bois nor Luxemburg had much standing in the Communist organizations tied to the Third International.

Beyond these suggestive overlaps, my goal in this essay is to explore a more specific convergence between Luxemburg and Du Bois: their shared understanding of the mass/general strike as a revolutionary practice that manifests the collective agency of the working class. Taking *The Mass Strike* and *Black Reconstruction* as representative works for this position, we can see that these writings spanned at least four distinct historical moments: the United States in 1860–1880 (the subject of *Black Reconstruction*), Tsarist

(1990, 2013, 2014). However, for important differences in Foner’s and Du Bois’s accounts, see Ignatiev (1993).

² I use the term enslaved persons rather than slaves to underscore the violent and coercive nature of enslavement as social practice, and the personhood of the people on whom these acts were committed.

Russia in 1905–1906 (the subject of *The Mass Strike*), pre-World War I Imperial Germany (Luxemburg’s standpoint an author), and the interwar United States (Du Bois’s standpoint). However, these events and their textual representations were embedded in a common spatiotemporal matrix of global and uneven capitalist development. Although they were situated in radically different contexts, this fact allows us to pose and comparatively examine how they theorized working-class subjectivity and self-organization within two distinct capitalist social formations. For both Luxemburg and Du Bois, the strike was the phenomenon that fused impersonal historical processes with more immediate forms of political agency, making possible an emancipatory and revolutionary break with the old regime.

I begin by briefly revisiting Luxemburg’s and Du Bois’s respective accounts of the mass strike and the general strike. Following that, I compare their distinct understandings of the strike by focusing on three specific themes. First is the strike’s role in transforming the relationship between collective subjectivity and political agency. Second is how the strike bridges economic and political struggles, fusing them into a single revolutionary political project. Third is the relationship between the strike and social revolution and the place of bourgeois-parliamentary political institutions therein. Along with a number of similarities, this comparison reveals important theoretical differences stemming from their particular standpoints of analysis and political engagements. In particular, Luxemburg neglected the emancipatory character of what Du Bois called the Reconstruction’s “abolition democracy” and its rightful place in the history of nineteenth-century class struggles, because she did not account for the specific articulation of class and race in a settler colonial society. Ultimately, staging this “encounter” with Du Bois allows us to displace her theory of the mass strike beyond its original context and intent. This both expands its scope outside of the original European framework, and, a way that is consistent with their shared Marxist affinities, reflects the unevenness of class subject formation and mobilization in different social formations.

THE MASS STRIKE AS CONCEPT AND PRACTICE

The Mass Strike was first published as a pamphlet in the fall of 1906. This work was a political-strategic intervention within the SPD, with Luxemburg directing her argument against both anarchist and trade unionist understandings of the general strike. Anarchists and syndicalists saw the strike in an ahistorical manner, as something that rested primarily on political imagination and will. On the other hand, trade unionist understandings of the strike that dominated the German social democratic movement saw it merely as an instrumental tactic that should be used sparsely and be entirely subordinated

to the advancement of socialism by parliamentary means. Despite their other differences, both tendencies saw the strike as a “purely technical means of struggle which can be ‘decided’ at pleasure and strictly according to conscience, or ‘forbidden’” by some external leadership (Luxemburg, 2008b: 116).

Against these misunderstandings, Luxemburg drew on the examples of the mass strikes that swept the Russian Empire in the previous year. These events were not a single, homogeneous phenomenon but rather a series of sporadic conflagrations whose roots she traced to the 1896 general strikes in St. Petersburg. The scattered working-class uprisings across the Russian Empire over the following years leading up to the 1905 Revolution fluctuated in their content between “purely” economic and political demands. While their results were mixed, Luxemburg saw these movements as fostering the growth of class consciousness and thus setting the stage for the mass demonstrations of January 1905.³ The latter combined economic demands for higher wages, shorter working hours, and better working conditions with political demands against the entire system of Tsarist absolutism.

The numerous uprisings across the Russian Empire in the winter of 1905 varied depending on local conditions and the balance of social forces. But the novelty of these events, Luxemburg argued, was that they were neither spurred by a party organization or trade union nor by “revolutionary romanticist” propaganda. The mass strike was not an abstract, schematic tactic that was willed into existence by an outside actor. Nor was it simply a localized response to the peculiar conditions of Russian society that had no bearing on other contexts. Instead, the mass strikes were the concrete manifestations of a “universal form of the proletarian class struggle resulting from the present stage of capitalist development and class relations” (Luxemburg, 2008b: 164). Within the historical trajectory of capitalist development, they were the onset of a “new form of struggle . . . a symptom of a thoroughgoing internal revolution in the relations of the classes and in the conditions of the class struggle” (Luxemburg, 2008b: 118).

These organic awakenings of class consciousness took hold through a politics of proletarian mass action and self-organization. Luxemburg did not frame her analysis in terms of economic necessity or determinacy (Howard, 1977: 50), yet she nevertheless saw the strikes as embedded in a historical process of sedimented class struggles and practices that served as the preconditions for these remarkable uprisings. The mass strike was a “historical phenomenon

³ I refer to “consciousness” throughout to capture the positions of Luxemburg and Du Bois. However, my reading of them here is more closely informed by a theory of class composition (Mohandesi, 2013), emphasizing the structural dimensions of class relations and the manner in which classes are materially constituted through concrete practices.

which, at a given moment, results from special conditions with historical inevitability" (Luxemburg, 2008b: 117). The new possibilities and problems introduced by the appearance of the mass strikes on the historical stage could only be understood through an "examination of those factors and social conditions out of which the mass strike grows in the present phase of the class struggle" and the "objective investigation of the sources of the mass strike from the standpoint of what is historically inevitable" (Luxemburg, 2008b: 118).

In *The Mass Strike* and in later texts, Luxemburg extrapolated the more general lessons from these events beyond Russia, particularly as they related to the SPD's political strategy. Reiterating that the mass strike could not be called into being as a directive from the party leadership, she wrote that it "occurs to some extent automatically, as the natural and inevitable intensification of a mass action which has already begun and is spreading further" (Luxemburg, 1910). It had its own internal rationale and logic of development, being "born of the inner need and of the resoluteness of the aroused masses, and simultaneously of the concentrated political situation" (Ibid). The mass strike was the manifestation of a larger historical process, being "merely the external form of an action which has its own inner development, logic, intensification and consequences" (Ibid). That is, it could be said to express a historical tendency, and also remained partly ungrounded and subject to contingency, ultimately being "both its own justification and the guarantee of its own effectiveness" (Ibid).

In her final political address, given on December 31, 1918, at the founding convention of the German Communist Party (KPD), Luxemburg reiterated the necessity of the mass strike in the midst of the unfolding revolutionary crisis, stating that it was nothing less than "the external form of the struggle for socialism" itself. What had begun as an "exclusively political" revolution was now passing into a new economic phase, prompted by the many spontaneous strikes that marked the onset of the German Revolution. As in her analysis of Russia, here too Luxemburg anticipated that strikes would increasingly become the "central feature and the decisive factors of the revolution, thrusting purely political questions into the background" and intensifying the economic struggle (Luxemburg, 1970: 419–20).

In addition to centering the mass strike as a novel but nevertheless historical and social development, in *The Mass Strike* Luxemburg also reframed the question of political leadership in relation to the class struggle. Again, the mass strike was made possible by historical preconditions, but it was not an artificial method that could be selectively deployed by a revolutionary organization (Luxemburg, 1913). The task of the SPD and the trade unions was not to prepare and announce the mass strikes. Instead, the socialist movement had to draw in and mobilize the unorganized working classes that were the basis of the mass strikes, to provide intellectual and political leadership where

necessary and to agitate with the goal of heightening class consciousness “by making clear to the widest layers of the proletariat the *inevitable advent* of this revolutionary period, the inner *social factors* making for it and the *political consequences* of it” (Luxemburg, 2008b: 161).

Therefore, the mass strike was a point of convergence between historical necessity and political agency. Objectively, it was grounded in the various “political and social proportions of the forces of the revolution [and] the relations of the contending powers” inherited from the past. (Luxemburg, 2008b: 141). Behind it lay not only the accumulated successes and failures of past struggles but also the general historical tendency of capitalist development, with all of its contradictions. In that regard, revolutionary subjects never made history in circumstances fully of their own choosing.

Yet there was also an emancipatory, intersubjective element to the mass strike. Luxemburg called it the very “method of motion of the proletarian mass, the phenomenal form of the proletarian struggle in the revolution” (Luxemburg, 2008b: 141). In writing that “the mass strike is merely the form of the revolutionary struggle . . . It is the living pulsebeat of the revolution and at the same time its most powerful driving wheel,” she meant that it did not exist apart from the revolutionary impulse cumulatively generated by the growth of class consciousness (Ibid). The mass strike was the sign that social conditions had reached a point where the working class experienced a sudden and sharp “awakening of class feeling” about the actual social and economic oppressions that it had tolerated for decades (Luxemburg, 2008b: 129). Unlike reactionary mass mobilizations, the proletarian mass strike played a historically progressive role, since it recognized the origins of its political and economic domination as having the same root causes in capitalist exploitation. While this class consciousness arrived suddenly and unpredictably, it was intensified through a positive feedback loop of political practices such as demonstrations, meetings, and public discussions. These dynamic interactions further mobilized the working class, emboldening it to throw off social hierarchies and potentially inaugurate a revolutionary breach. The unique task of Social Democracy in that conjuncture was to channel this newfound revolutionary class consciousness into the political strategy and tactics—party organization and the conquest of political power—that would ultimately facilitate the dictatorship of the proletariat.

THE BLACK PROLETARIAT AND THE GENERAL STRIKE

Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction* came thirty years after Luxemburg’s reflections on the strike. In 1935, with the catastrophes of World War I, the Great

Depression, and the rise of fascism all having taken place in that interregnum, it had indeed seemed that barbarism prevailed over socialism. Undoubtedly influenced by these circumstances, Du Bois had undertaken an intensive study of Marxist thought between 1931 and 1934. It is uncertain if Du Bois had ever read Luxemburg.⁴ However, it is well known that during this time he focused on both *Capital* and the *Communist Manifesto*, teaching these works in a graduate seminar on “Karl Marx and the Negro” at Atlanta University in 1933 (Mullen, 2016: 24; Hartman, 2017). *Black Reconstruction* was the culmination of this process, providing a heterodox and original Marxist reinterpretation of the Civil War’s aftermath. Themes of mass praxis, class consciousness, ideology, and contradiction permeate the work (Robinson, 1983: 196). Many of these are captured in Du Bois’s reflections on the “black worker” and the general strike.

While the topic of the general strike takes up only one chapter in the massive *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois pointedly began the book with an account of the figure of the black worker. By designating enslaved persons the black proletariat, Du Bois situated them as the main protagonists in the discussion of the strike. Echoing Luxemburg’s discussion in *The Accumulation of Capital* of how the truly global character of capitalist development required the ongoing exploitation of the underdeveloped periphery, Du Bois (1998a: 5) pushed this argument further, suggesting that, in the final instance, this dynamic rested on the shoulders of the slave:

Black labor became the foundation stone not only of the Southern social structure, but of Northern manufacture and commerce, of the English factory system, of European commerce, of buying and selling on a world-wide scale; new cities were built on the results of black labor, and a new labor problem, involving all white labor, arose both in Europe and America.

The black worker was the linchpin of the south as a contradictory social formation—a seemingly archaic “agrarian feudal” society segmented by both class and racial distinctions, yet also one deeply embedded in a modern *global capitalist* order. This system, where “the capitalist owns not only the nation’s raw material, not only the land, but also the laborer himself,” was both quite distinct from the nascent industrial capitalism of Europe and the northern United States, yet also integral to their flourishing (Du Bois, 1998a:

⁴ Du Bois’s only mention of Luxemburg that I have been able to confirm is a passing reference from his posthumous autobiography, which describes the German Democratic Republic as “developing the faith of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg” (Du Bois, 1968: 23). I owe this detail to Robert W. Williams.

29). At stake in the Civil War was not just question of its survival but also possible expansion.

In the chapter on “The General Strike,” Du Bois honed in on how the outbreak of the Civil War made this structural importance of the black worker apparent, not merely as a bearer of labor power but also as a political subject. While both sides of the conflict treated them as property and ignored their interests, “from the very beginning, the Negro occupied the center of the stage because of very simple physical reasons: the war was in the South,” where nearly 4 million enslaved persons lived (Du Bois, 1998a: 57). Enslaved persons were the fraction of the working class that was essential for the ongoing reproduction of the south’s labor-intensive agrarian social order. This became particularly evident in wartime: “the Southern worker, black and white, held the key to the war; and of the two groups, the black worker raising food and raw materials held an even more strategic place than the white” (Du Bois, 1998a: 63). This put the black worker in a position to cripple the southern economy and war effort, through the withdrawal of their labor power.

As the war dragged on, streams of fugitive and refugee enslaved persons (along with poor white workers) began to abandon their masters’ homes and plantations, expressing a “quiet but unswerving determination of increasing numbers no longer to work on Confederate plantations, and to seek the freedom of the Northern armies” (Du Bois, 1998a: 65). This movement was first cautious and uncertain, driven more by necessity than by any emboldened sense of agency. “The slave entered upon a general strike against slavery by the same methods that he had used during the period of the fugitive slave”—by running away (Du Bois, 1998a: 57). Like the mass strikes described by Luxemburg, this general strike was not initially solicited or organized by the Union army and politicians, who in the early days of the war simply wanted to return the south to the Union, not to interfere with the southern oligarchy’s property. Neither was it an armed insurrection: “The Negroes showed no disposition to strike the one terrible blow which brought black men freedom in Haiti and which in all history has been used by all slaves and justified” (Du Bois, 1998a: 65).

Instead, what Du Bois called the general strike—during which some five hundred thousand black refugees fled the plantations, with many eventually contributing to the Union war effort as either soldiers or now free wage laborers—was a “slow, stubborn mutiny” (Du Bois, 1998a: 80). Once unleashed, the “trickling stream of fugitives swelled to a flood,” becoming a “general strike against the slave system on the part of all who could find opportunity.” The majority of enslaved persons that did stay on the plantations engaged in smaller acts of stalling and sabotage that also helped undercut the Confederate effort. But the significance of the general strike extended beyond a mere refusal to work, or what David Levering Lewis (2001: 372) has called

"little more than the common sense of self-preservation exhibited on a massive scale." As Du Bois wrote, the general strike "was not merely the desire to stop work. It was a strike on a wide basis against the conditions of work," involving a more ambitious desire to "stop the economy of the plantation system" altogether (Du Bois, 1998a: 67).

The general strike involved both black and white workers, but it was the black proletariat whose "withdrawal and bestowal of his labor decided the war" (Du Bois, 1998a: 64, 57). Du Bois thus understood the general strike—what Guy Emerson Mount (2015) has called "the most massive slave revolt in the history of the New World"—as a truly unprecedented form of collective action by the most exploited part of the working class.⁵ By transferring their labor power from the plantations to the Union war effort by means of the general strike, those newly emancipated set in motion their own structural transformation as political subjects, from enslaved persons to wage laborers (Oakes, 2019). In doing so, they also set in motion a process that, over the following decade, would become the closest American equivalent to a European social revolution.

PROLETARIAN SUBJECTIVITY AND COLLECTIVE AGENCY

Turning to a comparative reading, it is clear that both Luxemburg and Du Bois understood the strike as an expression of collective proletarian agency, defined by the concerted withdrawal of labor power by a strategically located class agent within a semi-peripheral social formation. The strike made possible the emergence of a new political subjectivity. The strike, and the revolutionary consciousness it gave rise to, had the power to rupture, if only provisionally, the secular trajectory of capitalist development and to bring about a revolutionary situation.

Luxemburg has occasionally been thought of as theorist of "spontaneity"—a reputation originally attributed to her shortly after her death amidst the ideological struggles within the KPD and the Comintern (Waters, 1970: 9). However, her criticism of anarchist conceptions of the general strike shows this to be an incomplete reading (Howard, 1971: 17). It would be more accurate to say that Luxemburg had a dialectical understanding of the relationship between volition and history, where each conditions the other and cannot be understood in isolation (Geras, 2015: 35–37; Luban, 2019). As Dick Howard (1971: 16) has pointed out, Luxemburg held an understanding

⁵ For the connection between the general strike and past US slave rebellions, see Henderson (2015).

of the proletariat as both the subject and the object of history. As an object, it was the product of the historical dynamics of capitalist development—but as a subject, it had the capacity to become conscious of itself and its historical role, and so to transform the very material conditions that had brought it into existence. Moreover, the mass strike was not a single event, but, as Howard (Luxemburg, 1971: 64) claims, “a *concept*, a totalization, the unity of a variety of actions.” The concept of the mass strike thus captures the nature of revolution as both a totality and a process. As a totality, the strike articulates the contradictions of capitalist development and brings them to a head; as a process, it is an ongoing series of actions and practices through which a collective political subjectivity is formed and cultivated. Altogether, the mass strike *is* the proletarian practice of self-realization as an active class subject. It is the moment at which the proletariat seizes the “role of social subjectivity,” coming to recognize both its economic and political struggles as the results of its own practices (Howard, 1977: 51).

The proletariat’s consciousness of the revolutionary situation figures centrally in Luxemburg’s account of the strike. However, the mass strikes were not at first initiated and conducted by self-consciously revolutionary agents. Luxemburg noted that the strikes broke out with “no predetermined plan, no organized action.” They were not organized by parties or trade unions but instead took place through the “spontaneous risings of the masses” (Luxemburg, 2008b: 128). To succeed, the overthrow of absolutism required “self-consciousness, self-knowledge, and class consciousness” on the part of both the masses and the bourgeoisie. But it could only be achieved through struggle, “in the process of the revolution itself, through the actual school of experience, in collision with the proletariat as well as with one another, in incessant mutual friction” (Luxemburg, 2008b: 130).

A similar pattern of changing subject formation can be observed in Du Bois’s account. The original initiative taken by the black proletariat was tentative, and it was hardly conscious of the role it was playing at that juncture. What is crucial is that the realization of the general strike in *Black Reconstruction* was a learning process, where a new political subjectivity was formed in response to changing structural conditions (O’Donovan, 2015). Du Bois depicted how the black worker “was not seriously considered by the majority of men, North or South” (Du Bois, 1998a: 57). The instrumental treatment of the enslaved persons by both northern and southern whites obscured their real class interests and thus their potential agency. “Any mass movement under such circumstances must materialize slowly and painfully. What the Negro did was to wait, look and listen and try to see where his interest lay” (Du Bois, 1998a: 57). Eventually, this desire for emancipation surfaced via the collective action of the general strike, initiating a material transition from slavery to free wage labor. A collective renouncement of the

previous condition of forced labor allowed the black working class to represent itself as *new kind of labor force*: "the fugitives became organized and formed a great labor force for the army" (Du Bois, 1998a: 65). The general strike catalyzed the change in the black proletariat's collective subjectivity—a process that eventually culminated in the Reconstruction's political and juridical recognition of their personhood as citizens.

From both *The Mass Strike* and *Black Reconstruction*, we can see that Luxemburg and Du Bois share a *process-oriented* understanding of the strike in relation to subject formation. In their conceptions, the strike is an extraordinary form of class struggle that organically gives rise to new, collective forms of political subjectivity. The strike introduces a new form of agency in which both intersubjective collective practices and impersonal historical processes were condensed and channeled. However, they diverge on how revolutionary consciousness and agency could overcome the preexisting fault lines within the proletariat as a social class. This is especially true when it comes to the role of race in the formation of working-class movements, captured in Du Bois's exploration of race in the development of a settler colonial capitalist society.

Luxemburg saw the mass strike as helping forge a new class consciousness that incorporated the broadest segments of the masses. The class movement of the proletariat could not be the "movement of the organized minority. Every real, great class struggle must rest upon the support and cooperation of the widest masses" (Luxemburg, 2008b: 159). Successful mass strikes did not just mobilize those workers already organized into trade unions but morphed into "a real *people's movement*," so that "the widest sections of the proletariat must be drawn into the fight." The mass strike was the expression of "a real revolutionary, determined class action, which will be able to win and draw into the struggle the widest circles of the unorganized workers, according to their mood and conditions" (Luxemburg, 2008b: 159). In *The Mass Strike*, Luxemburg mostly assumed the general convergence of urban working-class interests as the outcome of capitalist industrialization. This was manifested both in her skepticism toward the peasantry as a potentially revolutionary class and in her rejection of national self-determination movements as compatible with proletarian revolution—positions that had put her at odds with Lenin (Davis, 1976). For Luxemburg, the internal tendencies of industrial capitalism toward proletarianization meant that the main hurdle was *organizational*—that is, whether or not revolutionary social democracy could harness and channel the radicalized urban working class, in order to direct it away from the moderate trade union leadership and toward a rupture with the existing order.

For Du Bois, too, social revolution was an organizational matter, in that he was sensitive to how the emancipatory promise of the Reconstruction

depended on the success of political institutions like the Republican Party and the Freedmen's Bureau. However, given the central role that racial consciousness played in upholding the southern order, Du Bois underscored how it was internalized by social subjects and reproduced through social practices—and how it could be used by the capitalist class to drive a wedge within the labor movement. *Black Reconstruction* details how, at the time of emancipation, the American proletariat was divided between recently freed blacks, southern poor whites, northern skilled workers, and northern common laborers (Du Bois, 1998a: 216). Yet the initial solidarity created by the general strike between emancipated persons and poor southern whites was eventually eroded by the maneuvering of both northern industry and southern elites. Fearing a unified, multi-racial working class, northern and southern property-holders converged on “the race element,” using systematic disenfranchisement, exploitation of now-free black labor, and extra-legal paramilitary violence to undercut Reconstruction. In the context of racial antagonisms between black and white southern workers, and the relative indifference of northern organized labor to the radical Reconstruction project, the promise of Reconstruction's “abolition democracy” was cut short by “war, turmoil, poverty, forced labor and economic rivalry of labor groups” (Du Bois, 1998a: 677).

Under Jim Crow, white and black workers were now pitted against each other. Even strike actions could no longer effectively bridge their new structural positions, as white workers formed racially exclusive trade unions, while black workers were used as strikebreakers. Although attempts were made to recreate the labor solidarity across color lines in the 1880s and 1890s, most notably by the Populist movement, the reaction had already become entrenched in southern political institutions (Du Bois, 1998a: 353; 2007: 154). The dismantling of Reconstruction cemented a lasting racial antagonism between the laboring classes, making “labor unity or labor class-consciousness impossible,” and leading Du Bois to his pessimistic conclusion that “labor can gain in the South no class-consciousness” (Du Bois, 1998a: 680, 704).

ARTICULATING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STRUGGLES

More than just initiating the development of revolutionary subjectivity, the strike also fused together economic and political struggles, revealing them to be the dual sides of the same process of capitalist development. In writing about social formations transitioning from “societies with capitalism” to “capitalist societies” (Parisot, 2019: 2), Luxemburg and Du Bois indicated how strike actions could potentially resonate on both political and economic

levels. Both authors suggested that class struggles must pass from political to economic concerns in order to fully realize their revolutionary potential and that strikes are unique forms of working-class actions that can traverse the boundaries between them. However, while both believed that strikes could open a space for the revolutionary transformation of existing social structures, neither presented a linear account of the development from political to economic struggles or vice-versa. Instead, the process depended on the specific social formation and the balance of forces within it—not least of all about what was construed to be “purely” economic or political in such a context and where the demarcation point between the two could be drawn. While being a common global process, capitalist development in the second half of the nineteenth century was also uneven and contradictory, with the differences among social formations affecting both the forms of political subjectivity and the political and economic struggles in these different contexts. Luxemburg’s and Du Bois’s accounts illustrate how analytic categories and frameworks sometimes resist simple transposal across contexts in their divergence on the issue of capitalism, free labor, and slavery. For while Luxemburg adhered to a more rigid distinction between the economic and the political, the peculiar object of Du Bois’s study suggested the reverse—a fusion of the economic and political domains, represented by enslaved persons’ contradictory positions as unfree workers in a society with capitalism.

Both Luxemburg and Du Bois saw the Civil War as part of the process of capitalist modernization. In *The Accumulation of Capital*, Luxemburg observed that “in the United States, the economic revolution had begun with a war” (Luxemburg, 2003: 396). Like Du Bois, she emphasized that capitalist accumulation occurred through the colonial exploitation of non-capitalist societies. Both authors also acknowledged the extent to which southern cotton production was essential to the English cotton industry—what Luxemburg called “the first genuinely capitalist branch of production.” Yet the similarities end there. For Luxemburg, American slavery was decidedly *not* a capitalist social relation but a “primitive system of exploitation” that was part of the “traditional pre-capitalist organization of production” (Luxemburg, 2003: 343, 339). Thus, it was only after the Civil War that “the millions of African Negroes who were shipped to America to provide the labor power for the plantations” emerged “as a free proletariat [and] were incorporated in the class of wage laborers in a capitalist system” (Luxemburg, 2003: 343).

Moreover, in *The Mass Strike* Luxemburg was preoccupied with Tsarist Russia and Imperial Germany, where the transition to free waged labor was rapidly taking place, and consequently where the separation between the political and economic domains was more pronounced. Accordingly, she adhered to a more classical Marxist understanding of the proletariat, writing in January 1905 that the Russian Revolution had “the most pronounced

working-class character of any modern revolution up to now” (Luxemburg, 2019: 53). Luxemburg focused almost exclusively on the urban working class in major industrial cities, such as St. Petersburg, Odessa, and Baku. This industrial proletariat was the very “soul of the revolution in Russia” because of its ability to bring capitalist production to a standstill through a proliferation of political and economic struggles (Luxemburg, 2008b: 163). The “determined political struggle of the urban workers” would naturally change into an “elementary economic tempest of mass strikes,” which would in turn provide new strength to the political struggle against absolutism (Luxemburg, 2008b: 156). This meant that the mass strike’s fusion of political and economic struggles was largely taking place *after* the process of capitalist industrialization had already initiated their separation into relatively independent domains.

Social democratic strategy in turn of the century Germany was heavily oriented toward parliamentary and trade unionist struggles, thereby being limited to “the form of the bourgeois state, in a representative fashion, by the presence of legislative representation.” The legal and political superstructure of the state perpetuated the separation of social struggles into “separate” political and economic domains—a separation that was merely the “artificial product of the parliamentary period” (Luxemburg, 2008b: 169). In contrast, Luxemburg stressed that the truly *revolutionary* character of the mass strike lay in it expanding the scope of the political beyond the parliamentary state. The strike revealed the real character of the underlying class struggle, where political-legislative and economic-trade unionist struggles were simply two faces of the same phenomenon:

In a revolutionary mass action the political and the economic struggle are one . . . There are not two different class struggles of the working class, an economic and a political one, but only *one* class struggle, which aims at one and the same time at the limitation of capitalist exploitation within bourgeois society, and at the abolition of exploitation together with bourgeois society itself. (Luxemburg, 2008b: 170)

While political and economic struggles could be distinguished in theory, their underlying *phenomenal* unity was in the mass strike, where between the two there was “the most complete reciprocal action.” During the strike, “cause and effect here continually change places; and thus the economic and the political factor in the period of the mass strike . . . merely form the two interlacing sides of the proletarian class struggle in Russia. And *their unity* is precisely the mass strike” (Luxemburg, 2008b: 145). In this sense, as Norman Geras has suggested, Luxemburg was neither an economic determinist nor a political voluntarist but saw the two as complementary aspects of

a single historical tendency that had its overt expression in the mass strike. Like Du Bois's black proletariat, the participants in the mass strikes were not necessarily aware of the *historical* significance of their shift from political to economic demands in the midst of their struggles. Nevertheless, the mass strike's fusion of political and economic demands—and the transformation of collective subjectivity and agency that this enabled—could initiate a crisis that Luxemburg expected to transform the entire social formation of Tsarist Russia.

Whereas Luxemburg's revolutionary subject was the proletariat understood as the industrial working class, Du Bois rejected the notion that this category should be reserved for the class of free, waged laborers in the context of advanced capitalist development. While Du Bois's invocation of the "general strike" and "black proletariat" was controversial among both his contemporary Marxist interlocutors and later scholarship (Lewis, 1998; Parfait, 2009; Kelly, 2015; Glaberman, 1995), his stretching of the latter has analytical purchase, capturing the distinctive social structure of the American south as compared to industrial North America and Europe. Although the general strike involved the articulation of both economic and political components, it took place in a settler-colonial social formation, where the metropole and the colonies were not spatially separated, and where agricultural labor mostly had not taken a contractual and waged form. Absent this formal separation of the economic and the political, the social structure of southern agrarian capitalism simultaneously rested on both the economic and political subjugation of enslaved persons.

As a result, the articulation of political and economic struggles represented by the general strike was qualitatively different from the one dealt with by Luxemburg. In the case of the general strike, the shift in the struggles was not from the political to the economic (with a reciprocal effect), but instead, given the structural position of enslaved persons within the south's social formation, was already simultaneously political and economic. As Gayatri Spivak (2014) has pointed out, it was precisely because the black worker was structurally situated at the crux of two distinct forms of capitalism—plantation and industrial—that the notion of the "black proletariat" could capture an expanded sense of collective subaltern agency in an "effort to rethink the revolutionary subject from within slave labor."

Clearly, the general strike undercut the economic foundations of southern society by withdrawing the labor power on which it reproduced itself. Yet the general strike had an equally important *political* dimension due to it taking place in a social formation where the political and economic were entwined. The plantation regime had relegated slavery to the nominally "private" sphere of property relations, thereby denying enslaved persons the ability to claim political rights. Against this order, the strike contested not just coercive labor

practices, but the south's entire *raison d'être* under which enslaved persons were denied the status of citizens in order to perpetuate their character as a specific kind of workforce. In this, the strike was a political act, as an immediate revolt against coercion and subordination, and in a more mediated sense, by forcing emancipation onto the agenda of national, parliamentary politics (the formally "political" terrain of the state.) In short, the general strike undercut the very economic-political structure on which the southern order was based, ultimately helping move emancipation from a legal or constitutional matter to one of social revolution.

SOCIAL REVOLUTION AND THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Both Luxemburg and Du Bois saw the strike as the catalyst in a transition from an order combining feudal and bourgeois elements, whether Tsarism, Prussian Junkerism, or the plantocracy of the U.S. south (Hahn, 1990), to a democratic-republican regime characterized by parliamentary democracy, universal male suffrage, and the institution of free wage labor. Both also believed that genuine democracy was unattainable within the framework of capitalist social relations and that its fate ultimately depended on a social revolution initiated and conducted by the working class. As a collective agent, the proletariat straddled this divide: it was both the defender of parliamentary democracy against the forces of absolutist or oligarchic reaction and a historically revolutionary force that pushed against the institutional limits of the bourgeois-democratic republic to a more radical economic democracy.

Luxemburg's critiques of both Bernstein's revisionism and aspects of Bolshevik rule have allowed her legacy to be claimed by a number of tendencies on the left (Waters, 1970; Geras, 2015; Howard, 1971; Hudis and Anderson, 2004; O'Kane, 2015). She remained a revolutionary socialist throughout her life, yet one who held a nuanced view of the relationship between parliamentary democracy and proletarian revolution. In *Reform or Revolution*, she maintained that in certain instances the bourgeois republic's reliance on universal male suffrage afforded opportunities for working-class struggles within parliamentary institutions. Taken in isolation, these legal struggles were never sufficient for the revolutionary project: parliamentarism was democratic in form, but it was nevertheless a "specific form of the bourgeois class state" (Luxemburg, 2008a: 65). The proletarian revolution still required a mass, popular rising oriented toward the seizure of political (state) power, the transitional dictatorship of the proletariat, and the destruction of the capitalist state. However, the attainment and defense of various constitutional freedoms through both extra-institutional and electoral struggles

could be seen as part of the prerequisite democratization of the bourgeois-parliamentary state. "Democracy is indispensable to the working class," Luxemburg famously wrote, "because only through the exercise of its democratic rights, in the struggle for democracy, can the proletariat become aware of its class interests and its historic task" (Luxemburg, 2008a: 93). Popular participation within the bourgeois parliamentary state allowed the proletariat to develop its own autonomous administrative organs and assert its electoral rights, providing inroads through which it could cultivate its forces in advance of the ruptural moment where state power could be seized. In other words, these struggles could have both practical and pedagogical effects on the composition of the revolutionary class.

In this scheme, the distinctive radical promise of the Russian Revolution of 1905 was to condense the time horizon between the bourgeois-democratic and proletarian revolutions. Luxemburg saw the mass strike as the most acute expression of the historical overcoming of absolutism, which forced Russia to pass from a stage of capitalist primitive accumulation to industrial capitalism. This had placed it on the track toward the emergence of a bourgeois-parliamentary, constitutional state, and at the same time, of a historically conscious proletariat that would oversee the rapid supersession of this political form. The revolutionary situation in Russia circa 1905–1906 was a moment when "the mass strike appears as the natural means of recruiting the widest proletarian layers for the struggle, as well as being at the same time a means of undermining and overthrowing the old state power and of stemming capitalist exploitation" (Luxemburg, 2008b: 163). In Russia, the equivalent of the European bourgeois revolutions would be carried out by a "modern class-conscious proletariat" (Luxemburg, 2008b: 162). Here, the pedagogical effect of the mass strike was to bring about a new collective agent that could simultaneously champion socialist republican democracy against both absolutism and bourgeois parliamentarianism. The revolutionary potential of the proletariat, with its "equal emphasis on political freedom, the winning of the eight-hour day, and a human standard of material existence," lay in its ability to realize the true potential of what were only formally democratic institutions (Luxemburg, 2008b: 163). Luxemburg thus saw the Revolution of 1905 as the first moment in history where the working class could advance democracy as both a formal *and* a substantive goal (Geras, 2015: 64).

For Luxemburg, the events of 1905 realized in absolutist Russia the "general results of international capitalist development," and therefore appeared "not so much as the last successor of the old bourgeois revolutions as the forerunner of the new series of proletarian revolutions of the West" (Luxemburg, 2008b: 164–65). While Luxemburg did not live long enough to witness the fascist reaction to these attempted revolutions, Du Bois was writing in the midst of that global moment, along with the hindsight of a suppressed social

revolution in his own country that cemented the south as a racial-authoritarian enclave. In that sense, *Black Reconstruction* was an attempt at the historical recovery of a road not taken. Against then-dominant interpretations of Reconstruction as a period of corrupt misrule, he argued that it was a social revolution of a world-historic magnitude: “We are still too blind and infatuated to conceive of the emancipation of the laboring class in half the nation as a revolution comparable to the upheavals in France in the past, and in Russia, Spain, India, and China today” (Du Bois, 1998a: 708). If not strictly speaking a proletarian revolution by the measures of the Communist orthodoxy of Du Bois’s time, it was nevertheless a thorough social transformation, initially catalyzed by the mass action of black workers.

Du Bois saw Reconstruction as a groundbreaking moment, calling it “one of the most extraordinary experiments of Marxism that the world, before the Russian Revolution, had seen” (Du Bois, 1998a: 358). It was an “economic revolution on a mighty scale and with world-wide reverberation,” during which racially integrated proletariat formed a “vast labor movement” that championed both political and economic freedom. Reconstruction presented the possibility of a thorough transformation of the economic, political, and ideological fabric of American society, promising to bring “a democracy which should by universal suffrage establish a dictatorship of the proletariat ending in industrial democracy” (Du Bois, 1998a: 346). As Marx had observed when reflecting on the Civil War, the advancement of a truly democratic republic in North America rested on the freedom of both white *and* black labor. For Du Bois, too, “the true significance of slavery in the United States to the whole social development of America lay in the ultimate relation of slaves to democracy” (Du Bois, 1998a: 13). The strike put black agency and autonomy at the center of what democracy in America could potentially mean, initiating a movement that culminated in the Reconstruction’s radical promise of both political and socioeconomic freedom.

The black proletariat were the limit point at which the institutions of the bourgeois-democratic republic and their promise of formal equality clashed against the radical, emancipatory, and universal project of “abolition democracy.” This was because the emancipation of black workers from their condition of forced servitude raised unavoidable questions about the attainment of legal equality, suffrage, education, and the distribution of both political power and private property. Du Bois understood the project of abolition democracy to entail, *at the minimum*, free wage labor, universal manhood suffrage, land redistribution, and citizenship as full legal equality under the law. But while these demands were in line with those of radical Republicans, like Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner, Du Bois also held a broader vision of abolition democracy as combining the eradication of enslavement with a more ambitious and international working-class struggle. Radical Reconstruction had

the power to form a biracial “dictatorship of labor” that exercised power over both the northern “dictatorship of capital” and the remnants of the southern oligarchy through a combination of federal state institutions and the exercise of universal male suffrage (Du Bois, 1998a: 219, 239, 345).⁶ The latter figured centrally in this vision, for only with this weapon “could the mass of workers begin that economic revolution which would eventually emancipate them” (Du Bois, 1998a: 284). The political overthrow of the plantocracy accomplished by the Civil War was the necessary precondition for a more thorough social revolution that would drastically change the political and institutional balance of class forces.

Emancipation, education, citizenship, rights, and the redistribution of land and capital were the essential elements of this transitional period of working-class rule. In states like South Carolina, Reconstruction-era governments allowed unprecedented forms of *de jure* equality, public education, and political participation for blacks, to the point that Du Bois entertained the idea that this “dictatorship of the proletariat” could have used universal suffrage to expropriate the southern oligarchy and abolish private capital, although he recognized that this course of events did not actually take place.⁷ As Eric Foner notes, even if it did not live to see this radical phase, Reconstruction still produced biracial democratic government, social legislation, the creation and expansion of public facilities and schools, the exclusion of the plantocracy from power, and, as a result, the prevention of the replacing of slavery with a similarly coercive form of labor discipline. “If Reconstruction did not create an integrated society, it did establish a standard of equal citizenship and a recognition of blacks’ rights to a share of state services” that distinguished it from both slavery and the segregated order that soon followed (Foner, 1990: 179, 159).

However, the balance of social forces following the Civil War ultimately prevented the Reconstruction from passing to this full revolutionary phase—that is, from the political demand for full legal equality and rights to the use of state power for land reform and redistribution of property (Foner, 1990: 162). While “the plantation land should have gone to those who worked it,” entailing a massive redistribution of land that would have definitively broken the forces of reaction, northern capitalist interests abandoned the Reconstruction

⁶ Also noteworthy is what Kevin Bruyneel (2017) calls the “constitutive presence and absence of Indigeneity and settler colonialism” in *Black Reconstruction*, in that the emancipatory potential of the Reconstruction era was partially made possible and conditioned by the ongoing dispossession of Native Americans.

⁷ See Du Bois’s footnote in *Black Reconstruction*, p. 381, where he suggests that Reconstruction “presents an opportunity to study inductively the Marxian theory of the state.” It is worth mentioning that in at least one instance Luxemburg did not reject peaceful expropriation. In *Reform or Revolution* (Luxemburg, 2008a: 64) she left open the possibility of buying out the property of the landlord class after the power had shifted into the hands of the workers.

project—and with it black workers—while the remnants of the southern elites successfully exploited racial fissures between poor whites and blacks (Du Bois, 1998a: 673). The “counter-revolution of property” between 1872 and 1876 saw the rise of violence and intimidation, disenfranchisement through “‘crime’ peonage,” and punitive labor laws (Du Bois, 2007: 151–52). In this way, the American equivalent of nineteenth-century European working-class movements for democracy was preemptively and brutally cut short.

The project of abolition democracy advanced emancipatory political demands to the utmost institutional limit of the democratic republican form. Similar to Luxemburg’s view that the mass strike was a necessary moment in the proletariat’s historical passage beyond the democratic republic, Du Bois’s account treats the general strike as the precondition for the attempted introduction of a republican regime in the American south that could then facilitate a more radical social transformation. This makes it unfortunate that Luxemburg did not turn her attention to Reconstruction. Had she done so, she would have recognized its proximate goals of free wage labor, universal manhood suffrage, and juridical equality as necessary components of future class struggles in the new political order of the U.S. south. Yet she would also likely see them as insufficient for the revolutionary supersession of capitalism. This is because while she was an original and insightful observer of the role played by imperialism and uneven development in the reproduction of the world capitalist system, her doubts that revolutionary struggles within that system could be refracted through the prisms of race and nationality likely kept her from fully grasping the significance of Reconstruction. Given this oversight, the emancipation of black workers and the attempted Reconstruction of the south along the lines of abolition democracy undoubtedly deserve a place alongside the revolutions of 1789, 1848, 1905, and 1917 in her periodization of the foundational modern class struggles.

CONCLUSION: LUXEMBURG AND DU BOIS IN THE ENCOUNTER

Rosa Luxemburg’s reflections on the mass strike remain among the most distinctive contributions to twentieth-century Marxist thought. However, when reading her alongside a Marxist internationalist contemporary like Du Bois, one who was situated in a different vantage point and approached the relationship between capitalist development and social transformation accordingly, we can note both affinities and divergences in their understandings of the strike and its significance for revolutionary politics. Capitalist development entails certain universal, structural tendencies of class formation, capital

accumulation, and class struggle. Yet these processes vary across social formations, often involving parallel and contemporary trajectories that are at the same time distinct and uneven.

Both authors understood the strike as a process that generated a new collective subjectivity, fused political and economic struggles into a unified revolutionary project, and made it possible for the working class to initiate a transition up to and beyond the democratic republic. Both were also acutely concerned with how collective agency and history mutually conditioned each other. For them, the strike was a moment that marked the emergence of a new revolutionary working-class subject and the inflection point where the historical tendencies of capitalist development could be made to come under the sway of its collective agency. The strike created the revolutionary conditions under which the barriers that normally separated political and economic struggles broke down and were replaced by new articulations of collective action. These, in turn, could accelerate the transition to the bourgeois-parliamentary republic, and beyond that, to generate the heightened working-class consciousness to push this regime to its limit. Yet insofar as Luxemburg understood the proletariat exclusively through the lens of the European industrial working class, she overlooked the characteristics of the antebellum south as a *modern*, not pre-capitalist, social formation: namely, its role as one of the main nodal points of the nineteenth-century capitalist world system and its peculiar class fragmentation along racial lines. As Du Bois perceptively noted, any hope of bringing into being a revolutionary subject in this kind of social structure required an expanded conception of the proletariat—one that captured the distinct position of black workers as a class fraction and foregrounded how racial barriers could undercut working-class unity. Luxemburg's relative indifference to the latter prevented her from recognizing Reconstruction as an attempted social revolution and a crucial moment in the history of nineteenth-century class struggles.

Together, Luxemburg's and Du Bois's analyses illustrate how differences in social formations affect class struggles and the processes of subject formation. Yet placing Luxemburg's account of the strike alongside Du Bois's is more than just a comparative study of the interactions between history and structure. It also "defamiliarizes" Luxemburg from her original context and adapts her ideas to a set of different challenges that were beyond her original framework. By channeling Marxist categories through the lens of the settler-colonial social formation, Du Bois reworked these theoretical tools to tackle the question of what working-class emancipation could mean—not just in the legacy of colonial race relations but equally importantly when exploring the global consequences of race and racism for international working-class struggles in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Given her unwavering commitment

to proletarian internationalism, situating Luxemburg's account alongside Du Bois's thus confronts it with an increasingly pertinent problem that, tragically, she did not live to see. By amending Luxemburg's analysis through this encounter, we emphasize the original power of her insights, yet also show that they were parts of an unfinished and ongoing project of understanding the conditions and possibilities of social revolution and emancipation.

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Chapter 9

Luxemburg on Tahrir Square

*Reading the Arab Revolutions with Rosa Luxemburg's The Mass Strike*¹

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The eighteen-day protest on the now-world-famous Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt, has come to symbolize the Arab uprisings of 2011. Media accounts have elevated the Tahrir episode to the status of a “pure event.” Echoing a Biblical clash between Good and Evil, Tahrir became the place where *al-sha’ab* (the people) fought a victorious battle against *al-nizam* (the regime). However, the presentation of the Tahrir episode as a unique occurrence isolates it from the broader revolutionary process. Separating these events from their historical and social context compromises the understanding of their political content and implications for the future. An over-symbolized narrative blurs a political analysis of the complex causes and effects, leading to the predominance of depoliticized accounts of the immediate event over a historical understanding of revolution as a process. Drawing on evidence from the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions as well as the more gradual process of political change in Morocco, we situate the critical events at Tahrir and other symbolic places within their proper histories of resistance.

The emergence of “the people” within the revolutionary episode as a more or less united mass actor was only possible through an interpenetration of past and present political and economic struggles of various subaltern classes.

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The dialectic between the political and the economic, the revolution and collective labor action has been succinctly analyzed by Rosa Luxemburg in her 1906 booklet, *The Mass Strike*. Luxemburg engaged with the political debates within the Social-Democratic movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. She resisted the technocratic notion that the political and economic struggle could be understood as two different, unconnected moments of the fight against capitalism and that mass strikes could be simply mobilized by the party or trade union apparatus in times of revolution and demobilized when the time was not “ripe.” Even though her emphasis on the “spontaneity” of the masses appeared to contradict Lenin’s stress on centralized leadership, both revolutionaries rejected the dominant reformist and bureaucratic views, each from the perspective of their own national context. In Germany, Luxemburg criticized the technocratic restraints that the party and trade unions put on the “spontaneous” strike activity of the working class, whereas in Russia, Lenin addressed the opposite problem: the question of how the Left can offer leadership to an already existing spontaneous strike movement (Higgins, 1966/1967). Even though Luxemburg’s pamphlet was not able to curb the reformist and bureaucratic tendencies within the German SPD, it has nevertheless remained an astute account of working-class struggles and an important theoretical contribution to the study of revolution. As Alexander (2011) and Schwartz (2011) point out, reading *Tahrir* with Luxemburg proves to be an illuminating undertaking, as she draws our attention to political dynamics which are obscured by the salient immediacy of revolutionary events.

As the concept of “revolution” refers to a deep reversal of societal relations, the episodic conflict “at the barricades” with the armed bodies of the state is “in the revolution today only the culminating point, only a moment in the process of the proletarian mass struggle” (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 163). The revolutionary process is stretched in time, and its movements are dictated by the ebb and flow of its constituting and profound political and economic protests.

The mass strike is a specific activity within the broader revolutionary process which amalgamates and unites economic conflicts. “Only in the sultry air of the period of revolution can any partial little conflict between labor and capital grow into a general explosion” (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 146). In other words, “the mass strike does not produce the revolution but the revolution produces the mass strike” (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 147). Similar to the conceptualization of revolution, “it is absurd” to think of the mass strike “as one act, one isolated action. The mass strike is rather the indication, the rallying idea, of a whole period of the class struggle lasting for years, perhaps for decades” (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 141–42). Luxemburg stresses the importance of a genetic approach to the phenomenon of revolution. Revolutionary events cannot be comprehended without an understanding of their discrete

histories. Therefore, our first task in this essay is to present the reader with a concise history of the forms of resistance, organization, and repression that underlie the current events.

Second, Luxemburg emphasizes revolutions and mass strikes as testimony to people's capacity to change their society. Their spontaneous nature is proof of their grassroots foundations. The masses "cannot be called at will, even when the decision to do so may come from the highest committee of the strongest social democratic party" (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 147). Political parties, trade unions, and other civil society organizations cannot control the unfolding events "because revolutions do not allow anyone to play the schoolmaster with them" (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 148).

On the other hand, mass strikes don't just randomly happen, even in revolutionary times. They must be called for and organized in some way by the grassroots agents involved. The technical self-organization of the mass strikes does not absolve political forces from taking their responsibility in the revolutionary process. Luxemburg emphasized the need for political leadership to guide the strike movement to victory in its confrontation with state power. In each revolution, grassroots forms of popular organization and mobilization emerge in order to direct the various instances of struggle.² Hence, in the second section, we describe the forces that came to embody the "people's will" throughout the struggles in the three countries.

A third insight is the impossibility of separating economic from political demands. Luxemburg emphasized that the inner mechanism of a mass strike depends upon the ceaseless reciprocal action of political and economic struggles. Even when strikes begin with specific economic demands, these cannot be meaningfully separated from the political sphere. In an absolutist state—as Luxemburg described Russia in 1906—"in which every form and expression of the labor movement is forbidden, in which the simplest strike is a political crime, it must logically follow that every economic struggle will become a political one" (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 150). In the Arab world where, especially since the advent of neoliberalism, collective worker actions were systematically curtailed and repressed, increasing economic demands turned into a political challenge for authoritarian rule. Conversely, the struggle for civil and democratic rights in the region cannot be separated from the underlying socio-economic dimension, as the authoritarian shape of Arab regimes is instrumental in their politics of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey, 2003). The combined demands of democracy and social justice in the Arab revolutions therefore represented a unity between class and civil democratic struggle, which

² This point is developed by Martin Smith (2005).

is directed as much against the old state power as against capitalist exploitation, [in which] the mass strike appears as the natural means of recruiting the widest proletarian layers for the struggle, as well as being at the same time a means to undermining and overthrowing the old state power, and of stemming capitalist exploitation. (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 163)

A fourth point of investigation is the impact of the mass strikes on the development of revolutionary politics. The strike waves have empowered the workers' movement, injecting it with a renewed confidence and militancy. Luxemburg emphasized that "the most precious, lasting, thing in the rapid ebb and flow of the wave is its mental sediment" (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 134). The transformation of traditional labor organizations and the emergence of grassroots strike committees and trade unions produced new worker practices and forms of consciousness. Through the activity system of the mass strike, workers appeared in the revolution as a collective agent with political capacities.³ However, with the fall of Ben Ali and Mubarak, the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt have entered a phase of differentiation and crystallization of political groups and class forces and a concomitant struggle for political hegemony. Workers' strikes are re-framed as either the continuation of the revolutionary spirit in the socio-economic field or as a destabilizing force, obstructing the smooth transition to democracy. In Morocco, class struggles fail to unite while reactionary strategies from the ruling elite are stalling the protest movement and confronting it with a similar differentiation.

By reading Tahrir through Luxemburg, we highlight the dialectic between economic and political struggle, spontaneity and leadership, class activity and consciousness in the Arab revolutions. This also means that we remain silent on other important dimensions of the revolutionary process which are not addressed in *The Mass Strike*, such as the role of gender, technology (e.g., social media) and anti-imperialism. Developing these elements, however, is beyond the scope of this particular chapter.

THE HISTORY OF THE STRUGGLES

Just as the local, partial wage struggles in Russia anticipated the wave of mass strikes in 1905, current events in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco cannot be separated from earlier social and class struggles. Since the 1980s, many Arab countries have been confronted with urban mass protests, wildcat

³ We have chosen to denote grassroots worker actions with the term "workers' movement," regardless of whether they were organized within trade-union structures. A further elaboration of this terminology would deserve a paper of its own.

strikes, and riots in reaction to the implementation of IMF and World Bank-sponsored structural adjustment programs. Neoliberal reform had already been partially enforced in Egypt in the 1970s, but the insurrection of January 1977, the establishment of a rentier economy, the obstinacy of the corporatist trade union bureaucracy, and grassroots worker actions stalled the economic liberalization process until 1991. In Morocco, a first structural adjustment program was implemented in 1983, Tunisia followed in 1986. The gradual abandonment of developmental and redistributive policies and the redefining of labor–state relations weakened the hegemonic base of the regimes. While States were reluctant to use salient repressive force—for example, because of the imperative for attracting foreign capital through the regime’s image to the outside world (El-Mahdi, 2011: 394)—they nevertheless became increasingly dependent on coercion and domination to face mounting economic grievances. The War on Terror offered an easy alibi for state security apparatuses to step up their repressive and exclusionary policies.

The current history of the Tunisian uprising starts in the early 2000s when, after years of relative impotence, the Union General des Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT) and civil society organizations organized strikes and demonstrations in support of the Palestinians, against the war in Iraq and the normalization of diplomatic relations with Israel. However, the immediate history of the present struggles began in January 2008 when the Compagnie des Phosphates de Gafsa (CPG) announced the results of a recruitment competition. The region of Gafsa, a small town in the southwest of Tunisia, has been, since colonial times, dependent on the exploitation of the richness of its soil, with the mining industry accounting for most of the economic life of the region. However, as the CPG was one of the factories that was subject to structural adjustment, the ensuing “restructuration” led to a big loss of jobs. From over 14,000 workers in the 1980s, CPG employment shrunk to around 5,500 workers in 2007–2008 (Amroussia, 2011). In general, neoliberal reform and economic liberalization in Tunisia led to rising prices, blatant corruption, and skyrocketing unemployment. Furthermore, these effects were accompanied by a deterioration of the provision and quality of public services such as healthcare, social security, and education, which eroded the material gains of the former Tunisian developmental state. Tunisian neoliberal policies promoted a selective redistribution of resources channeled mainly to the urban middle classes who, until the financial crisis of 2008, saw their wealth and levels of consumption expanding. The urban–rural divide, already present since independence, widened as privatization led to a concentration of land in the hands of large landowners and urban capitalists. Farmers were pushed into unsecure jobs as day laborers while the geographic transfer of wealth from the rural to the urban, from the interior to the coastal regions, continued unabated (Ayeb,

2011). On top of this, especially since the late 1990s, economic reforms were strongly manipulated and controlled by a very small group of beneficiaries—that is, Ben Ali and the Trabelsi clan.

The January 2008 recruitment results of the CPG were seen by the local population as further proof that even the few jobs that remained were not really open to meritocratic competition but were being sold to the highest bidder or given to the clients of the ruling party. The outcome was a five-month-long popular protest movement that was crushed in June, when police and army units brutally raided the city of Redeyef and arrested numerous militants (Allal, 2010).

In light of the mass protests since January 2011, this regional event appears to be trivial. Nevertheless, it lies at the basis of a movement with a broad popular character. In the towns of the region (such as Redeyef, Moularès, and M'dhilla), workers, the unemployed, civil servants, merchants, craftsmen, women, and students joined the protests, which were some of the largest protests since Tunisia's independence in 1956. Yet, there are several reasons why this mass strike failed to become a nationwide popular revolt. First, the repression of the Ben Ali regime made it very difficult for local activists to organize their struggle in other cities. Second, the weakness of national actors such as the official opposition parties, the silence of intellectuals, and the Union's failure to openly support the movement blocked the development of the regional uprising into a national protest movement (Amroussia, 2011). Two years later, however, it was in this very region that the revolution started. Before the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid on December 17, 2010, protests in the Gafsa region were already simmering (Piot, 2011). As such, it would be wrong to suggest that the revolution started with this dramatic event and to deny the crucial build-up: the accumulation of struggles which had the mining region as its center (Ayeb, 2011). Nevertheless, Mohammed Bouazizi's act of despair triggered a new phase in the protests that would ultimately culminate, a month later, in the departure of Ben Ali to Saudi Arabia.

In Egypt, the 25th January Revolution was anticipated by the mass demonstrations and general strikes of both a civil democratic and a class movement. Since 1991, the implementation of the Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program (ERSAP) led to a rapid disintegration of the post-Nasserite social pact and the alienation of the traditional base of the Egyptian regime: peasants, workers, and urban middle classes. In order to contain and decrease foreign debt and inflation, the ERSAP cut state subsidies on consumer goods, privatized public companies, froze wages, and liberalized markets and prices. The neoliberal strategy of capital accumulation initiated a new era of intensified class confrontation and increased authoritarianism (El-Mahdi, 2011).

In the countryside, the class offensive brought about a rise in land rents, a concentration of landed property, and rural violence as landowners sent police troops and thugs to chase the peasants from their properties. The livelihoods of some 5 million Egyptians were endangered by the New Tenancy Law of 1992 (Law 96). Peasants organized themselves against the landed elite, occupied their lands, and established cooperatives to cultivate the crops and organize solidarity among farmers. Although there was some support from progressive journalists, party militants, and human rights activists, in general, and peasants remained isolated from the rest of society during their struggle. In the industrial sector, state companies were deliberately put at a disadvantage vis-à-vis private enterprises in order to force their bankruptcy (Farah, 2009). Privatization often led to mass firing of workers with the aim of increasing profits. Moreover, in 1998 it was estimated that 70 percent of the workers in the private sector lived in poverty (Farah, 2009: 44). Neoliberal reform provoked strikes in the 1990s, but despite sometimes being very militant, these worker actions remained defensive, fragmented, and isolated (El-Mahdi, 2011: 395).

The workers' and farmers' class struggles during the 1990s were eclipsed by the rise of a civil democratic movement at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Similarly to the Tunisian dynamic, the Second Palestinian Intifada of 2000 mobilized, for the first time since the 1970s, students and urban youth in street protests. Out of the movement grew committees that united activists from various parties and human rights centers with the non-organized youth. The wars against Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon each time gave a new impetus to the developing of solidarity networks. The increasing use of violence against workers, peasants, and citizens and the grooming of Gamal Mubarak for presidency shifted the anti-imperialist movement's attention toward the regime itself. In 2004, the Popular Movement for Change was established which organized the first explicit anti-Mubarak protests ever, calling for free and democratic presidential elections. The movement became known as *Kefaya* (Enough), which spawned new forms of organization and methods of struggle (Abdelrahman, 2009).

When the *Kefaya* movement ran out of breath in 2006, the initiative shifted back to the workers' movement, which entered a new phase of militancy with the mass strikes of the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company workers in the delta city of Mahalla al-Kubra. In December 2006, thousands of Mahalla workers struck against the neoliberal Ahmed Nazif government because of an unpaid but promised bonus. Their rallies were joined by women, students, and other sympathizing groups, creating forms of solidarity and protest similar to what happened in Redeyef in Tunisia. This episode of mobilization encouraged workers in the whole country to follow their lead and strike (Beinin and Hamalawy, 2007). In September 2007 and February 2008, the

Mahalla workers struck again, pushing the whole Egyptian working class forward. They also inspired actors from the civil democratic movement to engage with the class struggle and support the protests (De Smet, 2012).

On April 6, 2008, the Mahalla workers planned a new protest. Some groups from the civil democratic movement used this event to launch a call for a general political strike against the regime. Alarmed, security forces prevented the strike by occupying the factory premises. Workers joined political demonstrations in Mahalla which were answered with violence. For two days, the people of Mahalla rose up against the regime, tearing down billboards of the president and chanting political slogans. The insurrection was repressed, but it planted the seed of revolution in Egypt.

In Morocco, the 20th February movement has mobilized an unprecedented number of people from a wide range of Moroccan cities, building on a history of social struggle that can be traced back to the early 2000s. Despite early optimism about the King's promises for political reform, the Casablanca suicide bombings of 2003, the rising price of primary consumption goods, and the continuing lack of economic prospects for the Moroccan youth provoked different forms of protest that spread over the whole country. The period of structural adjustment in the 1980s was followed by increased efforts to liberalize the economy, privatize public assets, and promote economic growth. By the early 1990s, and in spite of the social costs, Morocco was presented by the World Bank and the IMF as a success story of macro-economic stabilization and textbook economic reform. Furthermore, the country attempted to boost its economic relations by signing free trade agreements with the European Union (1996) and the United States (2004) (Zemni and Bogaert, 2009). Despite these efforts, poverty and unemployment rose sharply in Morocco during the 1990s with an increase of 50 percent of people living under the poverty line (from 13% of the population in 1991 to 19% in 1999) (Catusse, 2008: 60). The establishment of the Moroccan National Association of Unemployed Graduates (ANDCM), mobilizing unemployed graduates and denouncing the sharp decrease in public sector job opportunities, dates back to the early 1990s. Since then, the unemployed graduates have become a permanent, almost daily and highly visible feature of the social protest landscape in almost every city in Morocco (Bogaert and Emperador, 2011).

Protests especially arose in the countryside and expanded significantly since the 2000s. Due to their lack of organization and the absence of broader political demands, these local and spontaneous actions were easily co-opted or repressed. However, since 2005, these local actions adopted a more organized and coordinated character with the emergence of the *tansikiyat* (coordinations). Under the impulse of organizations, such as the leftist Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH), ATTAC-Maroc, and small political parties of the radical Left, the "coordinations against the expensiveness of

life,” established local sections in more than seventy cities and villages. They organized marches, demonstrations, and sit-ins to denounce the degrading economic conditions for the working class and the increasing prices of basic consumption goods, such as water and electricity. Local protests sometimes culminated in violent encounters between protesters and police forces in towns like Sefrou (September 2007) and Sidi Ifni (June 2008) (Aziki, 2011).

Since February 20, 2011, a group of young people have called upon the Moroccan people via social network sites to protest against the continuing corruption, lack of political freedom, and socio-economic deprivation. They were immediately supported by other groups such as the AMDH, radical leftist parties, and the very popular underground Islamist movement *adl wal ihsan* (Justice and Charity). Since the beginning of the 20th February movement, weekly protest actions are organized across the country.

Despite socio-economic conditions and histories of struggles in Morocco, which are similar to those in Tunisia and Egypt, these struggles have not (yet) led to a revolutionary momentum. The process of contesting the regime has not reached the stage where local struggles are transformed into a nationwide anti-regime movement. Since February 20, the unemployed in the mining district around towns like Khouribga, for example, remained very active but distinguished their particular actions explicitly from the broader political struggle of the 20th February movement. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to elaborate the complex reasons why Morocco has not as of yet seen the same kind of revolutionary activities as in Egypt and Tunisia, the different character of its regime tentatively points toward a possible explanation. The absolutist character of the political systems in Tunisia and Egypt and their use of coercion over consent to control society, since the era of neoliberal reform, “not only did not exclude the possibility of revolution,” to use Trotsky’s words, “but, on the contrary, made revolution the only way out” (Trotsky, 2008 [1906]: 30). In contrast, the specific history and strong legitimacy of the Moroccan monarchy provides a different context which seems to defer a “total” confrontation of the masses with the political system.

THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY AND ORGANIZATION OF THE STRUGGLES

While the Gafsa region has a history of labor struggles, in 2008 it was not the national leadership of the UGTT that organized the worker protests but local militants who broke with the union’s bureaucracy. After Ben Ali had taken power in 1987, the UGTT’s leadership negotiated a relation of “normalization” with the regime. “The Union’s central institution is an essential transmission belt for the political authorities, even if this function is not

always executed with the docility and effectiveness that the authorities wish,” observes Béatrice Hibou (2006: 147). The main task of the Union was to safeguard, in consultation and collaboration with the employers’ organization (UTICA), social peace in a rapidly changing neoliberal economic environment. As a consequence, the UGTT pacified militant action and abandoned key demands in exchange for a preferential relation with the government. An internal UGTT report of 2006 admitted that the Union’s legitimacy was now less based on its capacity to represent the workers and their interests than on its ability to present itself as a major social partner of the government (UGTT, 2006). Nevertheless, the subjugation of the Union was not a linear and uniform process as some federations (especially those of education, the banking sector, and the postal services) as well as regional union branches (such as Sfax) were able to hold on to a degree of autonomy in their relation to the central bureaucracy. Therefore, the French political scientists Camau and Geisser (2003: 222) described the UGTT as the weakest link of the power’s agencies.

The presence of leftist political militants and union activists in the Tunisian city of Redeyef made it the central locus and bastion of the 2008 uprising. New forms of organization, solidarity, and mutual aid emerged as a consequence of the Union leadership’s ambiguous wait-and-see attitude and the government’s repression. All generations were present in the revolt, and women played a particularly important role in organizing the resistance. The strike activity system reinforced class identities among its participants, even though the government tried to play the card of existing tribal allegiances (Amroussia, 2011). The 2008 uprising thus revealed the complex and multifaceted relations between the national leadership of the UGTT and its local sections.

As the UGTT bureaucracy had grown accustomed to playing an intermediary role between the state’s institutions and the workers’ demands, it was caught flatfooted by the uprisings at the end of 2010. On December 18, 2010, the day after Bouazizi’s self-immolation, the Executive Bureau dispatched a mission to the city of Sidi Bouzid, both to meet with the governor and to listen to the grievances of the people, revealing the growing “syndical dissonance” of the UGTT (Chouikha and Geisser, 2010), that is, the gap between the restraint of the national leadership in contrast with the active involvement of its local militants in the protests.

Bouazizi’s act of despair in Sidi Bouzid triggered a first wave of popular revolt, which quickly spread throughout the region. The regime responded with lethal force while simultaneously trying to minimize and downplay the insurrection. Only eleven days after the event, on December 28, 2010, did Ben Ali address the Tunisians for the first time. Yet, the promises to meet the protesters’ demands, which he made during the televised speech and his visit at the bedside of Mohamed Bouazizi, could not prevent the further

politicization of the movement (International Crisis Group, 2011). Local trade union branches provided the spontaneous and diffuse popular uprising with ready-made organizational structures and tools to contest state power, thus securing its sustainability over time.⁴ By the time Bouazizi succumbed to his wounds, on January 4, 2011, protests had spread over the whole of the Center region.

The protest movement did not arise from a preconceived plan but “flowed together from individual points in each one from different causes and in a different form” (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 123). Lawyers played a mediating role in attracting attention to the uprising in Tunis and gradually mobilized the urban lower and middle classes. Since 2000, the National Organization of Lawyers has functioned as one of the few strongholds of opposition to Ben Ali (Gobe and Ayari, 2007). In the meanwhile, the start of the new school semester after the New Year’s holidays amplified the protests as students and pupils also went on strike. The protests grew further in intensity when, in cities like Kasserine and Thala, symbols of state power (such as police stations and party cells) were attacked and ransacked, which, in turn, prompted ruthless retaliation by the authorities, causing several casualties and injuries. Ben Ali and his entourage realized that the situation had escalated from a local uprising to a national revolt. As the police withdrew from many cities, it was replaced by the army. They were welcomed as liberators.

On the eve of January 10, 2011, the president appeared for a second time on national television. In his speech, Ben Ali promised to create 300,000 jobs but also denounced the “terrorist acts instigated from abroad.” These preposterous words, which did not offer any credible solution to Tunisia’s predicament, radicalized the protest movement into a direct and total confrontation with the state apparatus. The wait-and-see attitude of the national UGTT had become untenable as the pressure of local militants—most of them with a communist or Arab nationalist background—grew stronger. On January 11, the National Administrative Committee of the Union recognized the right of local sections to organize (peaceful) protests and solidarity actions. The section of Sfax, the second city of the country, organized a manifestation on January 12 that, according to Union estimates, brought more than 30,000 people to the streets. The demonstration was not only backed by the Union but also by local businessmen who were fed up with their marginalization vis-à-vis the entrepreneurial class of Sousse and Monastir, where the ruling families were well-established. The demonstrators not only called for Ben Ali’s departure (*dégage*) but also introduced a slogan that became, from then on and until today, the rallying creed of the Arab revolt: *al-sha’ab yurid isqaat*

⁴ The Teachers Union (dominated by leftists and Arab nationalists) played a crucial role in politicizing the movement and confronting the regime.

al-nidham (the people want the fall of the regime). A day later, manifestations in Kasserine, Monastir, and Sousse repeated the slogan while, in the capital, more and more people from popular neighborhoods converged to the city center. It became obvious that what had started as local struggles of workers, the unemployed, the marginalized, and the youth had now become a national popular protest. The quantitative and qualitative expansion of the protests, on the one hand, and the total inability of the regime to respond accordingly, on the other, drew fresh layers into the revolutionary activity system: the middle classes, squeezed by the financial and economic crisis; the urban lower classes; and some parts of the business elites. The broad alliance of class forces against the common enemy of Ben Ali and the Trabelsi clan turned the movement into a genuine people's revolution. In the end, Ben Ali became so isolated that he had to flee the country and take refuge in Saudi Arabia.

In Egypt, the strikes of the 1990s and 2000s called the old worker leaders of the 1970s back into action. From the labor protests themselves emerged a layer of new, young activists. As neither the traditional leftist parties nor the state-controlled General Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions (GFETU) played their part as proletarian leaderships, the task of organizing and directing the various struggles fell to grassroots committees. Whereas the Tunisian UGTT played an ambiguous role in the organization of worker protests before and during the revolution, the GFETU structures were clearly hostile to any form of working-class action "from below" (El-Mahdi, 2011). In Mahalla, the workers came into confrontation with their official labor representatives and set up their own organizations at the factory level to organize the strikes. In addition, with the help of political and civil activists, they established the Textile Workers' League, which played an important role in organizing the September 2007 strike. Workers from other public and private enterprises emulated the Mahalla experience, setting up their own local structures and committees. Even before the 25th January Revolution, there was a movement toward the formation of a national independent trade union. By 2009, real estate tax workers, teachers, health professionals, and pensioners were able to establish their own independent trade unions at the national level. The revolution created the conditions for the mass strikes that shook Egypt from February 8 on and which were instrumental in the fall of Mubarak (al-Hamalawy, 2011). These mass strikes drew new layers of the working class into the revolution. As Luxemburg elucidates:

only in the period of revolution, when the social foundations and the walls of class society are shaken and subjected to a constant process of disarrangement, can any political class action of the proletariat arise from their passive condition in a few hours whole sections of the working class who have hitherto remained unaffected and this is immediately and naturally expressed in a stormy economic struggle. (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 146)

From these strikes sprang forth new worker organizations, both on a local and national level, such as the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) and the leftist Democratic Workers Party (Alexander, 2011).

With regard to the civil democratic movement, *Kefaya* had galvanized layers of the urban youth and created spaces for contentious politics. Young and militant members of the Muslim Brotherhood worked together with activists from new parties such as the neo-Nasserite *al-Karama* and the Trotskyite Revolutionary Socialists; dissidents from the socialist *Tagammu* party and the Egyptian Communist Party; human rights activists from centers such as the Hisham Mubarak Law Center; and progressive journalists from *al-Badil*, *al-Shorouk*, *al-Dostour*, and *al-Masry Al-Yawm*. The rise of internet activism further encouraged political discussion, the dissemination of information, and the mobilization of protest groups. The activists and networks that emerged from the civil democratic movement were the organizers of the first small-scale demonstrations on January 25, which unleashed the accumulated political and economic grievances of the whole population (Joya, 2011: 369).

Similar events unfolded in Morocco. Just as in Tunisia and Egypt, neither the traditional political parties nor the trade unions took the lead in the struggle against the ruling elite. Inspired by the successes in other Arab countries, young activists and internet bloggers launched an appeal on YouTube and various social network sites to protest on February 20, 2011. On that day, protesters were mobilized in more than fifty cities and villages. A second general day of protest on March 20 was even more successful, rallying, according to the organizers, more than 400,000 people across the country. Since then, the 20th February movement has tried to organize a general march every month, while many local sections organized actions every Sunday.

The 20th February movement is a loosely and openly organized movement, accessible to everyone, sometimes nothing more than a flag behind which people can rally. The movement assembles AMDH militants, trade unionists and other leftists youth, partisans from the radical left, Islamists from *adl wal ihsane* (although they withdrew in December 2011), Berber nationalists, progressive journalists, bloggers, and educated youth, and even young people from abroad with a Moroccan background. There are no official leaders. None of the traditional political parties has openly supported the movement, although some of their youth sections dissented from official party lines. While the national leadership of the biggest unions offered some passive support in the beginning, the 20th February movement was actively supported by local union members. Just as in Tunisia, the national leadership has been tied to state power and plays a pacifying role. Since the early 1980s, and especially after the urban riots of 1981 in Casablanca, both repression and cooptation diminished the militant role of the trade unions (Clément and Paul, 1984). Moreover, through increasing differentiation (there are more

than twenty official trade unions), low representation (less than 6% of the working class), and the institutionalization of a social dialogue between the unions and the employers federation, CGEM further neutralized their oppositional force (Cherkaoui and Ben Ali, 2007; Catusse, 2008). Furthermore, the agreement of April 26, 2011, between the state and the unions, offering a wage increase of 600 Dirham a month (approximately 60 Euros) to all public servants, was intended to disarm the unionized working class's involvement in the social struggle. As such, in the wake of past and recent struggles, new organizations and structures emerged outside the traditional working-class organizations. Most importantly, in contrast to Tunisia and Egypt, the numerous working-class struggles in smaller cities and villages (which included, among others, miners and unemployed graduates) remain individual points which have not yet flowed together in one mass strike. The 20th February movement and the Arab revolts more generally have definitely opened more space for the working class to increase their struggles. Yet, these struggles have concentrated mainly on the "right to work" and distanced themselves from the broader political demands of the 20th February movement. The political authorities exploit this. Highly aware of the explosive situation in the Moroccan mining region, for example, the publicly owned Office Chérifien des Phosphates (OCP) launched an ambitious development program within weeks after violent clashes between protesters and police forces on March 15 erupted in Khouribga. The program will employ 5,800 people from the region by the end of 2012 and offer a remunerated two-year training to another 15,000 people.

Most of the worker-led strikes, sit-ins, and other types of demonstrations in the three countries throughout the previous decade were "spontaneous" in the sense that they almost always originated from and started with particular economic and local grievances and improvised leaderships and organizational structures that were intrinsically related to the countries' geographies of uneven capitalist development and center-periphery disparities. Civil democratic protests, by contrast, were primarily led by middle-class, metropolitan political and human rights activists, journalists, students, and intellectuals, and often developed from abstract notions of Arab solidarity and anti-imperialism in the wake of the Second Palestinian Intifada into concrete criticisms of domestic authoritarianism.

In retrospect, some of these protests seem to have come too early, as they were either successfully co-opted or, more often than not, repressed by the regime. Luxemburg, however, observed that a general insurrection "cannot come in any other way than through the school of a series of preparatory partial insurrections, which therefore meantime end in partial outward 'defeats' and, considered individually, may appear to be 'premature'" (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 139). Indeed, the unfolding of the events in the three countries

reveal the gradual creation of methods of organization, traditions of revolt, and forms of consciousness which, eventually, gave rise to the uprisings of 2011.

The mass strikes in Tunisia and Egypt “for the first time awoke class feeling and class consciousness in millions upon millions as if by an electric shock” (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 129). Popular grievances were bundled into one activity system which united the civil democratic and workers’ movement into a singular force. “And *their unity* is precisely the mass strike,” added Luxemburg (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 145, emphasis in original). Demands for liberal-democratic freedoms as well as economic justice coalesced as a consequence of the momentous alliance between the lower, middle, and even sections of the higher classes. This class alliance has failed to emerge in Morocco at the time of this writing. But if it does, it is highly probable that its further organization will arise from outside the structures of the traditional unions and political parties.

THE POLITICS OF THE ECONOMY AND THE ECONOMY OF POLITICS

Luxemburg emphasized that we cannot think of “politics” and “economics” as two separate social spheres. “In a word: the economic struggle is the transmitter from one political center to another; the political struggle is the periodic fertilization of the soil for the economic struggle. Cause and effect here continually change places” (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 145). To claim that the Tunisian and Egyptian people were primarily interested in toppling their “bad dictators,” as media narratives seem to suggest, is to trade historical intelligibility for a depoliticized account of the present. The nature of the protests—while supported by nearly all social layers and as such combining different and sometimes contradictory demands—suggests a relation to larger questions of justice and economic organization. In other words, as Adam Hanieh (2011) remarked for Egypt, the ongoing Arab revolutions and protests are linked to the question of the nature of capitalism in the region as well as to the countries’ role in sustaining the power of U.S. hegemony in the region. The “nature of Mubarak’s rule cannot be separated from these questions, which is why the struggle against political despotism is inevitably intertwined with the dynamic of class struggle” (Ibid).

While the first demonstrations in the towns of southwestern Tunisia were mainly a consequence of local economic grievances, the organizational work of local Union militants as well as the unwillingness of the local authorities to meet any of the protesters demands, entailed, as we described above, a gradual politicization of the movement. The anti-war and anti-imperialist

movement was the first area of mobilization where the Union reclaimed, albeit very cautiously and within the confines of what was possible in Ben Ali's system, its critical role. Just like in Morocco or Egypt, the Iraq war and the plight of the Palestinians were also used by local organizations to test the limits of political possibilities and as such reveals also a wider disgruntlement within the population.

As the UGTT had grown accustomed to supporting the governmental policies, including some very unpopular price rises and subsidy cuts, it was very difficult to voice any economic grievance without simultaneously criticizing the larger political choices of the regime. Popular frustration with the lack of economic opportunities in the southwestern region was quickly associated with the corruption and clientelism of the ruling party and the ruling family. The loosely organized civil society forces, with a preponderant role of the lawyers, were important in reframing the demands for economic justice and opportunities into larger questions of political freedom. The fusion of political and social demands had become very obvious in the last week of Ben Ali's reign as protesters would combine appeals for political freedoms and human rights with those of economic justice as anti-imperial slogans and anti-IMF chants proved.

The 25th January Revolution in Egypt also saw the convergence of political and economic demands. The weakness of *Kefaya* had been its sole reliance on political aims to mobilize the masses. The lack of slogans—let alone a clear economic program—that addressed the deteriorating living conditions of workers, peasants, and the urban poor had cut off the relation between the civil democratic and class movement. The Mahalla movement, on the other hand, had slowly developed from a local economic wage struggle to a political fight with national aspirations. The first aim of the Mahalla workers during the December 2006 strike was simply to obtain their unpaid bonuses (Beinin and al-Hamalawy, 2007), appearing “as a purely economic partial wage struggle”—just like the Saint Petersburg general strike of 1896, which set the cycle of working-class action in motion and prepared the 1905 Russian Revolution (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 121). During the strike, workers started to shout slogans against the IMF and the GFETU, which expressed their awareness of the impact of global capitalism on their situation. The neoliberal policies had completely emptied the corporatist structures of their traditional role of middlemen between labor and capital. Whereas in the 1980s, the GFETU was able and willing to stall neoliberal policies, by 2006 it had fully become an instrument of capital's “accumulation by dispossession” (Abdelrahman, 2004: 107; Harvey, 2003). The Mahalla workers turned against their labor representatives, and their economic struggle increasingly became a struggle for trade union rights. However, a demand for democratic and independent trade unions in the context of an authoritarian regime contained implicitly yet logically a demand for the democratization of the state

itself, as the GFETU had historically been an important pillar to mobilize workers' support for the National Democratic Party in elections and rallies (Beinin, 2007).

In the struggle for wages and trade union rights, the workers came into confrontation with the factory management, the GFETU, the security apparatus, the military courts, the NDP-dominated parliament, and even the presidency. The vanguard of the workers' movement connected the neoliberal class offensive in the economic domain to the dictatorial nature of the regime and called for democracy and regime change. Moreover, the workers' vanguard, supported by leftist parties and organizations such as the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, sought to assemble the heterogeneous working class as a movement by calling for a national minimum wage of 1200 EGP.

The discursive fusion of political and economic demands was produced and reproduced in concrete sites of protest, where workers and civil democratic activists participated in a shared activity system of resistance. In working-class communities such as Mahalla and Suez, the independent strike committees and trade union cells became structures for the organization of popular political protest. Conversely, some of the popular committees—the networks that were spontaneously created to protect neighborhoods and organize demonstrations—developed a “trade-union wing” in order to deal with the revolutionary aim of social justice, for example, the Popular Alliance in Defence of the Revolution in Port Said.

In contrast to Egypt and Tunisia, the Moroccan people did not rally around the words “*dégage* Mohamed VI,” as the Moroccan King still enjoys considerable legitimacy and popularity. The 20th February movement therefore did not mobilize against the King but demanded a constitutional monarchy within a democratic system. Its moderate political aims were, however, clearly connected to economic grievances. During the demonstrations, symbols of ruling economic power were targeted, and people shouted slogans and carried placards against acolytes of the monarchy. Other symbolic targets were Omnium Nord Africain (ONA), the leading private conglomerate in the country which is controlled by the royal family.⁵

Between 2005 and 2007, spontaneous protests in cities like Rabat, Tangier, and Casablanca against the French multinationals Veolia and Suez, which are responsible for the distribution of water and electricity, were an immediate cause for the establishment of the “coordinations against the expensiveness of life.” During the mobilizations of the 20th February movement, protesters in Casablanca carried signs with the text “*dégage* Lydec,” referring to Suez's subsidiary in the city. By the beginning of the summer, in large cities such as

⁵ In 2010, ONA fused together with the National Investment Group and was named after the latter.

Rabat and Casablanca, the 20th February movement started to organize demonstrations and marches in working-class neighborhoods instead of calling everybody to the city center in order to increase its appeal among working-class people.

It would be tempting to see in the convergence of domination and exploitation an automatic reaction of reciprocity between political and economic contestation. While the nature of the Arab regimes may necessitate such a reciprocal alliance, the effective realization of the fusion of the political and the economic takes place in concrete instances of struggle where civil democratic and class actors “come together” and participate in a shared activity system, such as the regional UGTT branches in Tunisia, the popular committees in Mahalla, Suez, and Port Said and the local cells of the 20th February movement in Morocco.

DIFFERENTIATION OF REVOLUTIONARY ACTORS

Once the people’s revolts in Tunisia and Egypt had dethroned their rulers, the debate over the nature of the regime became practical. Politically moderate forces and fractions of the disgruntled bourgeoisie equated “the regime” more or less with Ben Ali or Mubarak and wanted to end the revolutionary process with their fall. Civil democratic actors, youth, and middle classes pushed for radical democratic reforms and a continued political mobilization in the streets, while at the same time criticizing working-class actors for their “irresponsible” strikes and economic protests which allegedly undermined the country’s stable transition to democracy and civil rights. This following phase of the revolution entails a process of differentiation and crystallization of political and class forces, whereby the popular bloc falls apart as its constituent forces compete for hegemony.

In Tunisia, from late February onward, a group of trade unionists, leftist political groups, Islamists, and disenfranchised youth from the center regions of the country squatted at the square of the Kasbah—the residency of the prime minister—while another group of people, including centrist political parties, conservatives, and independents from the urban middle classes, were protesting once a week at the Qobbat al-Menzah, in another part of the capital. While the former coalition wanted to get rid of every relic of the old regime, including its neoliberal policies, the latter feared instability and preferred to preserve the free market economy without the corruption, nepotism, and cronyism of Ben Ali’s reign. When caretaker Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi decided to resign from his position, many Tunisians, until then silent, started to mobilize against the workers’ movement, the UGTT, and leftist parties, which were supposedly too radical in their economic demands

and jeopardizing Tunisia's frail economic structures. Suddenly this so-called "silent majority," a mainly middle-class mobilization, became very vocal in its effort to counter the claim of the Union, the Left, and the Islamists that they spoke in name of "the people."

The critique of the Union has not remained vocal: UGTT offices have been ransacked by unidentified "criminals" while manifestations and strikes have been violently repressed by the authorities on several occasions. The caretaker government supported an economic normalization process that re-installed the international consensus on choices of development (neoliberal reforms promoted by the IMF, the World Bank, and the European Union) and as such tried to minimize the role of the workers' movement, as well as the political left, in the revolutionary process. This is a policy that the newly elected government seems to continue. Until today, the political translation of the interests of the workers movement has not proven successful. The Islamist movement *Ennahdha* has been able to capture a large part of the workers vote during the October 2011 elections, presumably because its moderate message was welcomed by a population that has been trying to return to some political and societal normalcy.

In Egypt, the revolutionary episode of the masses as a united political force has ended as well, for the time being. While there are still sizeable demonstrations in Tahrir on a regular basis, the millions who took to the streets in the 25th January Revolution remain demobilized, awaiting the outcome of parliamentary elections and the transition to civil rule. The strike movement, however, continues unabated. While the new independent trade union initiatives try to embed the strikes in an institutional framework, most of the work stoppages and sit-ins are still disconnected from each other, lacking any syndical perspective which transcends the narrow particular demands.

The establishment of the military transition regime divided political actors with regard to the nature and tasks of the revolution. From the popular mass character of the revolution emerged a nationalist narrative of liberation that was mobilized by every political faction to legitimize its own particular interests. Whereas the organized workers' movement tried to integrate its demands in the nationalist discourse and to present itself as a class subject in solidarity with the political demands of the revolution, military, Islamist, liberal, and right-wing nationalist actors attempted to exclude the striking workers as legitimate revolutionary participants, glossing over the decisive role of labor protests in the fall of the regime. The same process of disavowal has happened with women's involvement. Even though the authoritarian and violent imposition of neoliberal policies since the 1990s has been the main source of discontent among the population (Joya, 2011), elites are reframing the history and aims of the revolution into a mere mobilization against corruption and dictatorship (Sallam, 2011).

Conversely, leftist forces such as the Revolutionary Socialists interpreted the fragmented “mass strike” as a sign that the Tahrir episode had the potential of developing into a “permanent” revolution where workers constitute the primary social force capable of solving Egypt’s social and political problems. In this narrative, the organization of the working class in trade unions and parties and solidarity between the civil democratic and class struggle is the best guarantee for completing the demands of Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice that spontaneously arose from the 25th January Revolution. However, far from being a political hegemonic force, the Egyptian working class is still struggling to organize itself as a trade union movement. It is in this regard that the mass strikes of the 25th January Revolution played a crucial part: in strengthening the already existing nationwide worker networks, structures, methods, and forms of consciousness and in attracting new proletarian layers to the class movement. The revolutionary differentiation process and the attacks from the regime and the economic elites on the workers’ livelihoods will either push the movement further into the political terrain, opening up possibilities for societal transformation or pacify the class struggle altogether (Joya, 2011).

In Morocco, the unfolding opposition forces face some considerable challenges from the ruling elite. On March 9, 2011, King Mohamed VI addressed the nation and announced the creation of a constitutional committee that was entrusted with the mission to draft a new “democratic” constitution. With this initiative, the King and the ruling elite hoped to counter the protests and 20th February Movement. On July 1, 2011, only two weeks after the new constitution was drafted and presented to the wider public, the Moroccans had the opportunity to approve or reject the new constitution by referendum. With the exception of the radical Left, the national and international press, all political parties, several sectors of civil society and the trade union supported the “yes” camp (Dalmasso and Cavatorta, 2011). The 20th February movement and its partners called for a boycott, hoping that a poor turnout would delegitimize the referendum. Despite their efforts and accusations of widespread fraud and manipulation, according to official numbers, the constitution was approved with a vote of over 98 percent in an official turnout of almost 73 percent. Morocco received international support for this so-called important step toward democracy. This kind of initiative from above aims at controlling the reform process, taking the wind out of the protesters’ sails. Moreover, it poses a challenge to the 20th February movement, as it has not yet overcome an important weakness: what about the position of the King? (Lotfi, 2011). Democratic demands for social and economic justice are pointless without addressing the role and function of the King and without real political pressure to curtail his economic dominance in the country. Another predicament of the movement is its internal social and ideological diversity.

While the Islamists and the middle-class youth are generally reluctant about a prominent role for the workers' movement, the radical left considers it key for the further evolution of the revolutionary process. Perhaps the withdrawal of the Islamists from the 20th February movement could open a window of opportunity for the left.

CONCLUSION

Reading the events in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco with Rosa Luxemburg helps to reframe some of the ongoing debates surrounding the Arab Spring. *The Mass Strike* proved, first, to be a useful guide in re-introducing a historical and political reading of the Arab Spring. With Luxemburg, we were able to conceptualize revolution as an ongoing, multifaceted process, instead of a singular event by considering the histories of resistance, organization, and state repression. Tahrir and Avenue Bourguiba were given their proper place as crucial moments within a longer development of revolt. Second, armed with this historical insight, we analyzed the different forces that came to embody the "people's will" in the uprisings in the three countries. We found political revolution and mass strikes to be intertwined, as Luxemburg emphasized in her own work. Third, the class analysis shows that it was impossible to reduce the events to a confrontation between a "bad" dictator and "his people." The demands for radical political change were and are impossible to separate from economic demands encompassing material claims (including higher wages, more jobs, and better working conditions), social justice, and syndical freedoms. Between civil democratic and class actors, political protest, and economic action, there was a reciprocal influence and sharing of practices, organizational structures, and discourses. Furthermore, Luxemburg's own experiences in the Russian Revolution teach us that the power and role of the working class in the mass strike was beyond the scope of any single working-class organization (Luxemburg, 2008 [1906]: 109). Finally, *The Mass Strike* granted us an understanding of the second "moment" of revolutionary politics, when the remarkable alliance of popular unity and solidarity is disassembled into competing political forces that represent different class interests. Especially in Tunisia and Egypt, where the workers' movement played a crucial role in toppling Ben Ali and Mubarak, there are clear indications that workers and their claims are being "written out" of the narrative of revolution. While the revolutions were clearly as much about social justice as they were about political rights, the contestation of neoliberal reform is being pushed aside in the name of a necessary economic recovery.

In the end, the "Arab Spring" has proven that, even in a region where politics appeared to be shaped by stagnated forms of authoritarianism, political

sovereignty and agency lies with “the people.” Even if the current revolts do not immediately realize the political and social emancipation of the masses from domination and exploitation, the protests have developed forms of organization and consciousness that provide the basis for new struggles in the near future. The Arab people have sent a message to the world that they are taking a stand against neoliberal hegemony and its authoritarian partners. This feeling of hope is expressed by the Tunisians who massively rejected naming their revolution a “Jasmine revolution,” as international media have dubbed it, preferring instead the “revolution of dignity.”

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Chapter 10

Migrant Caravans and Luxemburg's Spontaneous Mass Strike

Josué Ricardo López

Rosa Luxemburg offers us a rich examination of the revolutionary nature of the spontaneous mass strike in Russia at the turn of the twentieth century. Moreover, her analysis also accounts for the role of political education, not as a cause for the spontaneous mass strike but rather as a complementary dimension of revolutionary political leadership from those working in solidarity with the masses. Rather than a paternalistic teacher–student relationship, Luxemburg understood that the pedagogical relationship needed for political education is based on recognizing the political power of the educated masses and believing in their capacity as agents of change.

Given Luxemburg's analysis of the spontaneous mass strike and political education, how might we understand the revolutionary significance of the migrant caravans traversing the Western Hemisphere in the twenty-first century? Furthermore, what kind of political education is needed to address the transnational economic and political crisis which contributes to mass mobility as a tool of survival? How might reading Luxemburg help us understand the responsibilities of such political educators? We can begin by first situating the migrant caravans in a larger political and economic context that is transnational in nature.

Beginning in Honduras, the migrant caravans of 2018¹ traversed the Honduran–Guatemalan border and the Guatemalan–Mexican border, and they culminated into a confrontation at the Mexico–U.S. border. In April 2018, hundreds departed from the Northern Triangle countries (Honduras, El

¹ Though there are numerous groups of people that sought entry at the U.S. border from Central America, these previous groups did not refer to themselves as part of a “caravan.” In my work with Guatemalan and Honduran communities, the term *caravans* to describe massive mobilization first appears in 2018, likely as a result of media characterization of these massive groups of people numbering in the hundreds and thousands traveling across Central and North America.

Salvador, and Guatemala) and made their way to the United States (Acevedo, 2018). In October 2018, thousands more departed from Honduras and made the 2,700 mile trek to the Mexico–U.S. border, with migrants from other countries joining them (Saunders, 2018). To the present moment, there continue to be groups of people arriving at the U.S.–Mexico border from the Northern Triangle countries, with nearly 1 million migrants detained at the Mexico–U.S. border in the fiscal year 2019 (Aguilera, 2019). After facing zero-tolerance policies that resulted in family separation and public outcry in response, the U.S. government re-strategized and now makes asylum seekers wait in Mexico (Hegarty, 2018). Many must wait for months in areas known for high rates of violence to make their case for asylum and receive their decision (Montoya-Galvez, 2019). As of November 2019, there are a reported 55,000 migrants waiting their turn at the Mexico–U.S. border and a reported one out of four members of the caravan are children (Associated Press, 2019; Amnesty International, 2018).

The migrant caravans raise a number of contemporary international concerns, including but not limited to the fact that while there are numerous laws in place to facilitate the movement of raw materials, goods, technology, and ideas from the Northern Triangle to the United States, the movement of human beings itself is constrained, rather than facilitated, by immigration laws. Yet despite the limitations of these laws, people continue to find ways to move across the borders of nation-states. The migrant caravans are examples of the ongoing struggle for human mobility as a normative feature of our shared world confronting the resistance of those invested in and profiting from the maintenance of geopolitical borders in the exploitative international division of labor.

There are many ways to reflect upon the political meaning of the migrant caravans. Consider, for instance: through the application of critical race theory to immigration issues (Romero, 2008); through an exploration of the growing carceral state, expansion of policing at the southern border, and use of for-profit detention centers (Saldaña-Portillo, 2017); or through juxtaposing the scholarship produced by natives to Turtle Island,² scholars working from *Abya Yala*,³ and mobile Indigenous peoples that move between the Global North and Global South (López, 2019). All of these approaches can serve to illuminate different dimensions of the role of the migrant caravans as well as highlight revolutionary possibilities born of struggles for mobility. Yet it is also true that the migrant caravans call attention to the international

² Some Indigenous groups use Turtle Island to refer to what we contemporarily recognize as North America.

³ I use *Abya Yala* as some Indigenous groups do so to refer both to what we contemporarily recognize as North and South America. See Juan García Salazar and Catherine Walsh (2017).

dimensions of capitalism and anti-capitalist struggles. What precisely does Rosa Luxemburg offer us in thinking about the role of the migrant caravans in this sense?

An initial reason that Luxemburg's thought is quite relevant to exploring the revolutionary political possibilities created by the migrant caravans is her analysis of the spontaneous mass strike. For Luxemburg, the spontaneous mass strike was the means by which the proletariat could take political action in a revolutionary situation. The revolutionary situation comes about when the existing political institutions are failing to, or are uninterested in, meeting the needs of the masses. For Luxemburg, the revolutionary situation is a product of the cumulative historical contradictions of capitalism that will ultimately produce the social unrest that leads to political revolution. Luxemburg writes that the mass strike "is not artificially 'made,' not 'decided' at random, not 'propagated,' but that it is an historical phenomenon which, at a given moment, results from social conditions with historical inevitability" (Luxemburg, 2004a: 170). Luxemburg is not drawing a causal relationship between time and the mass strike in the sense of historical determinism. Rather, she is arguing that the contradictions of capitalism will themselves inevitably lead to the proletariat taking political action, but we cannot predict when that will be—hence, the dimension of spontaneity in the mass strike. Once social crisis fueled by capitalist inequality has reached its breaking point—with such a point unknown to us in advance—we see the spontaneous mass strike become the method of revolution for the proletariat. She writes:

In a word, the mass strike, as shown to us in the Russian revolution, is not a crafty method discovered by subtle reasoning for the purpose of making the proletarian struggle more effective, *but the method of motion of the proletarian mass*, the phenomenal form of the proletarian struggle in the revolution. (Luxemburg, 2004a: 192)

So, too, would it seem that the migrant caravans arise as proletarian political action in response to capitalism's contradictions, and Luxemburg's reflections on the mass strike may, therefore, be a source of important insights on this contemporary phenomenon.

A second reason for the relevance of Luxemburg is the attention she pays to internationalism, both in her revolutionary political tactics as well as in her research. It is true that Karl Marx did devote more attention to international challenges such as colonialism toward the end of *Capital, Volume 1*, and there certainly are scholars of international relations that rely upon Marxist thought in their analyses (Ashman, 2009; Rosenberg, 2013). However, something unique about Luxemburg was her insistence on a proletariat anti-capitalist struggle as an international rather than a national struggle. For example,

Luxemburg “argued against national self-determination for Poland, insisting instead on ‘strict’ proletarian internationalism—a position that placed her in direct opposition to the most prominent socialist figures at the time, as well as to Marx’s own writings on Poland” (Hudis and Anderson, 2004: 8). Moreover, her own writings are demonstrative of her skepticism of national politics and inclination, particularly under the guise of negotiation and reform with defenders of the capitalist order (Luxemburg, 2004b). Furthermore, her writings also demonstrate her inclination to examine commonalities across nation-states as evidenced by her attention to the concerns of proletarian women across the globe (Luxemburg, 2004c) and in her historical examination of the role of slavery in different civilizations across the world (Luxemburg, 2004d). It is up for debate how much Luxemburg got right in her analyses and whether what was correct remains so given the knowledge available to us in the present, but it is clear that her anti-capitalist praxis was a thoroughly internationalist one. As no analysis of the migrant caravans can be coherent without attention to the internationalist dimension of these workers’ struggle, Luxemburg’s work figures to be a richer source of interlocation than would be many other examinations of capitalism that lack this dimension.

Luxemburg’s work on the spontaneous mass strike, combined with her commitment to an internationalist proletarian revolution, provide a foundation for thinking about the migrant caravans as a spontaneous mass strike. Thinking of the migrant caravans as a spontaneous mass strike facilitates an examination of the economic and political possibilities in our contemporary revolutionary situation where the governments of multiple nation-states are failing to address the needs of the masses, and the metropole of the Western Hemisphere has the masses accumulating outside the gates of its castle.

To focus our analysis of the migrant caravans as spontaneous mass strikes, I explore two of the four dimensions of the mass strike Luxemburg outlines in *The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions*. The four factors are the following: (1) the spontaneous mass strike is preceded by struggles over time, so the mass strike cannot be understood in isolation from its historical context; (2) economic and political struggle become one in the spontaneous mass strike; (3) the spontaneous mass strike is a central part of the revolution itself; and (4) the spontaneous mass strike cannot be manufactured and must be born from the masses themselves. Due to the depth of analysis required to explore each of these, I examine only the applicability of (1) and (2) in the case of the migrant caravans as a spontaneous mass strike. Though there is room for more substantive discussions of each of these factors than I provide here, my aim is to introduce these factors into contemporary struggles for human mobility in the Western Hemisphere, specifically at the southern border of the United States. I then examine the relationship between revolutionary leadership and the spontaneous mass strikes in Luxemburg’s

thoughts, extending her analysis to concerns with political education in our current political context and the spontaneous mass strikes in the form of migrant caravans.

THE MASS STRIKE CANNOT BE UNDERSTOOD IN HISTORICAL ISOLATION

Luxemburg argues that we would fail to adequately understand both the origins of the spontaneous mass strike as well as its revolutionary potential if we perceive it as a single event that is disconnected from the sociohistorical conditions which lead to the strike. She writes that “it is absurd to think of the mass strike as one act, one isolated action. The mass strike is rather the indication, the rallying idea, of a whole period of the class struggle lasting for years, perhaps for decades” (Luxemburg, 2004a: 192). In other words, her analysis of the Russian Revolution beginning in January of 1905 leads her to conclude that the spontaneous mass strike does not emerge as a singular response to oppression by the state; rather, the strike is preceded by a “series of partial insurrections” that can be seen as “premature” responses that seemingly end in “defeat” (Luxemburg, 2004a: 190). These smaller struggles that preceded it are important to understand the sociohistorical context that leads to the spontaneous mass strike as political action.

I argue that, like Luxemburg on the Russian mass strikes, we can also understand the migrant caravans as preceded by conditions that have led to a series of partial insurrections that seemingly ended in defeat, when in fact these were steps leading to the migrant caravans and our current revolutionary situation. We can consider this from multiple angles, and crucial among those is the role of U.S. foreign policy in deterritorialization and imperialism. The idea of “Manifest Destiny” marked U.S. foreign policy in the nineteenth century, through which the United States believed itself to be destined to control not only land from sea to shining sea but the entirety of the Western Hemisphere. From Manifest Destiny emerged two clear examples of U.S. foreign policy predicated upon the superiority of the United States and the inferiority of the rest of the Western Hemisphere and its occupants: the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, in which the United States declared themselves defenders and arbiters of life in the Western Hemisphere, and the Roosevelt Corollary, established at the turn of the twentieth century, which functioned to justify not only the role of the United States in mediating disputes between Europe and Latin America but also U.S. military intervention in the Western Hemisphere whenever U.S. interests were threatened (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). U.S. foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere was based on the belief that the supposed superiority

of the United States entitled its leaders to conquer or to dictate what went on in other sovereign territories.

In Latin America—particularly in the Northern Triangle countries—U.S. foreign policy ultimately manifested itself in quite violent, repressive ways. The case of Guatemala is a powerful example. The October Revolution of 1944 led to the presidency of Juan José Arévalo, who was followed by Jacobo Árbenz. Arévalo instituted a series of social reforms, including a focus on education as he was a pedagogue himself who had studied in Latin American universities (Arévalo, 2014). When Árbenz came to office, he initiated Congressional Decree 900, which called for the redistribution of land to peasant farmers (Government of Guatemala, 2014). However, Árbenz was met with opposition from U.S. business elites, namely the United Fruit Company, who had purchased large tracts of land in Guatemala and in other countries throughout the Western Hemisphere (Adams, 2014). Under the guise of preventing the rise of communism in the Western Hemisphere (Schlesinger, Kinzer, and Coatsworth, 2005), the United States intervened in Guatemalan political affairs to protect the economic interests of U.S. businesses, launching its first ever CIA coup in 1954. A civil war ensued, which lasted thirty-six years (1960–1996), resulting in over 200,000 people killed; 80 percent of the victims were Indigenous Mayan peoples (Commission for Historical Clarification, 2014). The Committee for Historical Clarification found that there were genocidal acts committed by the Guatemalan military, which was financially sponsored, militarily trained, and provided with critical intelligence and counterintelligence by the United States (Garrard-Burnett, 2010). In our current times, the U.S. government and transnational corporations continue to exert significant influence over Guatemalan politics and economics (Hale, 2004).

There were different responses by Guatemalans to the violence that ensued after the CIA coup, including forming guerrilla units and fighting back. However, one key strategy for survival was mobility. People moved internally within Guatemala (Recovery of Historical Memory, 2014), to neighboring countries, such as Mexico (Montejo, 1995) and certainly to the United States (Jonas and Rodriguez, 2014). Furthermore, with the ongoing war and violence in Central America more broadly, in which the United States continued to play a part, many other peoples migrated to the North as a means of survival (Gonzalez, 2011). While the variations in the responses by the United States to migration from different Latin American countries are too extensive to discuss here, it is important to note that the United States, despite its role in the perpetuation of violence and maintenance of economic inequality, refused to recognize its responsibility for the instability of social, political, and economic life in the Northern Triangle and the Western Hemisphere more broadly (García-Bedolla, 2014). If understanding

the migrant caravans requires a careful examination of the historical context that led to them, then examining the U.S. response to the migrant caravans requires understanding that the U.S. government has operated from an ahistorical framework for determining political responsibility in our hemispheric relations. Ignoring historical violence, political responsibility, and its many subsequent consequences has certainly contributed to the migrant caravans as spontaneous mass strikes.

As Luxemburg would argue, if the migrant caravans are a spontaneous mass strike, then in order to fully understand how they emerged, we would require a historical examination of relations in the Western Hemisphere. As our brief analysis of Guatemalan–U.S. relations demonstrates, there is a substantial amount of historical evidence indicating that the spontaneous mass strikes were preceded by exploitation in the international division of labor and primitive accumulation as the United States intervened and sponsored the violent defense of U.S. corporate interests in foreign countries at the expense of the native population. While the migrant caravans of 2018 are certainly unique in their size and visibility—that is, in their attempt to move a massive group of people *visibly rather than clandestinely* across the borders of multiple nation-states—they are arguably built upon the experiences of smaller groups migrating to the United States. Consider, for instance: the knowledge in sending communities regarding how to get in contact with *coyotes*; the knowledge developed by *coyotes* through numerous border crossings around how to move through multiple countries; the arrival of migrants in the United States who then send money for their families to also migrate to the United States; and the calculation that, while one could live in the Northern Triangle from remittances provided by family members in the United States, one could make substantially more money by also making the journey to the United States and finding work in the metropole. Furthermore, the U.S. response of curtailing human mobility also contributed to the migrant caravans as a response to sociopolitical and economic instability in the region. For example, the use of deportation in the United States contributed to the rise of gang violence in the Northern Triangle (Martin, 2017) and the United States eliminated domestic and gang violence as qualifications for asylum. Its result, ironically enough, was an increase in people leaving the Northern Triangle as a result of increased violence in the region. Rather than curtailing mobility, we can understand the migration of people northward and the U.S. response to such mobility as a culmination of both the failure of mobility and the failure of multiple nation-states to construct the conditions for living well. This international political crisis has now manifested itself in thousands becoming *politically visible* through the migrant caravans and their attempts to find the means of living well in the Western Hemisphere.

Yet is it only the violent defense of economic interests in foreign lands that led to the spontaneous mass strike? While it is certainly true that there are some immigrants who come to the United States for purely economic reasons and attempt to prosper from capitalism in the metropole, there are also other migrants who raise concerns with the relationship between the economic, the political, and the international. I examine the fusion of the economic, the political, and the international in the migrant caravans as a spontaneous mass strike below.

THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ARE ONE IN THE MASS STRIKE

While it is important to understand the distinctions between the economic and political spheres of a given society, the spontaneous mass strike is demonstrative of the intimacy between the two. Luxemburg argues that “it is impossible to separate the economic and the political factors from one another” (Luxemburg, 2004a: 194) in the case of the spontaneous mass strike. The contradictions of capitalism produce exploitative economic conditions for the proletariat. If the existing political institutions are unable or unwilling to address their concerns, the spontaneous mass strike becomes the revolutionary form of political action for the proletariat. The “unity” of the political with the economic for the proletariat is, for Luxemburg, embodied by the spontaneous mass strike. She argues that “in a word, the economic struggle is the transmitter from one political center to another; the political struggle is the periodic fertilization of the soil for the economic struggle. [. . .] And, *their unity* is precisely the mass strike” (Luxemburg, 2004a: 195). She argues that attempting to derive the “purely political mass strike” (Luxemburg, 2004a: 195) through academic gymnastics would only lead to misunderstanding the mass strike and not comprehending its significance to the revolutionary moment.

The migrant caravans reflect the same intertwining of the political and the economic. If we consider the historical context provided earlier, U.S. foreign policy explicitly defended the right of the United States to interfere in the Western Hemisphere when U.S. economic interests were at stake, as evident in the CIA coup in Guatemala of 1954 and the U.S.-sponsored Guatemalan military that massacred those who resisted. Political intervention was intimately linked to economic interests in this case. Furthermore, the migrant caravans—which, among other reasons, were formed as a response to the lack of economic opportunities in the Northern Triangle—traverse multiple geopolitical borders on their way to the United States: Honduras to Guatemala, Guatemala to Mexico, and Mexico to the United States. This not

only highlights the connection between economics and politics in terms of mobility but it also draws attention to the multiple nation-states implicated in the regulation of such mobility. The maintenance of geopolitical borders serves not only to determine who is a citizen and who is a non-citizen but also to maintain a cheap and exploitable foreign workforce in the international division of labor. The citizen/non-citizen distinction also impacts undocumented laborers who enter the United States and work under brutal conditions with seemingly limited protections under labor regulations due to their non-citizen status. It seems that in the case of the migrant caravans as a spontaneous mass strike, Luxemburg's suggestion to understand economics and politics as overlapping and intimately related is quite fruitful for our thought. Indeed, Luxemburg's radical anti-capitalist approach to the international situation is key to understanding what is just in this situation: if the North has severely destabilized economic and political life in the region, then migration Northward is not an act of *illegality* but rather a political and economic right and part of a necessary remedy—albeit a potentially temporary one—for such destabilization.

The migrant caravans as a spontaneous mass strike also draw attention to a racialized concern with economics, politics, and mobility in the United States. When considering the U.S. response to the migrant caravans, it is important to understand the ways in which the political and economic are filtered through a racist and xenophobic perspective of those south of its borders. While Luxemburg does consider the proletarian struggle as an international one involving solidarity between multiple proletariats across the borders of nation-states, her examination of the Russian Revolution would not lead her to the analysis of racialization necessary to make sense of the migrant caravans arriving at the U.S. border. However, Rafael Khachaturian's work in this volume explores how we can productively connect Du Bois, Luxemburg, and role of the mass strike. Du Bois's analysis of the mass strike in *Black Reconstruction in America*, Khachaturian argues, was fundamentally an objection to a Euromodern philosophical anthropology predicated on constructing Black people as either non-human and thus property that could perform the same function as a human laborer⁴ or sub-human and thus an exploitable labor force. Du Bois's understanding of racialization in the mass strike combined with Luxemburg's understanding of an

⁴ The fact that this statement appears contradictory (a non-human that could perform the same function as a human laborer) is an important revelation of European philosophical anthropology and its narration of who "the Black" is. Premised on the simultaneous recognition of someone's humanity for the subsequent dismissal of someone's humanity, such a formulation is demonstrative of the bad faith inherent to such philosophical anthropology. As I will show in the following paragraph, such bad faith also appears in the contradictory logics of the dominant U.S. discourse regarding immigrants. For a more extended discussion on bad faith and racism, see Lewis R. Gordon (1995).

international proletariat serve to illuminate the racialized dimension of the migrant caravans.

The xenophobic and racist discourse regarding the migrant caravans reveals a racialized fear that manifests itself in both economic and political commentary. I would argue this fear is based on the same philosophical anthropology narrating Whites in the United States as fully human and the racialized others as sub-human and non-human. Consider, for instance, the paradoxical economic arguments regarding immigrants: they are simultaneously coming to the United States to take all of the jobs from U.S. citizens and they are all lazy freeloaders looking to benefit from public handouts funded by U.S. taxpayers. Aside from the obvious logical contradiction in making these two claims simultaneously, these arguments are factually incorrect on multiple fronts. First, undocumented peoples do pay taxes in the form of sales tax every time they purchase something. Second, many undocumented workers work with false documentation and social security numbers, meaning that they have taxes withheld from their paychecks. Third, though undocumented workers certainly do pay taxes that support public goods, they are often unable to access these public goods without documentation. Fourth, undocumented immigrants tend to not only perform labor that is crucial to the U.S. economy but they also do work that many U.S. citizens do not want to do and typically will not do (Dudley, 2019). Thus, a closer examination of these economic objections reveals not only that they are unsubstantiated but demonstrates, further, that there is a racialized dimension to the bad faith of economic objections made against the migrant caravans.

These expressions of a hegemonic philosophical anthropology are obvious in the political commentary of many U.S. citizens and evident in the country's political leadership and media defending xenophobic and racist politics. Throughout his candidacy and during his time in office, Donald Trump has relied upon characterizing immigration from the Global South as a threat to the national security of the United States, with specific criticism regarding those coming across the southern border from Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries (Associated Press, 2018). Moreover, his racist critiques are not limited to Hispanophone countries, as is evident with his obsession over the infamous "Muslim Ban" and referring to Haiti and African states as "shithole countries." However, empirical evidence reveals that immigrants actually commit crimes at a lesser rate than those born in the United States and that the "majority of immigrants are not 'criminals' by any commonly accepted definition of the term. For this reason, harsh immigration policies are not effective in fighting crime" (Ewing, Martinez, and Rumbaut, 2015: 1). Nevertheless, the Trump administration has responded with draconian zero-tolerance policies at the border that have led

to the incarceration of adults, separation of children from their families, and the denial of asylum claims of people attempting to flee domestic and gang violence (Benner and Dickerson, 2018). An anchor on the popular conservative news program *Fox and Friends* sought to justify the administration's dehumanizing interpretation and enforcement of immigration laws that led to family separation by stating "and these are not, like it or not, these aren't our kids."⁵ In the dominant response in the United States to the migrant caravans, there is a clear attempt to construct the immigrants as persons not deserving of U.S. citizenship and, thus undeserving of any opportunities or even humane treatment. This discourse, in turn, provides a rationalization for the continued economic and political violence that produces the migrant caravans in the first place.

The migrant caravans, then, are a deliberate and constructive transnational response to the failures of the Northern Triangle countries and the United States to address the needs of the international masses. The Northern Triangle countries are unable to provide for their citizens at least in part due to historical U.S. intervention in, and destabilization of, these countries, as well as the ongoing political domination of the United States in the international division of labor. In addition, the U.S. government's response to the migrant caravans also demonstrates a racist and xenophobic dimension of U.S. immigration policies that relies upon constructing southern migrants as an encroaching criminal threat and as undeserving of U.S. citizenship despite evidence to the contrary. As Luxemburg argues, when economic conditions become so untenable for the proletariat and the existing political institutions refuse to alleviate these conditions or worsen them, then the migrant caravan as a spontaneous mass strike becomes the form of revolutionary action of the international proletariat. The migrant caravans as spontaneous mass strikes reveal the intimate and ultimately inseparable relationship between politics and economics.

Yet the migrant caravans both create unique challenges and point us to other difficulties in our current times, such as the increased policing of the U.S. border, the rise of for-profit detention centers to incarcerate migrants, the use of deportation as a mode of punishment, the division of families across geopolitical borders, and the cooperation between Mexico and the United States in regulating mobility from the Northern Triangle. How might Luxemburg's thought help us respond to some of these current challenges?

⁵ "But we can't just let everybody in that wants to be here. And these are not, like it or not, these aren't our kids—show them compassion. But it's not like he's doing this to the people of Idaho or uh, or uh, or uh Texas. These are people from another country, and now people are saying that they're more important than people in our country who are paying taxes and have needs as well." See Erik Wemple (2018).

IN OUR REVOLUTIONARY MOMENT: POLITICAL EDUCATION

Luxemburg's third dimension of the spontaneous mass strike—that the mass strike is part of the revolution that is understood as an ongoing struggle for human equality and freedom—and the fourth dimension—that the mass strike cannot be manufactured—are important to consider more extensively in the context of the migrant caravans. However, there are also a number of additional fruits in Luxemburg's thought on the spontaneous mass strike that are helpful to reflect upon as we move forward in our current times. Specifically, her thoughts around what political leadership looks like in fanning the flames of the spontaneous mass strike as well as building on the political possibilities created by the mass strike are important for considering how we respond to international capitalism and the struggle for human mobility.

Luxemburg argues that the mass strike cannot be created through planning and deliberation by party or centralized political leadership. The spontaneous mass strike cannot be given a calendar date. Reflecting on those socialist party leaders who would like to manufacture the mass strike in the German context, she writes in her analysis of the Russian Revolution: "On the same ground of abstract, unhistorical methods of observation stand those who would, in the manner of a board of directors, put the mass strike in Germany on the calendar on an appointed day" (Luxemburg, 2004a: 169). She goes on to write that there are "those who, like the participants in the trade-union congress at Cologne, would by a prohibition of 'propaganda' eliminate the problem of the mass strike from the face of the earth" (Luxemburg, 2004a: 169). Her point is that the mass strike can neither be eliminated as a political possibility nor produced through centralized organization and planning. The anxiety produced for organization leaders invested in carefully cultivating the mass strike or closing it off as a possibility lies in the seemingly uncontrollable power of the mass strike: its spontaneity produced at an unknown time by the accumulating historical contradictions of capitalism.

While Luxemburg cautions us to recognize that the spontaneous mass strike is inseparable from the revolution, she is also conscious of the fact that there are a range of revolutionary actors with different roles in the struggle. She does argue that the spontaneous mass strike brings previously politically unaffiliated members of the proletariat to consciousness and to participate in the revolutionary moment (Luxemburg, 2004a: 196). However, following the spontaneous mass strike, she also argues that leadership in political parties and trade unions have a crucial role to play in harnessing the energy of the spontaneous mass strike and working toward new political and economic possibilities. She writes:

To give the cue for and the direction to the fight; to so regulate the tactics of the political struggle in its every phase and at it every moment that the entire sum of the available power of the proletariat which is already released and active will find expression in the battle array of the party; to see that the tactics of the Social Democrats are decided according to their resoluteness and acuteness, and that they never fall below the level demanded by the actual relations of forces, but rather rise above it—that is the most important task of the directing body in a period of mass strikes. (Luxemburg, 2014a: 199)

Yet *effective* leadership during this time comes from trust in the potential of the proletariat that is being actively manifested. Luxemburg writes that “consistent, resolute progressive tactics on the part of the Social Democrats produces in the masses a feeling of security, self-confidence and desire for struggle; vacillating weak tactics, based on an underestimation of the proletariat, has a crippling and confusing effect upon the masses” (Luxemburg, 2004a: 199). While the spontaneous mass strike and political leadership responding to the proletariat are seemingly distinct figures in the revolutionary situation for Luxemburg, she also recognizes their potentially intimate connection, highlighting the role of mutual trust and confidence as a requisite for maximizing revolutionary possibility.

What, then, can we derive from Luxemburg’s understanding of the relationship between revolutionary leadership and the spontaneous mass strike to aid our work today? One aspect to consider more deeply here is the role of political education in her thought. While she recognized that spontaneous mass strikes could not be manufactured, she saw the work of political education as playing a crucial part in developing the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat. Political education took both the form of raising awareness through teaching and learning, and also in participating in the revolutionary struggle itself. This she termed the “living political school” (Luxemburg, 2004a: 182). Furthermore, her belief and trust in the proletariat kept Luxemburg from advocating for the type of limited political education that Frantz Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth* or Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* would refer to as “propaganda” rather than education. Instead, Luxemburg saw the importance of educating the proletariat about history, international relations, the contradictions of capitalism, and the power of the masses in revolutionary political change. She writes:

they should be enlightened on the development of the Russian Revolution, the international significance of that revolution, the sharpening of class antagonisms in Western Europe, the wider political perspectives of the class struggle in Germany, and the role and the tasks of the masses in the coming struggles. Only in this form will the discussion on the mass strike lead to the widening of the

intellectual horizon of the proletariat, to the sharpening of their way of thinking, and to the steeling of their energy. (Luxemburg, 2004a: 171)

Note, for instance, her use of *they* in italics. This is revelatory of Luxemburg's trust in the potential of the proletariat. *They* should be taught, rather than led through pseudo-teachings grounded in a distrust of the masses and the supposed superiority of the political leadership. One can also see that she did not mean to suggest all people had the same amount of knowledge about politics and international relations. However, differing levels of knowledge do not justify paternalism. Rather than propaganda-based education where the masses were seen as de facto irresponsible political subjects who required manipulation by those who actually knew, for Luxemburg political education meant understanding the *political classroom* as one formed by multiple responsible political subjects. That is, the masses are also responsible political subjects, in that they are capable of learning and acting—praxis—when engaged as such. For the political educators, then, their responsibility has a series of layers: to recognize the masses as responsible political subjects; to educate in such a way that recognizes the power the masses have in effecting political change; and to also recognize themselves as advanced students⁶ who, by learning from the masses, are able to more effectively facilitate revolutionary political education. Luxemburg, without a doubt, saw knowledge as key to raising political consciousness, and a politically conscious citizen is much better at constructing equitable social and economic relations through political struggle than an uneducated one.

Luxemburg took seriously her responsibility as an educator of the masses but also as an educator for the educators or for party leadership. Her educative efforts—writing, speechmaking, serving as editor of newspapers, or as a teacher of union members, for instance—allowed her to do at least two things.

The first is to reflect on the political situation of the masses and their revolutionary potential, as is evident throughout her writings. In *Mass Strike* in particular, for example, one can see Luxemburg engage with the spontaneous mass strikes of Russia not as a historical anomaly but as a political situation that one can study and learn from, and in response to which one can develop pedagogical practices that anticipate such developments in the future. That is not to say that the spontaneous mass strike can be anticipated but rather that political education of the masses contributes to revolutionary consciousness which can give shape to the spontaneous mass strike.

⁶ See Lewis Gordon's (2018) discussion of the advanced student.

The second stems from Luxemburg understanding her role as an educator to also be the role of an advanced student. In other words, Luxemburg learned from her students, in that she took the political situation the masses faced seriously and believed in their power as a political force. This contributed to her ability to see the glaring contradictions between the needs of the masses and the empty revolutionary speak of party leadership, which were, in some instances, complicit with capitalist interests. Furthermore, Luxemburg took an active, confrontational role within the circle of supposed educators, or the corrupt party leadership. This is evident in her commitment to contesting the decisions of leadership that not only saw the masses as thoughtless people who needed to be coordinated—a theme she constantly repudiates throughout *Mass Strike*—but also in challenging party leadership which appeared to be disloyal to the interests of the masses themselves. For Luxemburg, leadership that cries for revolution in the name of the masses yet distrusts or disbelieves in the revolutionary potential of the masses is hypocritical at best, and no substantive political education can occur when the pedagogical relationship is shaped by distrust and disbelief in another's potential.

How might her thoughts on political education aid our contemporary response to the spontaneous mass strikes in the form of the migrant caravans? I define *political education* as teaching, learning, and political engagement which seeks to make sense of our own political context, how it intersects with political situations elsewhere, and the development and implementation of political strategies with the intention of creating a world in which we can all live well. I offer here four ways to think about political education in response to the present crises of capitalism and human mobility: (1) transnational education for cultivating a transnational political consciousness; (2) political education to understand the connections among mass strikes in different nation-states in the Western Hemisphere; (3) political education to underscore both the distinct, local concerns of peoples as well as the transnational concerns which are shared across places; and (4) political education that builds on knowledge from how capitalism maximizes transnationalism for its own benefit so we can better inform our own transnational projects. I address each point briefly below. My purpose is not to exhaust each point but merely to introduce each and some pertinent questions for further thought.

Transnational Political Education

The migrant caravans raise concerns with the current international division of labor, exploitative capitalism, and the role of multiple nation-states in failing to meet the needs of their masses and curtailing mobility as an option for resistance and survival. Transnational political education would allow us to cultivate a political imaginary not only for a socialist world but also

for a world in which human mobility is increasingly facilitated and borders between nation-states do not constitute an obstacle to living well. However, shifting our political imaginaries would require us to contend with the objections of other groups concerned with land and sovereignty, particularly Indigenous peoples. Their objections to settler colonial rule and the settler-states' presumed jurisdictional authority upon stolen lands need to be taken seriously in transnational political education so we do not reproduce colonial practices. Some questions to consider:

- In what ways do Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous notions of land allow us to imagine alternative economic relations at a hemispheric level?
- What are the ways to simultaneously facilitate mobility across lands while respecting the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples and others upon those lands?
- If there are local/national identities linked to political responsibility of, and for, lands as well as to the people occupying those lands, is there also a hemispheric/transnational political subject which emerges when we accept that mobility is a constitutive feature of both the past and the present of our shared world?

Juxtapositional Political Education

Political theorist Juliet Hooker (2017) advances the idea of juxtaposition rather than comparing and contrasting, when thinking across geopolitical borders. Juxtaposition as an approach refutes any predetermination of what is “better” or “worse” and instead seeks to understand the unique political conditions in certain contexts and their relationships to other political situations. Though much of her concern emerges from the way European and Euro-American political scientists consciously and unconsciously embrace the superiority of the West in comparative analyses, we can also learn from her methodology of juxtaposition in terms of our own political education. For instance, there are different histories that lead to different political contexts, and these different political contexts can produce different spontaneous mass strikes. We can learn not only from spontaneous mass strikes that defy and traverse the borders of multiple nation-states but also learn from mass strikes within and across nation-states. This is precisely what Luxemburg did when studying the mass strike in Russia to inform her own political theory and strategy. Some questions to consider:

- What are the commonalities across the differences in the spontaneous mass strikes within different territories or nation-states (such as Puerto Rico, Bolivia, and Chile to name some contemporary examples)? What

are the salient differences that require additional attention to the local context?

- What is the relationship between spontaneous mass strikes within a nation-state and mass strikes that defy the borders of nation-states such as the migrant caravans? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they unique?
- In what ways can the spontaneous mass strikes in different nation-states be linked together? In what ways can those mass strikes be linked with transnational mass strikes such as the migrant caravans?

Local Education with Transnational Education

While there are certainly concerns that transcend any particular space—such as the power of capitalism in hindering our ability to live well—there are also important local considerations to keep in mind. Political education would not sacrifice the local for the transnational, but instead would seek to understand the local as embedded within the transnational, while at the same time understand the transnational as a product of multiple localities. Political education, then, would serve a dual function of underscoring efforts to address the distinct local concerns of people as well as understanding their connection to transnational concerns. Likewise, any transnational concerns would require a localized approach when considering place-specific political education. Some questions to consider:

- In what ways would local concerns interfere with transnational ones? In what ways might transnational concerns interfere with local ones?
- How do we moderate disputes and negotiate across lines of difference when local and transnational agendas may conflict?
- Are there particular situations in which local concerns should take precedence over transnational concerns? What about transnational over local concerns?

Building-Block Political Education

Without a doubt, we live in a world in which geopolitical borders no longer play the same role as they did during European Invasion over five centuries ago. The power of a kingdom is no longer exclusively determined by its castle walls, though the militarized defense of these walls is still politically significant in examining human mobility. Nevertheless, we have to contend with the fact that, for instance, there are some transnational corporations that arguably have more power than some sovereign nation-states. Arguably, these transnational corporations may have more influence in determining

international policies than a sovereign nation-state, and the nation-state simply serves as a means of the expression and implementation of the desires of such corporations. In the historical evidence provided earlier, the relationship between the United Fruit Company, the U.S. government, and intervention in Guatemala is indicative of such an arrangement, and there are certainly other historical cases that indicate as such. Capitalism has long adapted itself by reaching beyond national borders, whether through territorial expansion and imperial war, political and military interventions, or economic interventions through institutions, such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund. Capitalism has developed a series of political, economic, and social organizations that transcend geopolitical borders. We see obvious manifestations of these in political institutions such as the United Nations, economic interests traversing geopolitical borders organized as transnational corporations, and the incredible range of international non-profit organizations that embed themselves in communities of the Global South.

For our own political organizing, capitalism has provided a road map which we need not follow but that we can learn from in order to develop our own initiatives. If we are conscious of Luxemburg's point that capitalism produces problems at an international level, then we can think about the ways we can form partnerships across geopolitical borders to build alternatives to capitalism. Some questions to consider:

- What political institutions can connect marginalized communities across the Western Hemisphere, such as the numerous Indigenous nations, Afro-descendant peoples, and European descendants who recognize that we need an alternative political and economic order to live well?
- How might we devise transnational economic relations that mirror what transnational corporations are able to do, but that do not sustain global capitalist inequality and an inequitable division of labor?
- In what ways can learning about and contributing to distinct social worlds avoid the pitfalls of epistemic colonization, as is evident in much of the Western anthropological work available on the Global South? In what ways can we ensure reciprocity in learning and teaching across lines of difference?

CONCLUSION

Luxemburg's thought on the spontaneous mass strike has continued significance in our political times, particularly when we consider the migrant caravans as a spontaneous mass strike. Reflecting on the migrant caravans requires that we extend Luxemburg's thought to consider histories of violent

intervention by the United States in the Western Hemisphere for the purpose of maintaining its economic interests, the use of mobility as a strategy of survival contemporarily, and the increasingly transnational and connected world in which we live. Mobility is a constitutive factor of our shared world, and the migrant caravans as a spontaneous mass strike are evidence of the crises of capitalism at a transnational scale that manifest themselves in massive movement to the North. Extending Luxemburg's thought to contemporary political relations in the Western Hemisphere requires us to examine how racism and xenophobia impact these political relations and the response of the United States to the migrant caravans.

Luxemburg advises formal, organized political leadership to place its trust and confidence in the mobilizing proletariat. One form of doing so is through extensive political education. For Luxemburg, the politically conscious and informed citizen is the best citizen. In the context of the migrant caravans, the four dimensions of political education I provide (transnational, juxtapositional, local, and building-block) seek to develop political consciousness in the proletariat that is based on the commonalities across our differences in thinking through and enacting shared political struggle. The work of developing political consciousness is not exclusively an intellectual endeavor but rather one grounded in the current struggles of our time. It requires political analyses of political movements to inform political action both locally and transnationally. In the spirit of Luxemburg, it is important to emphasize that we practice what we teach. In the spirit of political education, it is also important to reflect and learn from our practices as we move forward in our shared work.

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RECONSIDERING PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION

Chapter 11

Disaggregating Primitive Accumulation¹

Robert Nichols

The third and final section of Rosa Luxemburg’s magisterial *The Accumulation of Capital* investigates the “historical conditions of accumulation.” In treating the actual historical emergence and contemporaneous expansion of capital—rather than its “formal” logic according to the classical political economists—Luxemburg concludes her *magnum opus* in much the same way that Marx ended his. The final section, *Capital, Volume 1* (Part VIII), was likewise preoccupied with the question of “primitive accumulation.” Despite this formal parallelism, however, Luxemburg takes the opportunity to make significant substantive contributions of her own, which depart from and cannot be reduced to Marx. Specifically, Luxemburg takes issue with Marx’s account of “enlarged reproduction.” Whereas Marx is accused of explaining the continuous growth and expansion of capital on purely formal, intrinsic grounds (i.e., through the introduction of the “producer of money as a *deus ex machina*” (Luxemburg, 2003: 309), Luxemburg insists that we can only properly understand this enlargement process by grasping the ways in which capital is parasitic upon non-capitalized forms of life external to its current parameters: it is only by drawing in resources from outside its extant ambit that capital continues to expand. According to Luxemburg, this introduces a fatal contradiction (beyond the contradictions of the labor–capital relation so extensively analyzed by Marx). For if capital engrosses itself through the parasitic consumption of external resources—e.g., non-capitalized social and natural reproduction—then, like a parasite, it destroys the very life it so

¹ An earlier version of this essay first appeared in *Radical Philosophy*, 194 (Nov/Dec 2015): 18–28. It is reprinted here with permission.

desperately needs to survive. In order to name and explain this contradiction, Luxemburg reworks the concept of primitive accumulation into a continuous and constitutive feature of capitalist expansion. In her rendering, primitive accumulation is transposed from Marx's "pre-history" of capital to a central explanatory concept in the apprehension of imperial expansion. As she put it,

The existence and development of capitalism requires an environment of non-capitalist forms of production . . . Capitalism needs non-capitalist social strata as a market for its surplus value, as a source of supply for its means of production and as a reservoir of labor power for its wage system . . . Capitalism must therefore always and everywhere fight a battle of annihilation against every historical form of natural economy that it encounters. (Luxemburg, 2003: 348–349)

My aim in this essay is to contextualize the meaning and significance of this argument. I do so not only by situating it in the longer history of critical, "revisionist" accounts of primitive accumulation but also by tracing the main lines of debate since Luxemburg's own time. Finally, I attempt an original intervention, arguing that many revisionist theories have mischaracterized the problem at hand by adopting an overly static and modular conception of primitive accumulation. Rather than extending the category to include a wider swath of historical examples (as the revisionists would have us do), I propose instead a *disaggregation* of the component elements of primitive accumulation in favor of an analysis that contemplates alternative possible relations between these elements. I moreover contend that doing so enables us to specify the distinctive violence of *dispossession without proletarianization*, an insight that extends and continues the spirit of Luxemburg's contributions to the study of the nexus of empire and capital.

I.

For nearly 150 years now, critical theorists of various stripes have attempted to explicate, correct, and complement Marx's discussion of the so-called primitive accumulation (PA) of capital provided in Section Eight of *Capital, Volume 1*.² This is perhaps especially true of Marxism in the English-speaking

² One irony of this debate has been the extent to which primitive accumulation is now commonly spoken of as a Marxist concept when in fact it derives from Adam Smith. Ambiguities and misreadings compound through multiple translations. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith spoke of an "accumulation of stock" that must be "previous to the division of labor." When Marx translated this into German, he rendered it as "die sogenannte ursprüngliche Akkumulation," and then, when *Das Kapital* was translated into English, it became "primitive accumulation." Not only are the various terms (previous, ursprünglich, and primitive) not direct equivalents, but Marx distances himself

world. Whereas French and German Marxist traditions have tended to focus more on the formal, conceptual categories of *Capital*, Anglophone debates have attended more closely to Marx's historical-descriptive account, perhaps due to the privileged role that England plays in the historical drama staging the bourgeois revolt against feudalism, the early emergence of capitalist relations, and subsequent industrial revolution. The enclosures of the English commons and transformation of the rural peasantry into an industrial work force serves, after all, as the primary empirical referent from which Marx derives his conceptual tools. From Paul Sweezy and Maurice Dobb in the 1950s, to Christopher Hill, C. B. Macpherson, and E. P. Thompson in the 1960s, to Perry Anderson and Robert Brenner in the 1970s, these "transition debates" have focused on the accuracy and adequacy of Marx's history of early modern England.³

Across a variety of interpretive traditions, a major point of contention with regard to primitive accumulation has been the sense given in *Capital* that it is best thought of as a *historical stage* eventually supplanted by the general law of capitalist accumulation—what we can call the "stadial interpretation." One important reason why this has been contentious is that it implies a corresponding stadial succession in the *forms of violence* engendered by capitalism.

There are many sections in *Capital* in which Marx gives one the impression that we ought to interpret primitive accumulation as a historical stage, overtaken and superseded by the true, mature, general law of accumulation once a full and complete capitalist system is in place. As mentioned above, Marx's primary empirical case of primitive accumulation is the series of "enclosures of the commons" that took place in England and Scotland, primarily in the seventeenth century. While acknowledging some variation in the historical experience of different countries and regions, Marx designates this English version the "classic form" and certainly suggests that, by his own time, this process had *ended*. He expressly relegates it to the "pre-history of capital" (Marx, 1976: 876, 928; Marx, 2009).

In a certain sense, Marx's own argument centrally depends on the interpretation of primitive accumulation as a historically completed stage. His argument requires this because of the role it plays in the account of the general law of accumulation under the fully developed form of the capital relation. Marx argues that the proper functioning of the capital relation is predicated upon systematic exploitation, i.e., intrinsic to capitalist production, rather than a side effect or a distortion. But if it is so systematic and widespread,

from personal association with the idea through his use of the qualifier "so-called." See Adam Smith (1999: 371–372).

³ For a recent critical review of these debates, see Ellen Meiksins Wood (2002).

then why does it require such elaborate unmasking by Marx in the first place? Why can't the people who labor under this system of exploitation recognize it as such?

To explain this obfuscation, we need an account of something like ideology or hegemony. Marx has argued that one of the distinctive features of capitalism as a system of exploitation is that it operates through the nominal freedom of the exploited. Laborers "freely" contract into their own exploitation, often experiencing this as an actualization of choice and free will, in part because they lack an analysis of how this context of choice was established in the first place or a vision of how it might be replaced by another. Capitalism is "naturalized" when one accepts only the range of possibilities within immediate view without recognizing the background structuring conditions of this range as the product of an arbitrary and historically contingent set of circumstances. But for this ideological normalization story to be plausible, Marx must assert not only that mature capitalism does not require un concealed "extra-economic" violence but also that the period when such violence was required has faded from immediate consciousness. Although capitalism's prehistory is dripping in blood, once the fundamental capital relation is established, extra-economic force is thought to fade away. It is replaced by the "silent compulsion of economic relations [*der stumme Zwang der ökonomischen Verhältnisse*]" which "sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker. Direct extra-economic force [*außerökonomische, unmittelbare Gewalt*] is still of course used, but only in exceptional cases" (Marx, 1976: 899). Even the immediate consciousness of the previous period of violence has been largely erased. Hence, for instance, Marx's insistence that, by "the nineteenth century, the very memory of the connection between the agricultural laborer and communal property had, of course, vanished" (Marx, 1976: 889). This is why the very idea of a *primitive* accumulation seems to necessitate a stadial interpretation: a stadial account explains our "forgetting" of capitalism's birth in blood and fire.

It is also perhaps clearer now why the stadial interpretation has been so controversial and vexing. Critics have raised objections not only with the historical periodization, but also with the very idea that the overt, extra-economic violence required by capitalism is surpassed and transformed into a period of "silent compulsion" through exploitation. Peter Kropotkin, for one, roundly criticized Marx's reliance upon an "erroneous division between the *primary* accumulation of capital and its present-day formation" (Kropotkin, 1995: 221). For Kropotkin and his anarchist-collectivist movement, the framing of primitive accumulation as an historical epoch was more than a side concern; it spoke to the central question of the relationship between capitalism and the state form itself. Rejecting the "silent compulsion" thesis, Kropotkin argued that capitalism required the use of continuous, unmediated and unmasked

violence to maintain its operation. As a result, he also rejected any attempt at working within bourgeois capitalist political systems, favoring direct action and the immediate creation of non-capitalist spaces of work and life (a position that has split anarchists and Marxists from the First International to the present).⁴

We are now better positioned to make sense of Luxemburg's contributions in *The Accumulation of Capital*. In her rendering, primitive accumulation is transposed from Marx's "pre-history" of capital to a central explanatory concept in the apprehension of imperial expansion. The concept becomes vital to name that "battle of annihilation" which capitalism wages "against every historical form of natural economy that it encounters" (Luxemburg, 1995: 348–349). So for Luxemburg, not only does overt, political violence persist, it takes on "two faces." Within Europe, "force assumed revolutionary forms in the fight against feudalism," whereas *outside* Europe this force "assumes the forms of colonial policy" (Kropotkin, 1995: 349). The importance of Luxemburg's innovation therefore consists in her ability to draw a variety of distinct manifestations of political-economic transformation, upheaval, and violence into a single analytic frame—the constitutionally expanding field of *imperial-capitalism*. At least at this general level, this basic insight has endured and found resonances with a wide range of subsequent thinkers.⁵

In more recent times, debates within feminist and postcolonial theory have revived this question. The intertwining of empire, primitive accumulation, and "extra-economic violence" has unsurprisingly played a central role in the emergence of an entire tradition of postcolonial Marxism, particularly in India. Ranajit's Guha's landmark *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983) set the tone for these debates. As the title of his subsequent work, *Dominance Without Hegemony* (1998), makes all the more explicit, Guha (and along with him, much of the Subaltern Studies movement) took issue with the occlusion of imperial domination in favor of the Western Marxist experience of hegemony. They argued that, contrary to the traditional Marxist (but especially neo-Gramscian) account, the most advanced, "mature" accumulation of capital coexisted alongside and necessarily required the kind of overt state violence Marx had supposedly relegated to its "pre-history." There was no historical transition from extra-economic violence to silent compulsion, only a geographical displacement of the former to the imperial periphery (Guha, 1983, 1998; Amin, 1974).

⁴ Kropotkin: "while combating the present monopolization of land, and capitalism altogether, the anarchists combat with the same energy the state, as the main support of that system. Not this or that special form, but *the state altogether*" (Kropotkin, 1995: 235).

⁵ For instance, Luxemburg's work earns unexpected praise from Hannah Arendt on precisely this point regarding primitive accumulation. See Arendt (1979: 27–28). For a less surprising contemporary use, see David Harvey (2003).

In the context of this discussion, we would be remiss, too, in not mentioning Silvia Federici's *The Caliban and the Witch* as another coruscating appropriation of the concept of primitive accumulation. Federici delves into the dense archive of state and capital formation from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century in order to correct for Marx's blindness toward gender as a central axis of social organization and control, demonstrating how violence against women is congenital to capitalism's formulation. Reconstructing the early history of capitalism from the standpoint of women as a social and political class, while always subtended by a racial and imperial horizon, Federici entirely reworks primitive accumulation as a category of analysis. Her conclusion confirms that of Kropotkin, Luxemburg, and Guha et al.: "A return of the most violent aspects of primitive accumulation has accompanied every phase of capitalist globalization, including the present one, demonstrating that the continuous expulsion of farmers from the land, war and plunder on a world scale, and the degradation of women are necessary conditions for the existence of capitalism in all times" (Federici, 2004: 12–13).⁶

The North American Indigenous (Dene) political theorist Glen Sean Coulthard has also recently engaged in a critical reconstruction of primitive accumulation, expressly designed to shift the focus toward the *colonial relation*. In his work, Coulthard seeks to strip Marx's original formulation of its "Eurocentric feature[s]" by "*contextually shifting* our investigation from an emphasis on the *capital relation* to the *colonial relation*" (Coulthard, 2014: 10). In this contextual shift, Coulthard draws resources from Marx's own writings, noting that after the collapse of the Paris Commune in 1871, Marx began to engage in more serious empirical and historical investigations of a variety of non-Western societies. The so-called ethnographic notebooks (1879–1882) are filled with such studies, including lengthy treatment of communal property and land tenure. These writings, when combined with the revisions that Marx made to the 1872–75 French edition of *Capital*, and his periodic comments on the Russian *mir* or communal village form, present us with a significantly altered picture (Anderson, 2010; Stedman Jones, 2007). Marx searches here for an alternative to the relatively unilinear account of historical development given in his earlier works, suggesting that capitalist development could take a variety of different paths, implying at least the possibility of alternative modes of overcoming capitalism and implementing socialist systems of social organization. This rethinking rebounded back upon Marx's own understanding of primitive accumulation. Perhaps most famously, in an 1877 letter to Nikolay Mikhailovsky, Marx protested that the "chapter on primitive accumulation" should not be read as a

⁶ I have also benefited greatly from the following works: Robin Blackburn (1997); Massimo De Angelis (2001, 2004); Onur Ulas Ince (2013); Michael Perelman (2000).

“historico-philosophical theory of the general course imposed *on all peoples*” but rather as a historical examination of the “path by which, *in Western Europe*, the capitalist economic order emerged from the womb of the feudal economic order” (Marx, 1934: 1).⁷

If revisionist accounts of PA have slowly gathered steam over the past 150 years, they have exploded in the past decade or so, particularly in the field of critical geography. This explosion has, however, also caused a certain conceptual shattering, throwing forth a range of ambiguously related companion concepts such as “accumulation by displacement,” “dispossession by displacement,” “accumulation by encroachment,” and “accumulation by denial.”⁸ Perhaps most influentially, David Harvey speaks of “accumulation by dispossession” (ABD). While offered as a synonym for primitive accumulation, in Harvey’s rendering, ABD is essentially a stand-in for *privatization*: “the transfer of productive public assets from the state to private companies,” especially as a result of the supposedly over-accumulation of capital in neo-liberal times (Harvey, 2003: 161). The category is thus shorn from any connection to the transition debates or indeed, from any particular connection to land.

In the now rather fragmented conceptual field responding to Harvey, three broad approaches appear. The first defines PA in terms of the processes by which the “outside” of capital comes to be incorporated within it. It is thus an essentially spatial framework, but one that often oscillates between the metaphors of “frontiers” and “enclosures.” Whereas the former denotes the outside boundary of capital, and is inescapably tied to colonial imaginaries, the latter invokes more a sense of encirclement and physical (if not also metaphorical) gating, fencing, and partition (Tsing, 2005; Mezzadra, 2011; Thompson, 1990, 1991). A second framework emphasizes “extra-economic means” as the definitive feature of PA. For instance, Michael Levein defines accumulation by dispossession as “the use of extra-economic coercion to expropriate means of production, subsistence or common social wealth for capital accumulation” (Levein, 2012: 940). As this formulation highlights, the linking of PA to “extra-economic means” demands consideration of the politics/economics distinction and (unlike the first framework) does not necessarily pertain to the expansion of capital into new societies and spaces, but may take place entirely “within” capital’s existing sphere of influence.

⁷ Marx (1987) makes the same point in his letter to the Russian activist Vera Zasulich.

⁸ For a discussion of these, and key references, see Werner Bonefeld (2011); Jim Glassman (2006); Derek Hall (2012, 2013). Two oft-cited discussions on these distinctions include a special issue of *The Commoner*, No. 2 (Sept. 2001), featuring contributions from The Midnight Notes collective, Massimo De Angelis, Werner Bonefeld, Silvia Federici, and a special issue of *Rethinking Marxism*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (July 2011), with contributions from Sandro Mezzadra, S. Charusheela, and Gavin Walker.

Finally, a third framework emphasizes the *object* of appropriation. This is most evident in the large literature that defines PA in terms of “land grabbing” (Wolford, Borras, Hall, Scoones, and White, 2013; Borras and Franco, 2012). It is this emphasis on land—and its relation to the other elements of PA—that I intend to explore further below. For the moment at least, we can say that while the above elements may hang together in some specific formulations (i.e., extra-economic land acquisition on the frontier of capital), they need not do so. Considerable disagreement persists therefore when it comes to identifying which element is decisive in demarcating PA as a distinct category of analysis.

Among the myriad complexities of these debates, two matters stand out most prominently: (1) Is primitive accumulation best thought of as a historical stage of capitalist development or as a distinct modality of its ongoing operation? (2) Does the supposed “silent compulsion” characteristic of capitalist exploitation constitutionally depend upon the continual injection of “extra-economic” violence? The first is about the relation between the *general law* of accumulation and its so-called *primitive* prehistory; the second about the forms of violence they imply. From Marx’s own later writings, through to Luxembourg, Guha, Federici, Coulthard, and much (but not all) of the critical geography framework, this has generally been resolved by shifting the *temporal* framework provided in *Capital* to a *spatial* one: we are no longer operating with a distinction between mature capital and its prehistory but with a distinction between core and periphery, colonizer and the colonized.

On the one hand, it seems intuitively correct to suggest that the extra-economic violence engendered by capitalism has not be superseded historically by the emergence of the supposedly more “mature” features of the general law of accumulation, that is, the silent compulsion of exploitation. Capitalism’s entanglement in expansionist, imperial war is too widespread, systematic, and ongoing to be relegated to a prehistory. On the other hand, however, characterization of this dimension of capitalist expansion and reproduction as *primitive accumulation* places considerable strain upon the coherence of that term of art. Specifically, such reformulations drive a wedge between the *conceptual-analytic* and *empirical-descriptive* functions of the concept.⁹

Tensions between these two functions are, of course, already latent within Marx’s original formulation. Marx sought to provide an empirical-historical description of the actual processes of capital formation in Western Europe from the seventeenth century to his own time in the mid-nineteenth. In this descriptive register, the primary empirical case is that of England. However, this description then goes on to serve a *conceptual-analytic* function as a

⁹ A similar observation is made in Ince (2013).

paradigmatic or “classic form.” It has thus provided the basis for the general theory or formal model that, while originally rooted in the specific historical experiences of early modern England, now exceeds and transcends this particular case. In this second, formal register, other cases can be evaluated as better or worse approximations of the ideal. Since Marx expressly analogizes between the prehistory of European capital and the non-European, non-capitalist world existing in contemporaneous time with his own theoretical formulations in *Capital* (e.g., the colonial periphery of the mid-nineteenth century), a certain historicist tendency is disclosed, providing fodder to important postcolonial criticisms to emerge subsequently.¹⁰

Ironically, reformulations of Marx’s original thesis along the lines of the work discussed above have tended to compound, rather than resolve, such tensions. By expressly grouping the diversity of extra-economic violence manifest at the peripheries of capitalism under the general heading of primitive accumulation, such work has only exaggerated and expanded the historicist tendency already implicit in *Capital*. For if the extra-economic violence of the imperial peripheries is an instantiation of primitive accumulation, then we should expect its empirical content to conform to the “classic case” of seventeenth-century England. This requires a large generalization across space and time, threatening to empty the term of its original content. As Ince (2013) warns, in a drive to expand the *descriptive extension* of primitive accumulation (what it *covers*), its *conceptual intension* (what it *means*) has become less precise and clear.

In an effort to avoid a theory of primitive accumulation that smacks too much of the stages of development theses characteristic of Eurocentric nineteenth-century philosophical anthropology, subsequent commentators have elided the fact that at least in one important respect the developments that took place in Western Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were in fact qualitatively unique. Specifically, primitive accumulation in Western Europe took place in a global context in which no other capitalist societies already existed. Whatever analogies between capital formation in Europe and non-European societies obtain, this fact attests to a singular event that could never again take place. All other subsequent experiences with primitive accumulation were dissimilar from Marx’s “classic case” in this specific respect (at least). And this had enormous implications for the shape, speed, and character of capitalist development in all other locales, because in all other places, it was structurally affected by already-existing capitalism in Western Europe. Put differently, while the original framework attempts to explain the strange alchemy of capital’s emergence out

¹⁰ For an influential critique of this historicism, see Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000).

of non-capital, subsequent focus shifts to the subsumption of non-capital by already-existing capital. This is why colonial policy of the nineteenth or twentieth century is *not* analogous to primitive accumulation in seventeenth-century England. The spatial expansion of capital through empire does not, in fact, represent a return to capitalism's origins, so much as a succession of qualitatively unique spatio-temporal waves, simultaneously linking core and periphery.

Consequently, I submit that primitive accumulation cannot be coherently extended to define a feature or dimension of contemporary capitalism without considerable reconstruction of its conceptual intension. In order to preserve the insight with regard to the persistence of extra-economic violence, but avoid the problems of an overly generalized extension of PA, what is required then is, first, a *disaggregation* of the component elements of primitive accumulation in favor of an analysis that contemplates alternative possible relations between these elements. Marx largely treats the four elements of primitive accumulation as one modular package: he explicates the violence of dispossession as a means of explaining the other elements of proletarianization, market formation, and the separation of agriculture and industry. Subsequent debates have largely taken on this model, treating the four elements as though necessarily interconnected, focusing debate on whether their initial formation (and the overt violence required for their emergence) has been superseded or remains alive today. This leads one to the (mistaken) expectation that all cases of PA should express this fourfold structure. Thus, my first postulate here is that by treating primitive accumulation as a modular package of interrelated processes the category becomes over-determined by the specific historical form originally given by Marx.

My second basic postulate is that rather than adopting a general *expansion* of the category of primitive accumulation, we are better served by reworking the notion of *Enteignung* originally formulated therein. *Enteignung*—variously translated as “dispossession” or “expropriation”—is a narrower and more precise term of art than primitive accumulation. More to the point, it comes closer to grasping the original intent of the revisionist theories of primitive accumulation: naming a form of violence distinct from the silent compulsion of exploitation. Rather than working with a distinction between general vs. primitive accumulation, then, I commend working with a distinction between exploitation and dispossession (where the latter is used in a more specific sense than simply as a synonym for PA itself). By disaggregating primitive accumulation, we allow for the possibility of relating exploitation and dispossession in a variety of ways rather than assuming they hang together in the manner envisioned by Marx's “classic form.”

II.

At the most general level, Marx employs the concept of dispossession to denote the process by which “immediate producers” (*unmittelbare Produzenten*) are separated from direct access to the means of production and/or subsistence. Marx’s most basic and frequent example of this is the separation of peasant agricultural producers from direct access to publicly held land, or “commons.” Through his use of the term dispossession, Marx thereby teaches us something about his views on land, nature, and locality or territorial rootedness. Marx uses a variety of formulations to elaborate upon the idea, but one influential phrasing is that dispossession entails the “theft of land.” *Capital* is replete with words like *Raub* [robbery] and *Diebstahl* [theft] as instantiations of *Enteignung* or *Expropriation*.¹¹ Marx also occasionally uses these terms more or less interchangeably with *Aneignung*, which translators have frequently rendered as usurpation, although appropriation is probably more helpful, since it retains the direct link to expropriation, proprietary, and indeed property.

While evocative (and thus popular in contemporary debates), the phrase “theft of land” is indeterminate in a variety of ways (Linebaugh, 2014). Both key words need unpacking. The former term seems to imply a normative basis for the critique, denoting a kind of offense or violence, while the latter suggests its natural object. But what exactly is meant by *theft* here and in what sense can it pertain to *land*? Is this meant only as a specific example, relevant to seventeenth-century enclosures and/or nineteenth-century colonialism, or is it the necessary and fundamental expression of a general dispossessive logic in capitalist development across time and space? And what of the conjunction joining them? Is the key element theft, with a variable object, or is land the decisive element, subject to various kinds of appropriations? We must press Marx on both key terms.

In the ordinary sense of the term, theft is an event, most often taking place between two individuals. By contrast, when Marx is providing a more

¹¹ In the first and second German editions of *Das Kapital*, Marx periodically uses the term *Enteignung*. However, in the third and fourth editions (after Marx had worked on the French translation), many of the key Germanic terms have been substituted for Latinate words (e.g. *Expropriation* for *Enteignung*, *Exploitation* for *Ausbeutung*). The period of the 1872 French translation of *Das Kapital* is a telling transition moment in this movement between Germanic and Latinate terms. In at least one edition of the *Das Kapital* from 1872 (i.e., after the publication of the French translation), most of the references to “expropriation” have been replaced with “enteignung.” So, for instance, the subtitle for Part VIII, Chapter 2 becomes “Enteignung des Landvolks von Grund und Boden,” rather than “Expropriation des Landvolks von Grund und Boden.” Or: “Mit einem Wort: die Masse der Menschheit *exproprierte sich selbst* zu Ehren der „Accumulation des Kapitals” (MEGA, II.5, 613) was changed to “*enteignete sich selbst*” in at least one German edition (based on the 1872 edition of *Das Kapital*). See Karl Marx (2009: 710). I have not been able to determine why these changes were made.

systematic explication of dispossession, he clearly intends a continual process that ought to be analyzed from the standpoint of class-formation, rather than individual agents taken in isolation. Although he does occasionally fall into speaking of individual acts of violence [*individuelle Gewalttat*], the more proper designation continues to reference a “process of separating” [*Scheidungsprozeß*]. What exactly is being separated from whom may still remain unclear, but the emphasis on a process intrinsic to the original formation of the capital relation seems to transcend the ordinary sense of theft or robbery.

There is, however, another sense in which “theft of land” is unhelpful for getting at the specificity of dispossession in the general theory of primitive accumulation. If we persist in speaking of the theft of land, we may be lulled into thinking of “land” here in a narrow sense, that is, as one object of possession among others. Marx repeated uses the phrase *Grund und Boden* when speaking of the object of expropriation: “grounds and lands” are that from which we are dispossessed. But this is clearly shorthand for a more expansive sense of those terms. In fact, land stands here in for the foundational relationship to the original means of production as provided by the earth itself. There is a great deal that could be investigated further here, including Marx’s conception of a “social metabolism” between humanity and the natural world, which crops up periodically in *Capital*. We don’t need a full analysis of this relationship, however, in order to observe that “land” here is not another ordinary object of possession. When Marx speaks of land in the context of dispossession, he does not mean it as a good, but as the condition of possibility for the production of goods, and ultimately for the reproduction of social life itself. It comprises a key element in what Rosa Luxemburg called the “natural economy” (Luxemburg, 2003: chapter 27).

This leads to a third and final sense in which “theft of land” is unhelpful. In the ordinary sense of the term, theft denotes the immoral and/or unlawful transfer of property from one person to another—e.g., I take your bike from you. In this common use of the term, goods or commodities move from one person to another. In a manner of speaking, we might say that the people remain static while the objects themselves circulate. Although the phrase “theft of land” helpfully points to some ways in which dispossession is like robbery in the ordinary sense, it can conceal the distinctiveness of the basic relationship to the earth referenced here. For if I “steal” your land, I don’t literally move it from your home to mine. Rather, I move *you*. Whenever Marx speaks of the theft of land as a key instantiation of dispossession, he flags for us the way in which land designates one key distinctive aspect of the interactive relationship between humans and the non-human natural environment—namely, its *spatiality* and/or *territorial specificity*. To speak of dispossession as a foundational element to the production and reproduction of

the capital relation is, therefore, to indicate something of the ways in which capitalism disrupts or disturbs our orientation in space, our place-based relations. This basic point has important implications for any theoretical analysis of the specificity of political struggles mediated primarily through relationships to land, belying any simple reduction to questions of property and theft. To give but one quick example, a “right of return” in the context of struggles over land entails not a return of the property to the original owner but a return of the owner to her original home. If the primary historical expression of dispossession is that of immediate producers from their basic relationship to land, then it necessarily entails the forced movement of people; it implies dislocation. While theft in the ordinary sense can be violent, it does not necessarily denote this geospatial reorganization of populations in the way that dispossession from land seems to require. It is perhaps in recognition of this fact that Marx fairly consistently employs the pairing “expropriation and expulsion” (*Enteignung und Verjagung*) in the later sections (chapters 30–33) of *Capital*. In general, then, we can at least provisionally see that to speak of dispossession is to entangle ourselves in questions far larger than the simple theft of objects.

Although Marx provides indispensable resources for analyzing the distinctiveness of dispossession as a form of violence, as we have already noted above, he is not interested in expropriation for its own sake. Instead, dispossession is analyzed in *Capital* instrumentally, that is, as a means of explaining proletarianization. This is apparent even in his analysis of the violent expulsion and “clearing process” implied by dispossession. In his account of the transformation of the Scottish highlands, for instance, Marx emphasizes that “the last great process of expropriation of the agricultural population from the soil [*Der letzte große Expropriationsprozeß der Ackerbauer von Grund und Boden*]” is “the so-called ‘clearing of estates,’ i.e., the sweeping of human beings off them. All the English methods hitherto considered culminated in ‘clearing’” (Marx, 1976: 889). Marx even expressly links this clearing process to environmental destruction and colonial expansion (Marx, 1976: 893). However, he proceeds to interpret this process of dispossession as causally linked to the other component elements of primitive accumulation, especially proletarianization. Marx is quite clear that the purpose of this dispossession process is precisely to drive landed peasantry into disciplinary waged-labor relations:

The intermittent but constantly renewed *expropriation and expulsion* [*Expropriation und Verjagung*] of the agricultural population supplied the urban industries, as we have seen, with a mass of proletarians . . . The thinning-out of the independent self-supporting peasants *corresponded directly with the concentration of the industrial proletariat*. (Marx, 1976: 908; emphasis added)

In other words, Marx views the violence of dispossession in light of the other constitutive elements of primitive accumulation, namely, proletarianization, market formation, and urbanization. *Expropriation und Verjagung* emerge as key concepts for him in these moments, but only instrumentally as the means of explaining proletarianization. The enclosures of the commons and the clearing of the land are undertaken *in such a way as* to generate an initial market in labor.

This formulation is, however, vulnerable to the same criticisms Marx lodged against the traditional political economists. Proletarianization cannot be the motivational impetus behind the enclosure of the commons since this would, again, presume the context it is meant to explain. Marx comes close to committing this error at times because he does not always clearly differentiate between *functional* and *explanatory* accounts. While the enclosures of the commons may have significant explanatory power when it comes to documenting the formation of an urbanized class of wage laborers, it is an altogether different matter to claim this as its *function*. On Marx's own terms, it cannot be the function of dispossession to generate a proletariat, at least not in the original case. We must qualify with "in the original case" here, because it *is* possible to envision a non-tautological functionalist account of dispossession relative to proletarianization *after* the original formation of a capitalist society. From that point on, the demand for new labor may in fact be a significant factor in subsequent enclosures and dispossessions.

To clarify the distinction, consider two archetypal agents of dispossession in *Capital*: the Duchess of Sutherland and E. G. Wakefield. Marx pillories the first for her appropriation of 794,000 acres of land and subsequent expulsion of the Scottish clans who had lived on them "from time immemorial" (Marx, 1976: 891). However violent this process of dispossession was, it was not undertaken *in order* to produce a class of vulnerable waged proletariat, even if this was the effect. E. G. Wakefield is an entirely different case, however. The English colonial advocate did expressly and intentionally work to dispossess both Indigenous peoples and independent agrarian settler-producers *in order* to generate and maintain a pool of vulnerable waged laborers in the colony of New South Wales, and they could do so precisely because previous iterations of dispossession had *already* generated a proletariat (Marx, 1976: Chapter 33).¹² Although both processes of dispossession are related to proletarianization *in some way*, they are also importantly different in a manner that alters the overarching conceptualization of PA. In the move from Sutherland to Wakefield, we also move from an explanatory account of the dispossession-proletarianization connection to a functionalist one.

¹² To see the intentionality behind Wakefield's analysis, one need only read his 1849 work, *A View of the Art of Colonization*, which is expressly offered as a theory of *systematic* colonization.

My postulate then is that the causal linkage between dispossession and exploitation in Marx's original formulation is underdetermined. It is not the case that dispossession is always explainable in terms of its function relative to proletarianization, a matter that is obscured by the modular conception of primitive accumulation in both its original and revisionist forms. It is, however, possible to recast dispossession as a distinct category of violent transformation independent of the processes of proletarianization and market formation. To do so, however, requires relating labor to land.

III.

As mentioned earlier, the phrase *Grund und Boden* appears periodically throughout *Capital*, but it is a phrase that stands in need of some explication. On the one hand, as we have already seen, terms like "land," "ground," "earth," and "soil" are used in their ordinary-language senses to refer to various material objects in the simple sense. It is in this sense that Marx (and later thinkers) speaks from time to time of the "theft of land." Land here appears to be little more than another kind of commodity, reworked by capitalism, and subject to the same forces we would expect to find in the struggle over any other resource.¹³ In other moments, however, Marx is more careful—expressly working to demonstrate how it is that land is not, in fact, simply another object of production and circulation. In those moments when Marx speaks to the distinctiveness of land, he typically does so in a voice more reminiscent of his earlier, so-called anthropological writings. In these passages, the land appears as a category derived from a classical Hegelian idiom of "man and nature." In short, *Land* is dialectically related to the category of *Labor*. Consider the formal definition of labor from Chapter 7 of *Capital*:

Labor is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature.

¹³ Even here, however, we should be careful not to impose a false chain of equivalence. To say that land can be conceptualized as a commodity is not to say that it is a commodity *like any other*. The very conception of "commodity" already denotes a mysterious dual-sided character, disclosed dialectically. Commodities are expressed as both use- and exchange-value, and in this sense all commodities must be both *alike* and *unlike*. So to notice that the land can be a commodity is not to deny the possibility (indeed, the certainty) that land must retain some trace of its use-value, making it both *like* other commodities and also importantly *unlike* them.

Labor in this precise sense is said to be “an exclusively human characteristic,” because “man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realizes [*verwirklicht*] his own purpose in those materials” (Marx, 1976: 284). This definition is clearly rooted in a Hegelian framework, with its emphasis on the external objectification of the will:

During the labor process, the worker’s labor constantly undergoes a transformation, from the form of unrest [*Unruhe*] into that of being [*Sein*], from the form of motion [*Bewegung*] into that of objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeit*]. (Marx, 1976: 296)

From this general definition, Marx proceeds to disarticulate the labor process into three component parts: (1) purposeful activity, (2) the object on which that work is performed, and (3) the instruments of that work (Marx, 1976: 284). We are left then with a labor process comprised of *activity*, *object*, and *instrument*.

It is in the context of this discussion of labor that we find a more formal and conceptually precise definition of land. In the formal sense given by *Capital*, land is not merely another product of labor (a commodity), but is rather a special kind of *instrument* or *medium* of labor. In the tripartite division above, it is number 3, not 2. Marx writes:

An instrument of labor is a thing, or a complex of things, which the worker interposes between himself and the object of his labor and which serves as a conductor, directing his activity onto that object . . . Leaving out of consideration such ready-made means of subsistence as fruits, in gathering which a man’s bodily organs alone serve as the instruments of his labor, the object the worker directly takes possession of is not the object of labor but its instrument. Thus nature becomes one of the organs of his activity, which he annexes to his own bodily organs, adding stature to himself in spite of the Bible. As the earth is his original larder, so too it is his original tool house. It supplies him, for instance, with stones for throwing, grinding, pressing, cutting, etc. *The earth itself is an instrument of labor.* (Marx, 1976: 285)

So, rather than relating land back to other commodities, in this formulation it is clearly seen as a component of the broader category of “nature.” It is part of “the earth itself.” In some cases, it seems that the term “land” is being used to designate that element of nature yet to be transformed directly by human laboring activity. In these moments, land is deployed paradoxically as both an *instrument of labor* and as that which stands *outside of labor*. Land is, “economically speaking, all the objects of labor furnished by nature *without human intervention*” (Marx, 1976: 758). Such apparent contradictions can

only be resolved by grasping them dialectically, that is, by relating them to the more general category of nature. It would take us too far from our specific objectives here to provide a complete explication of the concept of nature in Marx, but it is nevertheless important to note that the status of the land as both inside and outside of the labor process reflects Marx's broader conceptualization of nature as something "outside" of humanity, or at least non-identical with it (i.e., that which humanity confronts and transforms) and, at the same time, the totality of all that exists (thereby encompassing humanity as well). Marx's innovation was in recasting the moment of encounter with nature from a contest with an unhistorical, homogenous substratum to an already historically mediated element of human practice. Nature is not eternally self-same but is itself the product of previous generations of human praxis. As a result, it has a necessarily temporal and historical character.¹⁴

Marx's use of the term land is therefore clearly intended to link labor and nature. However, it is not synonymous with either of these. For land in its specificity designates a relationship to *place*. The metabolic international of humans and nature is rooted in and mediated through particular locales, and this territorial specificity gives form to a society's labor process. This is reflected in the simple observation that to forcibly relocate an entire human community to some other place is to fundamentally and irrevocably transform it (moreover, most people view their homelands as non-fungible, to the point that adequate compensation cannot, even in principle, be given for their irredeemable loss or destruction). So, just as we can affirm the Hegelian–Marxist point that human communities do not interact with nature in an historical vacuum, we must add that neither do they encounter it in a *spatial* one. Land then is best grasped here as an intermediary concept—situated between labor and nature, between activity and object—designating the spatial and territorial specificity of this mediation. Importantly, while this spatiality can be shaped and reworked by human praxis, it is not reducible to that activity. The land mediates laboring activity through a set of spatial relations that are not themselves the product of human will, but rather a set of worldly circumstances in which we find ourselves. This is why it functions as a mediator: it retains something of the natural world. (This is the reason, for instance, why Karl Polanyi (2001 [1944]) insisted land was really only a "fictitious commodity.") While land can clearly be commodified in certain respects (bought, sold, traded, rented, stolen, etc.), it nevertheless must also be grasped in its distinctiveness if we are to understand the nature of dispossession.

It is true, of course, that Marx's primary understanding of dispossession as the "theft of land" is highly indebted to a specific historical context in which

¹⁴ My understanding of Marx on "nature" is indebted to Alfred Schmidt (2014), as well as the discussion of this work in Neil Smith (2008) and John Bellamy Foster (2000).

land acquisition played a determinate role in the shape and structure of capitalist development. A suitably reconstructed account reveals, however, that Marx's focus on land is the particular expression of a generalizable insight, namely, that dispossession entails the appropriation of, and consolidated class monopoly in, the mediated "metabolic interaction" of humanity and the productive resources of the earth. It is thus not reducible to primitive accumulation writ large, nor to abstracted conceptions of privatization or the "release of public assets."

In reformulated accounts of dispossession, Marxist thinkers frequently pass over the original emphasis on land and instead adopt a highly abstract formulation: the appropriation of the means of production.¹⁵ This general phrase appears to avoid the problems of overly specifying a *particular* historical configuration of the forces of production. The "means of production" are highly variable in content, containing almost anything depending upon the historical and sociological specifics. They can include everything from factory equipment and tools to computers and other electronic devices. However, all of those objects are themselves the *products* of previous cycles of labor. They may function as the means of production in specific contexts, but their unequal distribution is not itself necessarily the function of a dispossessive logic. Rather, inequality in such goods can be more easily explained as the fruits of exploitation. In order for dispossession to be a *distinctive* category of capitalist violence (e.g., not reducible to exploitation), we must be clear in our use of the abstract formulation. The unequal access here must, in other words, ultimately refer to some element contained within the concept of "means of production" that is not reducible to the product of labor itself. As intimated above, this irreducible element is the contribution of the productive powers of the natural world. If we follow Marx's logic back through the various particular manifestations of the means of production, we arrive at the insight that the "separation process" at the heart of dispossession is a separation of the bulk of humanity from the productive power of nature. As he put it in the *Grundrisse*, while "*all production is appropriation of nature on the part of an individual within and through a specific form of society,*" the specific and necessary component of capitalist production is the

(1) *Dissolution* of the relation to the earth—land and soil—as natural condition for production—to which [the worker] relates as to his own inorganic being; the workshop of his forces, and the domain of his will . . . [and] (2) *Dissolution of*

¹⁵ This is true of David Harvey's use of the phrase "accumulation by dispossession," which is offered as only a more general rephrasing of primitive accumulation, with no specific reference to land or nature.

the relations in which he appears as proprietor of the instrument. (Marx, 1993: 88, 497)

“Land” is the name given to this irreducible element in *Capital* because it was the most visible and concrete manifestation of this dual-sided dissolution/appropriation in the specific immediate contexts that most shaped Marx’s thought. This can be obscured by the fact that we also speak of land as the means of production for one particular kind of laboring activity—namely, agricultural. Hence, possible confusion arises from the fact that the term is used both as *one example* of the means of production (e.g., on par with tools) *and* as the original fount of all other, secondary means of production. A properly reconstructed account must preserve the original insight of the latter while, at the same time, transcending the limitations of the former. In so doing, we must move beyond the particular expression given in the nineteenth-century portrait of land as bound distinctly to agricultural production, but also the notion that its appropriation is “originary” in a temporal sense, that is, as an event in time or a stage of development. What follows from this is that dispossession comes to name a distinct logic of capitalist development grounded in the appropriation and monopolization of the productive powers of the natural world in a manner that orders (but does not directly determine) social pathologies related to dislocation, class stratification, and/or exploitation, while simultaneously converting the planet into a homogeneous and universal means of production. Moreover, since we have freed this formulation from the specific historical configuration envisioned by the original analysis of primitive accumulation, we can properly view it as a process that is constitutive and contemporary.

IV.

This essay has examined the history of interpretation of the category of “primitive accumulation” in Marxist thought. I have argued that the dominant strategy adopted by contemporary interpreters has been to extend the category to cover a range of phenomena not subsumed therein by Marx himself. Contemporary scholarship has been particularly concerned to refute the notion that primitive accumulation is a historical stage of capitalist development and, instead, to reframe it as a feature of ongoing spatial expansion. The motivations behind these reformulations are clear. Revisionist accounts seek to expand and extend the category of primitive accumulation out of a desire to foreground colonial violence as constitutive to contemporary capitalism. My argument here has been that these aims are better advanced through a disaggregation of the category rather than through its simple extension. Beyond

the general aim of foregrounding imperialism, I contend, this enables us to retain the importance of struggles over *land* in the context of colonization and Indigenous resistance.

Such an argument returns us back to Rosa Luxemburg. More so than most of her contemporaries, Luxemburg was concerned to uncover the plural temporalities of capitalist accumulation, particularly in its imperial guise. Moreover, she understood how central land was to the context of colonial dispossession. As others in this volume attest, Luxemburg grasped that modern European colonialism was qualitatively unique in its capacity to seize and transform the means of production and subsistence that undergirded alternative forms of life.¹⁶ In a word, that substratum of life was *land*. As she put it:

The European conquerors are the first who are not merely after subjugation and economic exploitation, but the means of production itself, by ripping the land from underneath the feet of the native population. In this way, European capitalism deprives the primitive social order of its foundation. What emerges is something worse than all oppression and exploitation, total anarchy and a specifically European phenomenon, the uncertainty of social existence. (Luxemburg, 2004: 110)

At work here are a set of keen insights that reverberate backward through the preceding discussion. For such a formulation retains much of Marx's original insights into the question of land as a mediation of labor and life while, at the same time, bringing the distinctiveness of modern imperial violence to the fore. This will be important therefore, to the broader project undertaken in this book—that of creolizing Luxemburg—because it therefore provides indispensable resources for movements aimed at defending the earth from the predations of imperial-capitalism.¹⁷

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¹⁶ In particular, see contributions by Jane Anna Gordon and Drucilla Cornell in this volume.

¹⁷ I have attempted to explore such movements in greater detail in Robert Nichols (2020).

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Chapter 12

“No Eyes, No Interest, No Frame of Reference”

*Luxemburg, Southern African Historiography, and Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*¹

Jeff Guy

In a rousing and provocative treatment of South Africa in the historical section of *The Accumulation of Capital* (Luxemburg, 1968), Rosa Luxemburg applied aspects of her theoretical arguments on the necessary structural links between capitalist and non-capitalist systems to the contemporary imperialist world. She described the destructive impact of mining capital on Boer small-commodity producers, who had themselves “built their peasant economy like parasites on the backs of Negroes” (Luxemburg, 106: 411). These writings, together with Rosa Luxemburg’s earlier studies of the impact of capitalist forms of production on non-capitalist societies, and the imperatives that structure their interaction (Luxemburg, 2004: Part One), are especially interesting to those of us who have studied the dynamics of the impact of capitalism on pre-capitalist societies and tried to apply these studies to the writing of historical narratives. In addition to this, the recent application by radical commentators of the idea of primitive accumulation to contemporary manifestations of imperialism allows Luxemburg’s work to reach across the century that has passed since she used her remarkable talents so courageously

¹ This piece originally appeared in *The Accumulation of Capital in Southern Africa: Rosa Luxemburg’s Contemporary Relevance*, edited by Patrick Bond, Horman Chitonge, and Arndt Hopfmann. Johannesburg: Regional Office of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2006. Pp. 26–45.

to analyze—and change—her world. In this chapter, I examine some of her ideas and their application in the context of the historiography of the relation between capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production in South Africa and suggest some of the reasons why we should revive this important debate and extend it beyond the walls of an increasingly confined academy.

THE DISSOLUTION OF PRIMITIVE COMMUNISM

Chapter 2 of *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader* is made up of a section of her projected *Introduction to Political Economy*, which had its origins in lectures given at Social Democratic Party School in Berlin 1908. It is entitled “The Dissolution of Primitive Communism: From the Ancient Germans and the Incas to India, Russia, and Southern Africa.” Let me say at the start that Luxemburg’s examples and arguments were limited by the source material available to her and by contemporary scholarship. Some of the positions she took can now be seen to be of their times, and have been overtaken and are no longer tenable. But this does not apply to her starting point, the necessary interaction of non-capitalist systems with capitalist ones and the significance of this relationship to the structural demands of capitalist accumulation, nor does it apply to her protest at the social, economic, and moral consequences of those who suffered as a result of this relationship. The stance that she took—theoretical, historical, and practical—was rare in her times and remains sufficiently unusual in our times so as to make her work theoretically pertinent and historically significant.

Luxemburg begins with a description of “the mark community that has been researched thoroughly in terms of its internal structures, the German one” (Luxemburg, 2004: 71). Clans were made up of peoples living in households to which were allocated a particular tract of arable land. Historical research suggested this system itself had evolved from an earlier one where land had been cultivated collectively, but this had been replaced by the annual allocation of agricultural land to the male in charge of the household. Mark members elected the head of the mark community and he was bound by its decisions. Resources—water and forests and grazing—were held in common; land not occupied and worked was lost, and there was a range of communal labor obligations, including resource and livestock management.

In time, the annual allocation of arable land became less frequent, moving in time toward a system of inheritance. But although there were great variations over space and in time, Luxemburg argued that the essential features of this form of pre-capitalist organization could still be discerned. Initially, the collective, communal elements were predominant. Land was distributed and re-distributed on a regular basis, political leaders were chosen for

limited periods, all practices which worked against the emergence of elites. But just as these communal elements sprang from conditions in which the mark emerged, so also did elements which moved away from communalism. Thus, the length of the land allocation period was increased, evolving eventually into the inheritance of rights to agricultural land. The democratically elected mark leadership became a hereditary post. The low level of development of productive forces meant that aggression in lean times created the need for military specialization and this worked against communalism.

Despite such changes, and the wide variations under different conditions, Luxemburg believed that the basic features of the mark could be discerned in many epochs and all parts of the world. Her starting point was based on contemporary understandings of the ancient Germans. But Inca society demonstrates the possibility of the co-existence of two forms of mark, dominant and dominated, in a single formation. Her Indian example was derived from the "Asiatic mode," where village structures and production persisted as conquerors imposed their different forms of state exploitation. Luxemburg writes vividly of the cruelty in the remnants of the Russian village commune after the emancipation of the serfs and the consequences of exploitation through taxation.

The southern African example is drawn from the writings of the Portuguese traveler Antonio Candido Pedroso Gamitto and his description of societies on the borders of present-day Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo as they were in 1830–1831. He concentrates on the Mwata Kazembe, a patriarchal conquering dynasty from the Lunda which established itself over the matriarchal cultivators and fishers in the Lualanda valley where it enters Lake Mweru. The lengthy extract she reproduces is a typical nineteenth-century traveler's account of barbaric and savage despotism: a ruler dressed in exotic cloth and jewels, a court decorated with animal skins and human skulls, and a people bearing the marks of despotism on their mutilated bodies.

The account is important as a historical source but obviously very limited, and Luxemburg's critical comment is interesting. Although she doesn't develop the idea, she is intensely aware of the limitations of the observer, trapped by his bourgeois Eurocentrism:

This is a picture of a society that has moved a long way from the original foundations of every primitive community, from equality and democracy. It should not, however, be a foregone conclusion that under this kind of political despotism, the relations of the mark community, the communal ownership of the land and soil, and communally organized labor, ceased to exist. As for the Portuguese, who are able to record exactly the superficial rubbish such as costume and courtesans, when it comes to things that run counter to the European system of private ownership, they have, just as all Europeans, no eyes, no interest, no frame of reference. (Luxemburg, 2004: 108)

In another example of cultural blindness, she refers to an English traveler's account² of the grotesque behavior of an African chief as

In fact a much less absurd and insanely comical phenomenon than the rule of a person "by the grace of God" over sixty-seven million members of a people who produced the likes of Kant, Helmholtz, and Goethe. And yet even the worst enemy of this ruler could not call him a magician. (Luxemburg, 2004: 103)

"Primitive communist society," she continues,

through its own internal development, leads to the formation of inequality and despotism. It has not yet disappeared; on the contrary, it can persist for many thousands of years under these tribal conditions. Such societies, however, sooner or later succumb to a foreign occupation and then undergo a more or less wide-ranging social reorganization.

The Arab influence on the east coast of Africa, slavery, its role in the development of despotism in the interior, the European age of discovery and its intensification of trade in human beings, all brought further radical change to primitive communism. But no matter how radical, this was only change—it was European capitalism that terminated "primitive social relations."

The European conquerors are the first who are not merely after subjugation and economic exploitation, but the means of production itself, by ripping the land from underneath the feet of the native population. In this way, European capitalism deprives the primitive social order of its foundation. What emerges is something worse than all oppression and exploitation, total anarchy and a specifically European phenomenon, the uncertainty of social existence Before the advance of capitalism, the primitive social order, which outlasted all previous historical phases, capitulates. Its last remnants are eradicated from the earth and its elements—labor power and means of production—are absorbed by capitalism. The early communist society thus fell everywhere—primarily because it was made obsolete by economic progress—in order to make room for prospects for development. (Luxemburg, 2004: 110)

The Accumulation of Capital

Luxemburg's best-known theoretical work, *The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to an Explanation of Imperialism*, published in German in 1913,³ begins with a lengthy and taxing criticism of Marx's theory of

² V.L. Cameron (1877).

³ According to *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, the original 1913 German edition had this subtitle. It does not appear, however, on the title page of the 1968 Monthly Review translated edition.

expanded reproduction, which underpins Luxemburg’s theory of imperialism. The argument about structural contradictions in Marx’s exposition on the nature of expanded reproduction is lengthy, technical, and has been criticized, but the conclusion is that capitalism is structurally unable to absorb the surplus value it creates and this leads to excess product and consequent crises of accumulation.

From this theoretical position, she develops her more accessible historical one: “Whatever the theoretical aspects, the accumulation of capital, as an historical process, depends in every respect upon non-capitalist social strata and forms of social organization” (Luxemburg, 2004: 60).⁴ Capitalist systems of production and reproduction originated in, developed from, and have always utilized non-capitalist systems as sources of labor and materials for production and as markets to absorb surplus value. The nature of this relationship depended on the nature of the non-capitalist economy. To the natural economy, in whatever form it appeared, there is only one form of response: its exploitation leading to its destruction. There are no features which capitalist production can utilize in a natural economy: in order to gain possession of its means of production—the land and its labor—and as a market for its goods, the natural economy has to be terminated. This happened in the era of primitive accumulation as feudal forms were undermined and transformed. And it was happening at the time Luxemburg was writing by means of “modern colonial policy.” There was no question, in the age of imperialism, of waiting for market forces to bring about the changes capital required:

Each new colonial expansion is accompanied, as a matter of course, by a relentless battle of capital against the social and economic ties of the natives, who are also forcibly robbed of their means of production and labor power Force is the only solution open to capital; the accumulation of capital, seen as an historical process, employs force as a permanent weapon, not only at its genesis, but further on down to present day. From the point of view of the primitive societies involved, it is a matter of life or death; for them there can be no other attitude than opposition and fight to the finish—complete exhaustion and extinction. Hence permanent occupation of the colonies by the military, native risings and punitive expeditions are the order of the day for any colonial regime. (Luxemburg, 1968: 370–371)

The violent search for such systems among competing capitalist nations leads not only to militarism and dangerous international rivalry but eventually to

⁴ This is a succinct version of the ideas expressed in Chapter XXVII of *Accumulation*.

the destruction of non-capitalist systems, and therefore, logically, the capitalist system itself which needs the non-capitalist system in order to survive.

Luxemburg's concentration on the impact of imperialism on the conquered, rather than on the conquerors, and her progress from the theoretical to the historical to the rhetorical a century ago is memorable and significant. And although firm in her broad generalization—the necessary termination of non-capitalist modes by capitalist ones—it is interesting to see in the specific case studies of colonial conquest her ability to look at their variations and specificities. She uses the French in Algeria, an eighty-year struggle over the appropriation of land. As her example of the opening of closed economies by European capital, she takes the example of the Opium Wars. For the destruction of self-sufficient rural industry and the small farmer, she looks to the United States and the onslaught of large-scale mechanization and big capital.

She then turns to South Africa and finds certain parallels with North America: the Boers can be compared to the American small farmer, but in this case pitted against not the capital-intensive, highly mechanized agricultural producers but the British tendency for expansion:

Both competitors had precisely the same aim: to subject, expel or destroy the colored peoples, to appropriate their land and press them into service by the abolition of their social organizations. Only their methods were fundamentally different. (Luxemburg, 1968: 412)

After the mineral revolution, mining capital and the Boer farmer came in to conflict over African land and labor until, by the end of the nineteenth century,

Mining capital had come to the end of its tether. The BSAC built railroads, put down the Kaffirs, organized revolts of the uitlanders and finally provoked the Boer War. The bell had tolled for the peasant economy. In the United States, the economic revolution had begun with a war, in South Africa war put the period to this chapter. Yet in both instances, the outcome was the same: capital triumphed over the small peasant economy which had in its turn come into being on the ruins of natural economy, represented by the natives' primitive organizations. The domination of capital was a foregone conclusion, and it was just as hopeless for the Boer Republics to resist as it had been for the American farmer. Capital officially took over the reins in the new South African Union which replaced the small peasant republics by a great modern state, as envisaged by Cecil Rhodes' imperialist program. The new conflict between capital and labor had superseded the old one between the British and Dutch. One million white exploiters of both nations sealed their touching fraternal alliance within the Union with the civil and political disfranchisement of colored workers ... And this noble work,

culminating under the imperial policy of the Conservatives in open oppression, was actually to be finished by the Liberal Party itself, amid frenzied applause from the “liberal cretins of Europe” who with sentimental pride took as proof of the still continuing creative vigor and greatness of English liberalism the fact that Britain had granted complete self-government and freedom to a handful of whites in South Africa. (Luxemburg, 1968: 415–416)

Certainly there are misunderstandings in the text. The terms and definitions are at times archaic and many historians would complain about the contours of her argument, though for this historian these would be quibbles. Given the context in which it was written, and the limitations of her source material,⁵ the fundamental structure of the argument remains, after a century, remarkable, robust, and provocative. Yet it is also, I believe, still capable of further development and this is what I want to attempt in the rest of this essay, taking a few of the fundamental ideas and examining them critically in the light of some other radical interpretations of South African history.

“HYBRID FORMS”

The pervasive theme of Luxemburg’s historical analysis is the contradiction within capital which demands at all stages of its historical development access to the means of production and the labor power of non-capitalist modes of production. Capitalism must interact with non-capitalist modes at all stages of its history. In 1970, Harold Wolpe wrote a significant article, much of it in response to an earlier article by Martin Legassick, which theorized the nature of capitalist development in South Africa and linked this with the shift in South African history from the policy of segregation to that of apartheid.

Influenced by the Marxist structuralism of the time, Wolpe made use of the concept of the “articulation of modes of production.” The South African capitalist mode of production worked in articulation with African pre-capitalist modes through the migrant labor system. The wars of conquest of the nineteenth century never completely alienated the Indigenous people from their land. Some African iron-using farming peoples were driven back beyond the frontier, but a significant proportion of others were incorporated within colonial boundaries where they retained access to the land as the means of production. This African-occupied land was now characterized as native

⁵ Limited, but not unintelligent or uninteresting to this day. For James Bryce’s *Impressions of South Africa*, see below. C.P. Lucas was an important figure in the Colonial Office for many years and used the most recent official sources in his *A Historical Geography of the British Colonies*.

“reserve” or some such term, where “communal land rights” were dispensed by “traditional or chiefly authority,” applying “customary law.”

Necessity became a virtue after the mining revolution and the conquest of the Boer republics, when the migrant labor system was developed by the mining industry and the South African state. Male African labor moved to the industrialized areas to work on contract for limited periods. When not working, or no longer able to work, they were sustained by the agricultural labor of their families in the rural areas. In this way, capital was able to create a disciplined ultra-exploited labor force, the rate of profit sustained by the fact that the wage did not have to carry the costs of reproduction. But it was impossible for this to continue indefinitely. From the start, the system had depended upon the fact that there was never sufficient land for a viable non-capitalist system to operate indefinitely, and as the twentieth century progressed, the process of articulation became less and less viable. After World War II, state intervention became necessary in order to sustain the cheap racialized labor system. The articulation of two modes of production was replaced by a capitalist one which sought to dominate, control, and effectively exploit labor by means of a system of racial discrimination at all levels, according to the tenets of the ideology of apartheid (Wolpe, 1995).

Despite its detractors at the time, and its more recent sidelining as an example of a now redundant structural Marxism, Wolpe’s ideas were influential and remain a challenging attempt to explain historical events outside the dominant racial paradigm. They are also in harmony with Luxemburg’s ideas on the continual, necessary interaction of the capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production.

Although of course Luxemburg was not able to theorize the link between pre-capitalist and capitalist modes in South Africa as a developed system,⁶ there is evidence that suggests that the empirical experience of aspects of what was to be characterized as “articulation” did capture her attention. She called it a “hybrid form”:

Obtaining the necessary labor power from non-capitalist societies, the so-called “labor problem,” is ever more important for capital in the colonies. All possible methods of “gentle compulsion” are applied to solving this problem, to transfer labor from former social systems to the command of capital. This endeavor

⁶ I have not yet been able to reconcile her view that colonial expansion “ripped” the land from beneath the conquered, and the evidence she presents of a slower, less obvious process of domination—the methods of “gentle compulsion” creating “hybrid forms.” Further investigation of these apparently contradictory positions would need to take into account the debate on primitive accumulation referred to in note 4 above.

leads to the most peculiar combinations between the modern wage system and primitive authority in the colonial countries. (Luxemburg, 1968: 363)

To substantiate "the fact that capitalist production cannot manage without labor power from other social organizations," she quotes at length (in a footnote) from the account that the English liberal academic and historian James Bryce wrote of his visit to South Africa in 1895 (Bryce, 1898: 248–251). It is significant that what caught her attention was Bryce's description of the De Beers closed compound at Kimberley and the manner in which African workers from all over southern and central Africa—"a living ethnological collection such as can be examined nowhere else in South Africa in Bryce's description"—were confined and controlled by this particular form of capitalist production. She also notes the essential dynamic of labor migrancy, a vivid example of capital interacting with pre-capitalist system: the wages earned in the mines were invested in bridewealth and non-capitalist production at home (Luxemburg, 1968: 364n.).

Luxemburg was therefore able to identify the salient manifestations of the essence of the labor process which in its different forms defined and determined the outline of South African history in the twentieth century. And in doing so, she became one of the distinguished community of Marxist scholars who have done so much to enlighten South African historiography by removing it from the domination of the dualism of the liberal empiricists with "no eyes, no interest, and no frame of reference."

PEOPLE AS THE AIM OF PRODUCTION

Having said this, I want to end with a critique of two related concepts and descriptions used by Luxemburg and Wolpe pertaining to the manner in which they describe the productive system which preceded commodity producing societies. When Luxemburg refers to the most fundamental form of human social organization, where private property, the division of labor, hierarchical structures, and commodity production are least developed, she tends to use the phrase "natural economy." It is, however, a concept which can no longer be considered tenable, if for no other reason than the achievements of anthropology and feminist theory. Wolpe, of course, was not tempted by the idea of a natural economy, but his descriptions of the South African pre-capitalist mode is nonetheless undeveloped: land is held in common, and kinship organizes labor and the distribution of the product; it is characterized as "redistributive." This is not only limited but misleading, and it was Belinda Bozzoli who mounted perhaps the most effective critique using a feminist perspective (Bozzoli, 1995).

Although not feeling it necessary to draw directly on Wolpe's use of "articulation of modes," my study of Zulu history in particular persuaded me that there were significant aspects of the structure of African farming societies—that is, of the pre-capitalist modes of production that were articulated with the capitalist mode and changed by it—that should be brought into the debate. In brief, I argued that so long as it was understood that they referred to a non-capitalist context, a number of conventional Marxist categories could be usefully applied to pre-capitalist African modes of production (Guy, 1990). These were societies organized around the production and accumulation, not of material goods as commodities, but of labor power as a commodity, as people. The productive process was controlled and organized by men but realized by the agriculturally productive capacity, as well as the reproductive capacity, of women. Reproductive (i.e., fertile) women had value against cattle when they passed from their fathers to their husbands in marriage, and once they were proved to be fertile and productive, cattle passed from husbands to fathers. Production and reproduction took place in aggregations of the largely self-sufficient, polygamous patriarchal homesteads which made up the pre-capitalist state. Political status and social power depended on the number of cattle/people/labor power a male homestead-head possessed and controlled. The largest homesteads were those of the head of state who also had authority over all the homesteads which made up the polity. He was also in nominal control of the land but was obliged to allow the use of that land to those men who gave him their allegiance. In return, these men were required to give tribute and labor to the head of the state—most intensely when they were young and unmarried, that is, before they, at a much lower level, assumed control of homestead production and the accumulation of labor themselves. This particular social feature was common in southern Africa but developed to an extreme by the Zulu heads of state who organized all young men into age-sets that labored for the king and served in the state army. This "military system" gave the king immense control over all aspects of production because it was only when he gave a particular age-set permission to marry that the men could set up productive units (homesteads) of their own and initiate the process of production, reproduction, and accumulation upon which the system was based.

The essential point to be made is that these were not societies based on commodity production or at least commodities as goods, although simple commodity exchange between largely self-sufficient homesteads was a feature of economic life. These were societies based on the reproduction of people and their equivalents realized largely in cattle or, more concisely, on the accumulation of labor power by men. They were, to paraphrase Marx, societies "in which man was the aim of production, not production the aim of man" (Marx, 1965: 84).

There are two linked points I want to draw from this. First about terminology. This was certainly not a "natural economy." Men had a right to arable land and had to allocate portions of this to their wives. Agricultural produce was retained not only within the homestead but within the different houses which made up the homestead. The crucial role played by their reproductive capacity gave women, I believe, considerable social power, the nature of which has still to be understood. But political authority based on patriarchy, descent, and age was fierce and exercised at all levels in the social formation.

In those cases where colonial forces were unable or unwilling to smash pre-capitalist societies, the impact of capital fractured these social structures along the fault lines created by patriarchy, age, and gender. In those cases when land was conquered as private property, various forms of tenancy were set up by which the landowner gave the homestead head access to land in return for the labor or the produce of his wives and children. When the colonial state set aside tracts of land for African occupation, cooperation was sought from a willing member of the patriarchal hierarchy who was set up as a chief.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Natal was organized on this basis. Agreements were reached between colonial officials and selected African men—usually, but not always, from the existing political hierarchy—who were given a degree of political and legislative autonomy and access to land in order to attract followers. I have described the system elsewhere as an "accommodation of patriarchs." Fifty years later, a similar system was set up in Zululand once the British army had destroyed the powerful, centralized hierarchy.

In these colonial systems, the household depended on the domestic labor of women and girls, herding by boys, and agricultural labor of women. Surplus was extracted by a system of taxation linked directly to the productive capacity of the homestead. Called the "hut tax," it was based in fact on female labor. Additional and increasingly necessary income was earned as wages in the settler economy by young men and returned to the homestead patriarch. In time, the young man would be rewarded when the father divided the homestead among his sons, who would set up homesteads of their own, using the bridewealth devolved on them by their father.

The features shared by the pre-colonial and the colonial system are clear: patriarchal authority, the gendered division of labor, agricultural production to sustain the homestead, and the unmarried sons of the homestead working for the dominant state. The hut tax was a novel but economically logical feature. It was characterized as an African system adapted to the demands of colonial rule, defended ideologically as "the Shepstone system" or "indirect rule." It was a system of the articulation of the modes of production as Wolpe

has it, and for Luxemburg another example of the necessity for capitalism to develop in association with non-capitalist productive systems, in this case one of the “peculiar combinations between the modern wage system and primitive authority in the colonial countries.”

For Luxemburg, writing about a wide range of social formations at the height of the imperialist era and just before the catastrophe of World War I, this continued and destructive interaction of the capitalist and non-capitalist system was a necessary consequence of their economic structures. Wolpe, writing in the late twentieth century on just one social formation, was able to analyze the South African example not just as a system but as a contradictory, dynamic, and self-destructive process.

In South Africa, there had never been enough land for the general reproduction of the pre-capitalist mode. Wages earned in the capitalist sector were never generally sufficient. Young men did necessarily return to their fathers' homesteads, and some women refused the role of rural reproducers, and the authorities of chiefs were often ignored. Such trends intensified with the consequences of capitalist production, the late nineteenth-century mining revolution with its demands for enormous quantities of cheap labor and increasing pressure on land and rentals. Wolpe suggests that the pre-capitalist mode, defended by the segregationist ideology but undermined and weakened by poverty and exploitation, lasted perhaps to the 1930s. It was replaced by a system of direct labor oppression, ideologically justified by apartheid which attempted to revive collapsed labor reserves now characterized as the reclaimed legacy of an autonomous African past.

But if we are to identify more precisely the passing of the pre-capitalist mode, we have to answer another set of questions more clearly: what factors define the pre-capitalist mode? These need to be decided before we can speculate on when they ceased to exist.

At one level, it might be argued that this evidence is widely available in the sources. It exists in the numerous documents in which African patriachs protest the changes colonialism has wrought on their lives—at the shortage or the loss of land, at the erosion of their authority, at the decimation of their hands, at the loss of their sons who have not returned from the mines, at the disobedience of their daughters. Statements on these themes are ubiquitous and can, to a degree, be confirmed by statistical evidence. But while such evidence is indicative, it is not in my opinion decisive: it is too subjective, too specific, insufficiently precise. Time and again we read of the disappearance of the traditional homestead, even the homestead system of production, only to find it reappearing in the records, to be destroyed again one, two, or three generations later. The nineteenth-century commissions are filled with the complaints of fathers that their sons and daughters have disappeared or are disobedient, turning their backs on the homestead

and their obligations to their kin. So are this week's television reports and newspapers.

We need a more precise indicator of the termination of the pre-capitalist mode than the assumed destruction of the homestead and the alleged behavior of its inmates. And I want to suggest that this might be found when the production in the homestead was no longer directed to the production and accumulation of labor power but to the production and accumulation of material commodities.

To take a hypothetical example (although I do have a historical personality in mind): consider a Zulu chief, a wealthy man at the time of the kingdom's independence, with a number of very large homesteads, dozens of wives, considerable herds of cattle, and followers numbered in thousands. His homesteads lay on a well-known trading route and all his life he had been involved in trade, exchanging his livestock for a range of commodities, including guns, and he became deeply involved in the colonial economy through his contacts with hunters, travelers, and traders. But despite the apparent changes, in his productive activities and transactions and in the goods in his homestead, he organized his chiefdom around the accumulation and production of labor power: the women in his homesteads, the herds attached to his homesteads, the young men serving in state army until given permission to establish their own homesteads.

After the 1879 conquest, this chief retained his land and actively supported the colonial regime. He and his people paid the hut tax out of surpluses acquired from trading and the wages of the young men now going in increasing numbers to the mines. Money was used increasingly in their different transactions, and the goods brought back from the urban centers began to change diet and dress, fundamental patterns of behavior. Even bridewealth began to be paid in cash or goods. Nonetheless, despite these changes to apparently significant features of social and economic life, the objectives of both rulers and ruled remained centered on the establishment of new homesteads, on marriage, and the exchange of goods between men for the productive and reproductive capacities of women. The pre-capitalist mode prevailed.

The chief was a traditionalist, and a lifetime's close dealing with traders had made him a good judge of men. A local storekeeper persuaded him, in this time of catastrophic livestock pandemics, to sell an increased portion of his animals, rather than invest it as bridewealth, or in his own homesteads, or in the homesteads of his sons. It was good advice, and the chief's savings bank and loan book meant that he retained his wealth when rinderpest and then east coast fever decimated the herds of Zulu cattle at the turn of the century. He continued to build homesteads, establishing in them young women he married through the payment of bridewealth in cattle, cash, or goods. He expected the same from the husbands and fathers of the men who married his

daughters. At one level, the dynamic of the pre-capitalist mode continued: patriarchal authority, the gendered division of labor, payment of bridewealth in order to establish the homestead.

But other aspects were changing. Increasing population exacerbated the shortage of land. An increasing number of his followers had insufficient land on which to maintain themselves and their families. Generalized poverty increased as viable homesteads took on responsibilities for destitute kin. It was difficult to retain control of wages of the young men working as migrants on the mines or the young women who fled rural poverty for city life. All these factors suggested that the pre-capitalist system was under severe strain and was changing. Nonetheless, patriarchal authority, polygamy, the payment of bridewealth, kinship obligations, and a number of associated customs and traditions remained, and these were all practiced and defended vigorously by the chief.

But he was, in fact, no longer working within a pre-capitalist mode. The bulk of income on which he depended was earned from the interest on the loans taken by the traders who bought his cattle, the savings in the bank book kept by the storekeeper, the sale of the agricultural produce of his wives, and the wages (decreasing in value) of his children. Even his people, while they still owned some cattle and used them as bridewealth, were dependent on (low) wages and the (limited) sale of agricultural produce. Despite the continued existence of social and cultural practices from the pre-capitalist era, the defining pre-capitalist circuit of women and cattle realized as labor power had been broken and inverted: people were no longer the aim of production; people produced commodities.

IN CONCLUSION

I have revisited aspects of South African historical theorizing, not only to give some idea of the remarkable and largely ignored contribution of Rosa Luxemburg but also to make some comments on historical chronology. Neither Luxemburg nor Wolpe are clear on just what constitutes the pre-capitalist mode. For Luxemburg, it includes the natural economy, primitive communism, and simple commodity production, and there follows the dissolution but not termination of such systems under the impact of capital.

Wolpe is vague on this question: the termination of the pre-capitalist mode is associated with declining rural reserve production and the termination of redistribution, sometime in the 1930s. I suggest above that, to decide when the pre-capitalist mode came to an end, little assistance is to be obtained from indicators of poverty, collapsing rural production, or the disappearance of customs and practices considered to be traditional, any more than the

converse suggests the opposite. Instead one has to look for evidence within the circuit of production to discover whether it is labor power or commodities that are being accumulated.

But why is this a fact of any significance? Why is it important to be able to identify the cessation of the pre-capitalist mode of production? One reason would be that such a discussion could, by looking at the South African example, make a contribution to the debate around the nature of primitive accumulation. However, I have not pursued this question in this chapter. Instead I want to consider its possible contribution to the urgent contemporary debate and struggle around the concept of Africa and being African.

Wolpe stated that one of the aims of his article on the articulation of modes of production was to direct analyses of South Africa away from racial explanations. The assertion of race has, however, returned with a vengeance. Cultural, political, and intellectual life in South Africa today is replete with ideas of Africa and being African. It is used to sell the "African experience" in its manifold forms, with all the distortions required by the privileged consumer such as the international tourist. It is used to explain, and even justify, socially unacceptable behavior, sexist behavior especially. And it is used to gain access to public funds in support of undemocratic political positions on the grounds that they reflect African tradition. Argument time and again comes up against the concept "African," which too often constitutes a barrier to further debate: it is understood only by those who define themselves as African and is therefore beyond external criticism.

One purpose in writing this chapter has been to suggest that if we can get a clearer theoretical idea of what the essential features were of the pre-capitalist mode of production in southern Africa, which (arguably it is true) does indicate an African concept (spatially), comparatively free of external influence, then we might find a way to move the argument forward by continuing to use economic, rather than racial or ethnic, categories.

The point I am making here is a pragmatic one. I do not believe that the search for an African essence is necessary or even achievable. But, as educators, we are not being effective when we use irrelevance against arguments which posit an essential African-ness. The argument can be presented with sincerely felt commitment but, at the same time, there are administrators, advertisers, journalists, celebrities, and politicians who promote and defend their activities on the grounds of their being African and in so doing exhibit an often sentimental, sometimes dangerous, racial, and sexual chauvinism. Ways need to be found to stay in the debate (i.e., not to be excluded on the grounds that we are un-African or even anti-African) for many reasons, including the urgent need to counteract the ideology of globalization which, in the name of international liberalization and democracy, provokes and intensifies ethnic, racial, and religious intolerance.

I said above that it was important to be able to argue within the realm of economic structures of production. This, again, is a pragmatic position used in order to clarify, not to suggest that social categories are unimportant. For of course, not only are social categories indispensable but, in the southern Africa context, pre-capitalist features like chieftainship and patriarchy retain their dynamism to this day, precisely because aspects of the pre-capitalist mode were not destroyed by capitalism but were instead retained and brought into articulation with the capitalist mode. But this is not to say they stayed the same. Despite the similarities of their outward features and thus the appearance of continuity (in, for example, *ubukhosi*, chieftainship, *ubudoda*, manliness, *lobola*, bridewealth) the system in which they were originally manifested and played a central structural role has long been transformed. Pre-capitalist social practices outlasted the pre-capitalist mode of production. They played an important role in the period of articulation. They are active to this day as capitalist accumulation continues to wreak havoc on South Africans.

But while this continuity might be socially and politically central, it is structurally peripheral. It is a remnant of an African mode of production, a social system long gone: a mode of production in which value was created by the productive and reproductive power of women, and in which the aim of production was people. It was a system epitomized in a word which has achieved wide currency today: *ubuntu*—the importance of reciprocal relations between people, communal concern and responsibility for others, the significance of others for ourselves; a concept with its origins in the southern African pre-capitalist mode of production, the unique feature of which was the creation of value through people. It is still used to evoke, if idealistically or by (for example) Desmond Tutu, an African sense of overriding social responsibility. But it has also been exploited (for example, as a marketing tool, the Ubuntu Marketing Philosophy), a development that confirms the argument in this chapter about the contradictory nature of history, in this case, the continued existence of a humane concept in inhumane conditions. A better understanding, an historical understanding, of *ubuntu* would enable it to be used, with intellectual honesty, in the creation of a better South Africa. But as long as it is used as a racial concept or an ethnic concept, with “no eyes, no interest, no frame of reference,” it must become, like the idea of tradition and custom itself, not an inspiration but a nightmare from the past, weighing on the brains of the living.

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Chapter 13

Luxemburg's Contemporary Resonances in South Africa

Capital's Renewed Super-Exploitation of People and Nature

Patrick Bond

For South Africans, Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* offered a profoundly relevant contribution to the Marxist theory of imperialism partly because she drew on primary accounts of this country's super-exploitation. Those were written during the critical period of primitive accumulation, and, as a result, she considered the context for land and natural resource dispossession, migrant labor, and ethno-patriarchal rule. In the process, she described and also theorized how settler colonialism's primitive accumulation was not a once-off affliction. Instead it was, *and remains*, a systematic way to arrange capitalist and non-capitalist relations to the benefit of the former, as a means of addressing internal contradictions within the accumulation process, albeit in a context of growing resistance.

Here is the line of argument. First, Luxemburg's *Accumulation* gives us the basic tools to work through why there is a "ceaseless flow of capital from one branch of production to another, and finally in the periodic and cyclical swings of reproduction between overproduction and crisis" (2003, 76). Second, as the capital flow turns from new sectors to new spaces, imperial power helps capitalist social relations dominate non-capitalist "natural economies." These are not only the terrains of pre-capitalist society (including patriarchal structures as well as proto-feminist reactions) and post-capitalist mutual-aid systems—including varieties of what can be considered "commons"—but also the environmental assets of dominated countries, of which Africans are the most sustained victims.

Third, Luxemburgist politics—which Gunnett Kaaf (in this volume) reminds us still inform the South African left's disputes over strategy—do

not necessarily require that all efforts be directed into building a political party at every moment in time. Instead, it is in the uneven defense of non-capitalist spheres of life that more progress has been recorded. “Commoning” is a useful term to describe many of these resistances (Cornell, 2012). In South Africa post-1994, these modes of resistance have at least five characteristics: removing vestiges of apartheid; opposing commodification of daily life; attacking late-capitalist investments in Intellectual Property that threatened millions of lives; transforming educational opportunities; and undermining the crony capitalism that Fanon (1963) warned would be an inevitable mode of post-colonial accumulation in his *Wretched of the Earth*. Stitched together properly, these offer broader lessons for socialist, feminist, anti-racist, and indeed eco-socialist politics, even if in the early 2020s, too many forces are arrayed against these to express confidence about an imminent left regroupment.

CAPITALIST VERSUS NON-CAPITALIST RELATIONS, IN STRUCTURAL SOCIO- POLITICAL-ECONOMIC TERMS

Luxemburg’s articulation of the settler-colonial version of imperialism, especially evident in South Africa, still rings true today:

Non-capitalist relations provide a fertile soil for capitalism; more strictly: capital feeds on the ruins of such relations, and although this non-capitalist milieu is indispensable for accumulation, the latter proceeds at the cost of this medium nevertheless, by eating it up. Historically, the accumulation of capital is a kind of metabolism between capitalist economy and those pre-capitalist methods of production without which it cannot go on and which, in this light, it corrodes and assimilates. (Luxemburg, 2003, 327)

Myriad contradictions arise from the capitalist and non-capitalist “articulations of modes of production,” as Harold Wolpe (1980) described the apartheid form. For example, Annette Kuhn and AnnMarie Wolpe (1982) explained the terribly adverse gender power relations observable in South Africa (as well as all other capitalist-patriarchal societies) during “social reproduction” or the “second shift.” This typically entails women’s unpaid labor in child-bearing and rearing and female care-giving for ill and elderly family and community members, often in addition contributing to community activities that add to overall social welfare. These functions exist, David Harvey (2017, 14) suggests, alongside Marx’s logic of the capital–labor relationship: “social reproduction as a separate and autonomous sphere of

activity providing in effect a free gift to capital in the persona of the laborer who returns to the workplace as fit and ready for work as possible.”

This is true generally across capitalist countries, but in the last century's evolution of Western social policy—for example, the “Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism” as analyzed by Gosta Esping-Andersen (1990)—the critical difference with South Africa is that under apartheid, women's child-rearing, home-based medical care of sick workers, and elder-care of retirees were largely performed in distant “Bantustan” homelands without any supportive state infrastructure (i.e., the standard childcare creches and schools, health systems, and retirement funds of advanced capitalism—aside from the sporadic existence of religious missionary schools). This structural feature of apartheid has to some extent persisted, given the state's extremely weak delivery capacity in rural areas.

The extent to which the wages earned by a laborer cover family reproduction costs helps to assess whether “super-exploitation” is underway. As John Smith (2018) argues, this would be increasingly evident in the “*reduction in the value of labor power by suppressing consumption levels* (or what amounts to the same thing, shifting production to countries where workers' consumption levels and the value of labor power is much lower)” (original emphasis). The “vast scale” at which this suppression of consumption happens today, he insists, is due to “the suppression of wages below the value of labor power and international variations in the rate of surplus value” (Smith, 2018).

Consider two aspects: wages that are below even family poverty levels in South Africa and local corporate profitability in relation to “international variations.” First, the StatsSA official agency does not provide us sufficient empirical evidence to fruitfully dwell on these two matters, but three superficial indicators of super-exploitation are suggestive of the depraved conditions that now prevail. First, the “Upper Bound Poverty Line” was in mid-2019 calculated by StatsSA as \$83.46/month (\$2.79/day), defined as enough money to buy food sufficient to provide an average person 2,100 calories per day plus “an allowance for the consumption of non-food basic necessities (such as clothing, shelter, transportation, education, etc.)” (StatsSA, 2018, 6).¹

¹ Disputes continue not only as to whether an income measure of poverty is appropriate, but also as to whether StatsSA is engaged in systemic under-counting of both essential expenses (including the food basket) and the share of the population living below the line. Normally, I prefer to use higher round-number estimates—the local-currency value of R50/day, or in mid-2019 dollar terms, \$100/month—because researchers at the University of Cape Town SA Labour Development Research Unit (Budlender et al., 2015) and an anti-poverty NGO (Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity, 2019) have identified serious methodological flaws at StatsSA. The latter suggests that a household budget of \$498 is appropriate, which is \$129/month/person for one of average size, that is, 3.86 members. Budlender et al estimated that, in contrast to StatsSA's calculation that 53 percent of South Africans survive with income under \$2.78/day, the actual figure was probably 10 percent higher in 2015; by 2019 poverty had worsened by a few more percent. An enormous “reserve army

It can be deduced that workers within the families comprising the lowest-income two-thirds of South Africans (i.e., that are at or below this line, with many deriving income only from tokenistic social grants) are super-exploited, presuming they enter the labor market. (Indeed, even if they are technically unemployed, they suffer the “reserve-army” function of dragging wages lower. And in any case, StatsSA has a very low bar for the definition of “work.”²) Within the labor market, a new national minimum wage was set in 2019 at \$198/month (aside from domestic work, farm labor, and state public works jobs, where the figure drops to \$119/month). For an average household size (3.86 people), a single earner would need \$298/month to keep her/his dependents at the poverty line.

In short, seen from below, there is extreme super-exploitation underway across the economy, with workers unable to maintain their households at the poverty line. A related indicator of super-exploitation through social reproduction is that this poverty line has not been penetrated by state social programs, for the social share of South Africa’s fiscal commitment is, contrary to impressions, very low: just 8 percent of GDP, which ranks fifth least generous among the world’s fifty main economies (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019, 105; Figure 13.1).

The second superficial indicator of whether South Africa qualifies as super-exploitative is the rate of profit of companies, in relation to those based elsewhere in the world. The most recent comparative data are from the International Monetary Fund’s annual Article IV Consultations, which periodically rate South Africa’s corporate profits against peers. The South

of labor” exists in South Africa, one able to survive only through access to a family member’s monthly state grant. (The main one is a \$27.45/month Child Support Grant that goes to 12 million primary caregivers, but it is means-tested for families whose head earns less than \$3500/year, or \$7000 if there are two heads of household.)

² The official South African unemployment rate is nearly 40 percent (counting “discouraged work seekers” who have given up looking), even though “work” is defined as merely one “yes” answer to any of these three questions: “In the last week, (a) Did you work for a wage, salary, commission or any payment in any kind (including paid domestic work), even if it was for only one hour? (b) Did you run or do any kind of business, big or small, for yourself or with one or more partners, even if it was for only one hour? (c) Did you help without being paid in any kind of business run by your household, even if it was for only one hour?” Until 2008, the StatsSA (2007, 3) definition was even more generous, with “employed” including these categories of activity, even if it was for just one hour over the week prior to the Labor Force Survey:

- Run or do any kind of business, big or small, for himself/herself
- Do any work for a wage, salary, commission or any payment in kind
- Do any work as a domestic worker for a wage, salary or any payment in kind
- Help unpaid in a family business of any kind
- Do any work in his/her own or family’s plot, farm, food garden, cattle post or kraal or help in growing farm produce or in looking after animals for the household
- Do any construction or repair work on his/her own home, plot, cattle post or business or those of the family
- Catch any fish, prawns, shells, wild animals or other food for sale or household food?

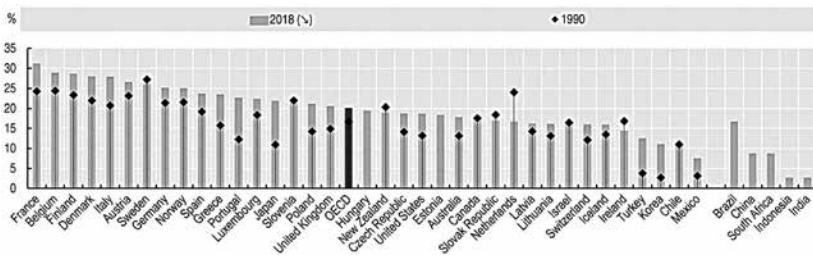


Figure 13.1 Public Social Spending as a Percent of GDP—2019 and 1990. Source: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2019, 105).

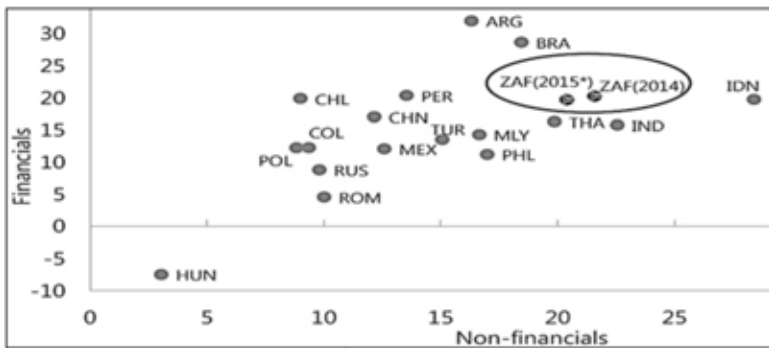


Figure 13.2 South African Financial and Non-financial Firm Profitability Compared to Peers, 2014. Source: International Monetary Fund (2016).

African operations of both local and international firms have recently ranked within the top three (among both high- and middle-income countries) for non-financial corporations' profits, alongside high-profit sites such as Indonesia and India; and also third for financial institutions' profits behind Argentina and Brazil (IMF, 2016, 2018) (Figure 13.2). The relative rates fluctuate in part because the overall rate of profit dropped in South Africa (as nearly everywhere) after 2007, following the 1993–2007 upturn that restored rates of profit to apartheid-era levels (Malikane, 2017) (Figure 13.3).

However, the problem with these rough indicators of super-exploitation is not only that they are slightly unreliable and excessively positivist in nature but that they abstract from the deeper socio-political relations that Luxemburg understood so well through her reading of secondary material about South Africa. As a result, they fail to incorporate temporal dynamics of profiteering as well as the social resistance that arises periodically as a result. In the 1980s, such resistance amplified pre-existing capitalist-crisis tendencies to the point that apartheid had to be jettisoned by big business. But

even more extreme internal contradictions are intrinsic to super-exploitative systems.

Looking at super-exploitation historically, as did Luxemburg, the character of these contradictions became obvious in South Africa, especially once their limits within over-accumulation were reached. As elaborated by Giovanni Arrighi, Nicole Marie Aschoff, and Ben Scully, this was “a paradigmatic outlier case of accumulation by dispossession—that is, as one of its extreme instances capable of highlighting in almost ideotypical fashion its nature and limits” (2010, 410). Figure 13.4 summarizes their assessment of the dialectic between conditions of successful

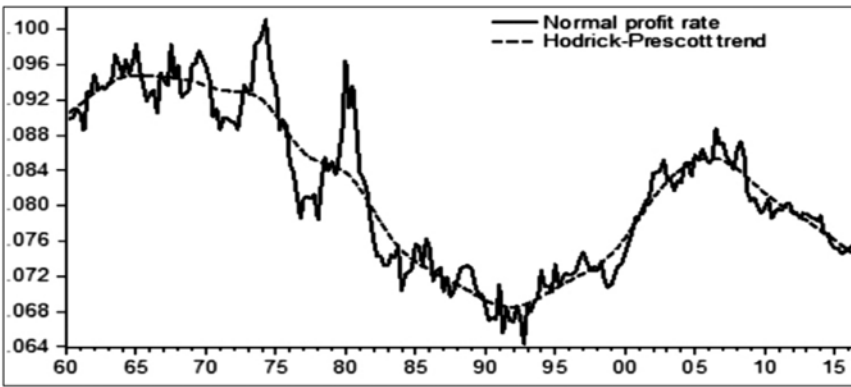


Figure 13.3 South Africa’s Rate of Profit, 1960-2016. Source: Malikane (2017).

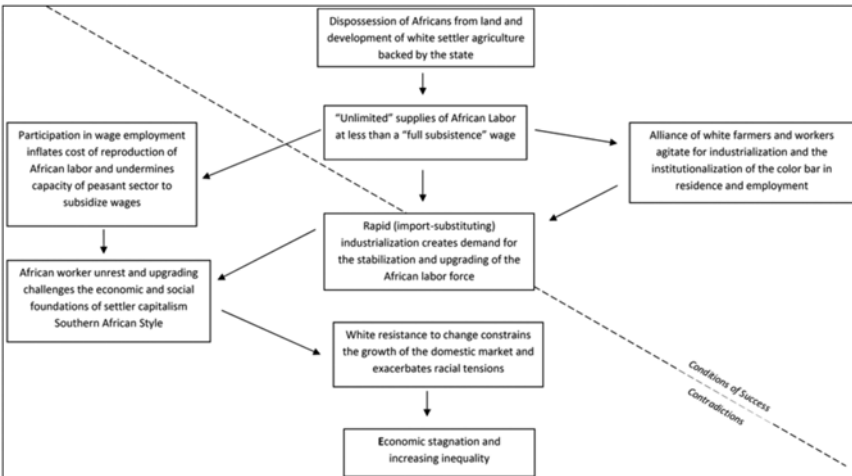


Figure 13.4 Apartheid-Capitalism’s Conditions of Success, and Contradictions. Source: Giovanni Arrighi, Nicole Marie Aschoff, and Ben Scully (2010).

super-exploitation and crucial contradictions that emerged from within those successes.

The limits and contradictions were witnessed in regular over-accumulation crises of capital. During apartheid's terminal period, the mid-1980s, the crisis was most associated with luxury-oriented import-substitution industrialization, due to limits to the size of the market, the extremely high level of class antagonism, and the bursting of the financial bubble in mid-1985. That was the catalytic event for white capital to shift political support from Pretoria Afrikaners to the exiled African National Congress (Field, 2009; Bond, 2014). But the crisis was displaced—not resolved—during the subsequent era of non-racial, constitutional democracy.

Although devalorization of capital exposed to various labor-intensive manufacturing sectors (clothing, textiles, footwear, appliances, electronics, etc.) occurred during the 1990s, and although the rate of profit was at least temporarily restored (Malikane, 2017), the unpatriotic character of formerly (white) "national capital" was ultimately the greatest contradiction. It was revealed in 1999–2001, when most major firms decamped their primary stock market listings from Johannesburg and moved abroad. Even Afrikaner firms did so in the late 2010s, including Naspers (the country's largest company and owner of 30 percent of China's giant tech firm Tencent, which was moved to Amsterdam) and the catastrophic Steinhoff empire (listed in Frankfurt, which did not prevent the firm's widespread international fraud). So South Africa never achieved the promised virtuous cycle of reintegration into the world economy as a "new NIC," an aspiring follow-on to the successful integrations of East Asian Newly Industrialized Countries.

In the past decade, a renewed over-accumulation of capital—and ongoing "capital strike"—can be traced to the overproduction of raw materials for the world market, most of the "super-cycle" prices of which peaked in 2011, plateaued, and then crashed after 2015, along with the limits of financialized consumption which in 2008 were witnessed in the National Credit Regulator's finding that half the country's twenty million formal sector borrowers had such weakened repayment capacity that they were in "impaired credit" status: they were at least three months behind on servicing their debts (Bond, 2015).

As a result, ever more extreme versions of accumulation by dispossession accompanied neoliberal public policy in South Africa, and much worse uneven development of the economy was experienced, including in the geographies of new residential and business enclaves. There, "gated community" and "edge city" strategies of re-segregation became obvious. One re-integrative strategy, inner-city gentrification, repeatedly reached its limits in Johannesburg and Durban due mainly to the limited center-city markets

(and effective demand) for office space, residential housing and artisanal consumption goods (Bond, 2000; Bond and Browder, 2019). The result is a spatially segregated outcome, far beyond the bounds of explanation via a capitalist logic expressed in neoclassical economics (the dogma that takes market transactions as the outcome of implicitly equal relations between atomistic buyers and sellers and of benefit to all).

The most sustained African attacks on the neoliberal standpoint were grounded in an account of the shifting role of racial domination, as expressed by Ben Magubane (2001) in his periodization of South African racism's *functionality* to super-exploitative capitalist circuits during various epochs:

In 1776, Smith described two events that he said were the greatest and most important in the history of mankind: “the discovery of America, and the passage to the east Indies by way of the Cape of Good Hope.” Asking, “What benefits, or what misfortune to mankind may hereafter result from these great events,” he lamented that “no human wisdom can foresee.” But it was possible even in 1776 for Smith to foresee that “the savage injustice of Europeans” towards those who were in the process of being colonized would “render an event, which ought to have been beneficial to all, ruinous and destructive to several of those unfortunate countries.” (Magubane, 2001, 1)

Magubane recounts how during the 1800s—a period also replete with overproduction crises (Bond, 2003)—“The expanding frontier of ‘settler capitalism’ saw the recrudescence of the worst form of racism. The old social relations of usurious and commercial capitalism, with its conquistadors and slaves, were replaced by the dominion of industrial capital, with its plantation and wage slaves” (2001, 6). That expanding frontier reflected, first, a “spatial fix” (Harvey, 1982); the geographical displacement of what, even in nineteenth-century South African capitalism, was a series of periodic over-accumulation crises (Bond, 2003). We can term this approach “shifting.” But there were also bouts of “financialization,” when rising credit achieved at least a momentary displacement of over-accumulation, because the credit system mopped up current consumption at the cost of a later more expensive repayment (Bond, 2003). We can call this “temporal fix” (Harvey, 1982) “stalling.” Third, as Luxemburg (2003) stressed in *Accumulation*, capital regularly enhanced its profitability through new means of what is now widely considered to be “accumulation by dispossession,” or “stealing.”

The shifting, stealing, and stalling of overaccumulated capital in South Africa meant renewed state–capital–society–labor–nature arrangements that were institutionalized so as to super-exploit the indigenous people, women, and nature. These may have seemed, as Harvey recounted, similar to Marx's

idea of primitive accumulation, namely “conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights; suppression of rights to the commons; . . . colonial, neo-colonial and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources) . . . and ultimately the credit system as radical means of primitive accumulation” (2003, 145). South African capital hardwired these structural systems of oppression into the body politic so deeply, that, in the post-apartheid era, super-exploitative labor relations are not only maintained, attacks on the environment are also undertaken with renewed vigor.

CAPITALIST VERSUS NON-CAPITALIST RELATIONS IN STRUCTURAL ENVIRONMENTAL-ECONOMIC TERMS

Thus far, we have touched on the super-exploitative characteristics of labor power that have allowed economic creolization to proceed in the manner Luxemburg suggested it would, in settler-colonial societies like South Africa where natural economies continue to be disrupted. More generally, though, the wreckage is not just of the pre-capitalist societies—or for that matter, the decommmodified state services, matriarchal care relations, and mutual aid systems that societies created in response—but also is evident in the (removable) ecological assets of the dominated country. Capital’s creolization when invading the spaces of nature deserves much more attention, because at least in the 2015–19 period in Southern Africa, the boomerang of eco-destruction from fossil fuel abuse became evident with several debilitating droughts, cyclones, and floods attributed to greenhouse gas emissions, that is, anthropomorphic causes (Fitchett, 2019).

Luxemburg was profoundly concerned about the environment: “land, game in primeval forests, minerals, precious stones and ores, products of exotic flora such as rubber, etc.” (2003, 349). Indeed, for “the communist peasant community no less than the feudal corvee farm,” she argued, “the most important of these productive forces is of course the land, its hidden mineral treasure, and its meadows, woods and water, and further the flocks of the primitive shepherd tribes” (Luxemburg, 2003, 350). Drucilla Cornell explains: “Apart from the profits earned on capital reinvested in the new territories, great capital gains are made simply through the conquest and possession of the land and all natural resources” (2012, 196).

As another instance of Luxemburgist environmental-economic thinking (an epistemological creolization of intellectual resistance), consider the way Samir Amin likewise analyzed the ecological implications of super-exploitation. For Amin, they emerged both from differential rates of surplus value

extraction, for which his 1971 *Accumulation on a World Scale* was the most famous expression, and also from capitalism's abusive contact with non-capitalist relations. This was a vital component of Amin's overarching theory of unequal exchange:

Luxemburg is right: capitalism expanded by destroying pre-capitalist modes of production both within the societies of the dominant centers and the dominated peripheries. Handicrafts are replaced by manufacturing industries, small shops by supermarkets etc. This process of accumulation by dispossession still goes on with the current privatization of former public services. (Amin, 2016)

Without diminishing his critique of destructive articulations of modes of production and hence of *social* relations, Amin gradually—and then more decisively at the end of his life—brought unequal *ecological* exchange into his value-transfer schema:

Capitalist accumulation is founded on the destruction of the bases of all wealth: human beings and their natural environment . . . historical Marxisms had largely passed an eraser over the analyses advanced by Marx on this subject and taken the point of view of the bourgeoisie—equated to an atemporal “rational” point of view—in regard to the exploitation of natural resources. (Amin, 2018, 159, 86)

In my own review of Luxemburg's lasting significance to African political economists, the extent to which resource depletion—that is, the diminution of natural wealth through insufficiently compensated extraction—impoverishes the continent became abundantly evident (Bond, 2019). This net resource loss is also (controversially) termed the depletion of “natural capital,” for in Africa, it occurs without foreign or local corporations making compensating reinvestments or paying adequate taxes and royalties (unlike, say, in the case of resource-rich Norway, Canada, or Australia). Africa's net resource losses have amounted to roughly \$150 billion per annum over the past two decades (Bond, 2018). Notwithstanding this enormous magnitude, Africa's depleted natural resource base is the victim of erasers wielded by nearly all bourgeois economists and progressive political economists alike, including those based at international and local NGOs which purport to advocate that corporations “publish what you pay” and “stop the bleeding.”

One crucial exception, albeit so evidently suffused with policy schizophrenia that it is often unreliable (Bond, 2018), is the World Bank. There, thanks to environmental economists Herman Daly (1996) and Robert Goodland, various reports have been released over the past quarter century addressing

what is termed *The Changing Wealth of Nations*. In these, a notional shift in a country's wealth is calculated over time: "Adjusted Net Savings" (ANS). The ANS incorporates four factors that allow the reform of the variable Gross National Income (GNI) in order to approximate "genuine savings": physical capital's depreciation, damage caused by pollution and depleted natural resources (all three of which are considered debits from GNI), and educational expenditure ("human capital" investment, considered to be an extra credit to GNI). To establish the magnitude of *uncompensated* exploitation of natural resources can at least be attempted with these data.

Leaving aside the depreciation of physical capital and the appreciation of human capital, the environmental calculations are profound. South Africa's CO₂ emissions are 9.0 tons per person, eleventh highest in the world among countries of over ten million people and third highest behind Kazakhstan and the Czech Republic, if measured per unit of per capita economic output per person. In addition to damage from CO₂, which the Bank estimates at 4.6 percent of GNI (table 2), the main negative features of the environmental accounts are Luxemburg's "hidden mineral treasure": unlike the land (meadows), forests (woods), water, and livestock that she also mourned, these are non-renewable. Once gone, they are lost forever.

If GNI captures the national (domestically produced) output of goods and services in a given year, then to sell such "goods"—for instance, South Africa's four leading mineral exports, which are coal (25% in 2017), platinum group metals (21%), gold (15%), and iron ore (11%)—requires extraction, smelting, refining, and shipment of non-renewable minerals (ores) and metals, as well as disposal of waste residue. To be sure, all these activities produce value within the commodity form, and with it, capital extracts surplus value from labor at the point of production. But in addition, the extraction of what Marx termed "free gifts of nature"—for example, South Africa's non-renewable minerals taken from the ground each year—can be usefully integrated into the critique of capital's super-exploitation of natural economy.

Cyclical dynamics are evident in the World Bank's (2019) calculation of mineral and fossil-fuel wealth loss in South Africa.³ The dollar-denominated depletion of these minerals worsened in 1980, due to the very high gold price resulting from U.S. stagflation, which was soon dramatically reversed in 1981 due to much higher U.S. interest rates, known as the "Volcker Shock." The next burst of depletion was in 2010–13, as the commodity super-cycle peaked. In 2011, (non-coal) minerals depleted by \$11.7 billion, up from a

³ The Bank's (2019) definition of mineral depletion is "the ratio of the value of the stock of mineral resources to the remaining reserve lifetime. It covers tin, gold, lead, zinc, iron, copper, nickel, silver, bauxite, and phosphate"—neglecting diamonds and platinum group metals (also, iridium, osmium, palladium, rhodium, and ruthenium).

previous high of \$7.2 billion in 2008. That year, coal depletion was measured at \$12.3 billion, and in 2011 it was \$9.2 billion. So in 2008, these combined resource outflows were \$19.5 billion and in 2011, \$20.9 billion (World Bank, 2019). As a share of GNI this was far less than other African economies with a skew to primary production (Mauritania, Togo, DRC, and Zambia) and especially those with oil sectors (Angola, the Republic of the Congo and Equatorial Guinea) (Bond and Basu, 2020).

Luxemburg (and, more recently, Amin) would not be surprised at the temporally dynamic unequal ecological exchange and environmental destruction represented in these World Bank bean-counting exercises. But there are important debates to be joined about whether the provisional natural-capital accounting is not excessively generous to those corporations doing the extraction. For example, South Africa's subsoil assets are valued by the Bank at just \$400 billion, far less than the International Monetary Fund's (2018) \$800 billion estimate, as well as far less than the \$2.5 trillion regularly cited as a result of a CitiGroup guess (Bloomberg, 2010), albeit a figure that is now ridiculed as far too optimistic given that the bulk is in platinum group metals that are currently impossible to extract (Seccombe, 2019).

Even if the Bank's studies of South African wealth and depletion processes are severely flawed (e.g. platinum and diamonds are not included), the Bank nevertheless provides a starting point for a discussion of natural resource exploitation. The population of South Africa in 2014 was 54.1 million. Dividing the different types of wealth in the country by each resident allows an estimate of \$77,348 in per capita wealth. Of that, 17.8 percent consists of the country's natural capital, of which just more than half (9.2 percent) is accounted for in "subsoil assets," which include the subcategories minerals and "energy" (coal and a small amount of gas). The other combination of nature's wealth—pastureland, cropland, forests, and protected areas—amounted, in 2014, to 8.5 percent of total wealth. By far the greatest amount of South Africa's wealth that year—58.1 percent—was allegedly in human capital, while 24.9 percent was in the produced capital stock (Figure 13.5). Natural wealth is highly concentrated in a few minerals (Figure 13.6a,b).⁴

Total wealth	Produced capital	Natural capital	Forest		Protected areas	Cropland	Pastureland	Subsoil assets	Human capital	Net foreign assets
			Timber	Non-timber						
77,348	19,263	13,743	898	320	370	2,115	2,892	7,149	44,921	-579

Figure 13.5 South Africa's Per Capita Wealth, 2014 (in US\$). Source: World Bank (2017).

⁴ The human capital investment is dubious because most South African public schools produce an education that *sets learners back*. In 2015, the World Economic Forum (2015) rated South African science and mathematics education as the worst of 140 countries, and 138th in overall quality. If education spending is meant to be a proxy for human capital investment (in terms of Bank logic), in many cases the result is better considered *disinvestment*. Nicholas Spaul (2013) notes that "with

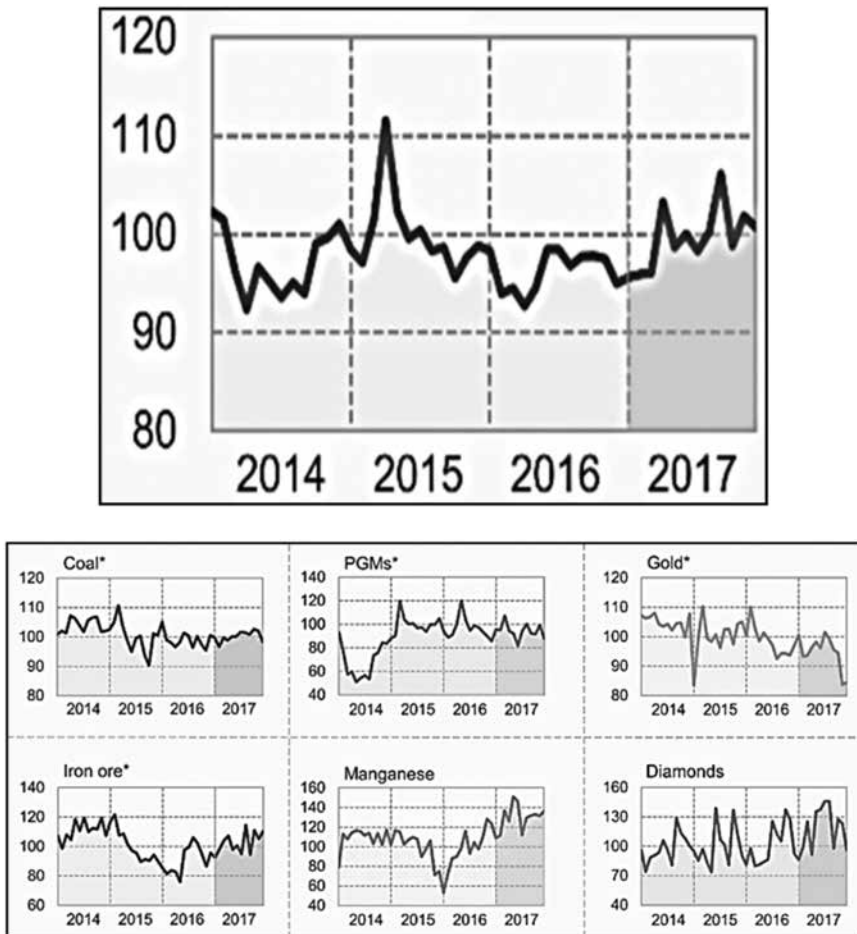


Figure 13.6a,b South Africa's Mineral Depletion, 2014-17 (Volume Index, 2015 = 100). All minerals, and Coal, Platinum Group Metals, Gold, Iron ore, Manganese and Diamonds. Source: StatsSA (2019b).

What do we learn from perusing these accounts, in which GNI is adjusted to incorporate natural capital and human capital? The five major categories in which annual output should be adjusted downwards are: (1) consumption of fixed capital in the form of wear-and-tear depreciation (14.3% of South Africa's GNI), (2)

the exception of a wealthy minority, most South African pupils cannot read, write and compute at grade-appropriate levels, with large proportions being functionally illiterate and innumerate." The main Treasury official responsible for funding these schools, Andrew Donaldson (2014) admitted that educational system "entrenches inequality between rich and poor."

South Africa

Population (millions)	55.0	Land area (1,000 sq. km)	1,213	GDP (\$ billions)	314.6
	Country data	Sub-Saharan Africa group	Upper middle-income group		
GNI per capita, <i>World Bank Atlas</i> method (\$)	6,080	1,631	8,263		
Adjusted net national income per capita (\$)	4,671	1,239	6,302		
Urban population (% of total)	64.8	37.7	64.1		
Agriculture					
Agricultural land (% land area)	80	42	35		
Agricultural irrigated land (% of total agricultural land)	1.7		
Agricultural productivity, value added per worker (2010 \$)	9,451	1,219	2,208		
Cereal yield (kg per hectare)	4,894	1,452	4,104		
Forests and biodiversity					
Forest area (% land area)	7.6	25.7	34.9		
Deforestation (avg. annual %, 2000-15)	0.0	0.5	0.0		
Terrestrial protected areas (% of total land area)	8.9	15.3	15.2		
Threatened species, mammals	26	918	1,056		
Threatened species, birds	46	876	1,511		
Threatened species, fish	107	2,023	2,315		
Threatened species, higher plants	116	3,740	6,808		
Oceans					
Total fisheries production (thousand metric tons)	578	7,416	103,240		
Capture fisheries growth (avg. annual %, 2000-15)	-1.0	1.8	-0.5		
Aquaculture growth (avg. annual %, 2000-15)	5.6	17.0	5.3		
Marine protected areas (% of territorial waters)	13.4	6.1	9.9		
Coral reef area (sq. km)	..	17,980	48,880		
Mangroves area (sq. km)	30.5	28,061	50,774		
Energy and emissions					
Energy use per capita (kg oil equivalent)	2,715	701	2,192		
Energy from biomass products and waste (% of total)	10.5	57.4	7.3		
Electric power consumption per capita (kWh)	4,229	497	3,495		
Electricity generated using fossil fuel (% of total)	93.1	64.3	71.1		
Electricity generated by hydropower (% of total)	0.4	21.2	21.0		
CO ₂ emissions per capita (metric tons)	8.8	0.8	6.6		
Water and sanitation					
Internal freshwater resources per capita (cu. m)	827	3,986	8,261		
Total freshwater withdrawal (% of internal resources)	34.6	3.2	6.3		
Agriculture (% of total freshwater withdrawal)	63	81	68		
Access to improved water source (% of total population)	93	68	95		
Rural (% of rural population)	81	56	91		
Urban (% of urban population)	100	87	97		
Access to improved sanitation (% of total population)	66	30	80		
Rural (% of rural population)	61	23	67		
Urban (% of urban population)	70	40	87		
Environment and health					
PM _{2.5} pollution, mean annual exposure (µg/cu. m)	30	36	42		
PM _{2.5} exposure (% pop. exceeding WHO guideline level)	100	99	95		
Acute resp. infection prevalence (% of children under five)	..	5	..		
Diarrhea prevalence (% of children under five)	..	14	..		
Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	41	83	19		
National accounting aggregates—savings, depletion and degradation					
Gross savings (% of GNI)	16.8	14.4	36.6		
Consumption of fixed capital (% of GNI)	14.3	13.8	18.0		
Education expenditure (% of GNI)	6.0	3.3	3.0		
Energy depletion (% of GNI)	0.7	1.7	1.1		
Mineral depletion (% of GNI)	1.1	0.9	0.4		
Net forest depletion (% of GNI)	0.0	2.3	0.0		
CO ₂ damage (% of GNI)	4.6	1.6	2.6		
Air pollution damage (% of GNI)	0.4	1.2	0.3		
Adjusted net savings (% of GNI)	1.5	-3.9	17.2		

Figure 13.7 Breakdown of South Africa's Per Capita Wealth, 2014 (in US\$). Source: World Bank 2017.

CO₂ damage (4.6 %), (3) mineral depletion (1.1%), (4) energy depletion (0.7%), and (5) air pollution (0.4%). The (controversial) upward adjustment of education spending is 6 percent of GNI, leaving a total ANS of 1.5 percent. In absolute terms, the ANS for an average South African attributable to depleted mineral wealth (including coal) was thus \$129 in 2014 (but again, recall that platinum and diamonds are not included).⁵ The snapshot capital accounts provided by the World Bank (2017) in its *Little Green Databook* also allows further contemplation of the destruction of South Africa's natural economy (figure 13.7).⁶

Again, the crucial limitation of a snapshot is that it does not capture the extreme dynamism associated with minerals demand and supply. A 2014–2017 dynamic graph of the volumes of South African minerals sold reveals not only that the 2015 crash was led by coal, iron ore, and manganese; also of critical importance in this period was the impact of the five-month platinum mineworker strike in 2014 (Figure 13.6). And it is to non-capitalist and anti-capitalist resistance that we turn in the next section.

NON/ANTI-CAPITALIST VERSUS CAPITALIST RELATIONS

Luxemburg was assassinated in 1919, during her period of most active revolutionary organizing, at the peak moment of Berlin's new communist

⁵ Crucially, as noted above, this figure fluctuates wildly as a result of swings in commodity prices. In 1980–1981, gold exceeded \$800/ounce before soon plummeting to \$250/ounce, and from 2002–2011, the upswing of the commodity super-cycle raised the rate of depletion dramatically, from 0.2 to 2.5 percent of GNI, before the 2015 crash reduced the depletion rate to 1.5 percent of GNI. It is worth remarking that while energy production is 93 percent reliant upon coal, which is by far the main cause of the CO₂ damage accounted for, the 'benefit' from extraction of coal is far less, and in any case mainly accrues to multinational corporations like Anglo Coal, BHP Billiton and Glencore (although these firms are increasingly selling their coal mines to local black entrepreneurs given that carbon-divestment pressures are rising in their headquarter cities such as London, Melbourne and even Baar, Switzerland).

⁶ These accounts are not yet sufficiently strong in data consistency to compare across time periods, so as to assess the depletion *process*. But they do allow more breakdown of what is pre-existing "nature" (albeit after several centuries of settler-colonial interventions) and what society must make special efforts to preserve. There are, for instance, nearly 300 "threatened species," including 116 higher plants, 107 fish, 46 birds and 26 mammals. The natural economy of the human lung is also threatened, with 100 percent of the population having PM2.5 particle exposure higher than World Health Organization guideline levels. The family's natural economy is disrupted by under-5 mortality rates that are more than twice as high as the average peer (upper middle-income) country. South Africa's freshwater hydrological natural economy suffers massive withdrawal, ten times as much as do other African economies and more than five times the rate of upper middle-income peer economies. And in every category of energy aside from hydropower, South African capitalism uses far more than do other African and upper middle-income economies. The most destruction is in CO₂ emissions, which are eleven times higher for an average South African (that mythical construct), than the 0.8 tons per average Sub-Saharan African.

movement. At a very different moment in the world left's fortunes, a century later in Johannesburg, the Democratic Marxism (2019) seminar series at the University of the Witwatersrand convened to contemplate the meaning of her contributions, particularly as they inform popular protest. This, one speaker concluded (Kaaf, 2019), should not be limited to formulaic political-party communism, but much more creative, connected revolutionary activity within social movements, on a variety of topical problems faced by poor and working people, as well as women and youth, and with a strong anti-capitalist ideology.

This, too, was the South African "people's commons" challenge identified by Cornell (2012), against what Luxemburg assessed as the three core strategies capital deployed against natural economies:

- (1) to achieve the liberation of so-called labor power, which actually means the capacity to coerce it into services, as in the persistence of unfree black labor in South Africa during the entire period of colonization; (2) to gain control over all natural resources; and (3) to introduce a commodity economy, and to separate trade and agriculture. (Cornell, 2012, 193)

First, in South Africa, the persistence of unfree black labor lasted until the early 1990s, when formal racial apartheid was ended. This entailed cessation of the Pass Laws and Group Areas Act which had regulated transit and residential aspects of migrant labor. In coming years, other racist legislation and the lack of democratic voting were remedied—for example, in 1994 when the first democratic national elections were held, and in 2000 when municipal elections dropped the most obvious residual privileges enjoyed by white residents (Bond, 2000, 2014). But simultaneously, the official unemployment rate soared from 16 to 29 percent in the ten years after democracy was won, and up to 40 percent if we include those who live in faraway (ex-Bantustan) areas and had given up looking for (non-existent) work. South African capitalism therefore retained a reliance upon both undercompensated migrant workers and a vast reserve army of labor, which together keep wages lower than they would otherwise be.

One form of resistance is trade union organizing, and it is no accident that in this context, the World Economic Forum (2017) rated South Africa's working class as the most confrontational on earth from 2012 to 2017 among 140 countries surveyed. There are increasing numbers of "work stoppages," but one indication of the power of labor is that with few exceptions (public sector workers in 2010 and mineworkers in 2014 and 2019), these now take fewer days to resolve, with a trend line of days affected by strikes down from seven million in 2006 to four million in 2017 (figure 13.8).

Labor resistance that is oriented to demanding higher wages (the subject of most strikes) tends to be assimilationist, not socialist. The standard trade

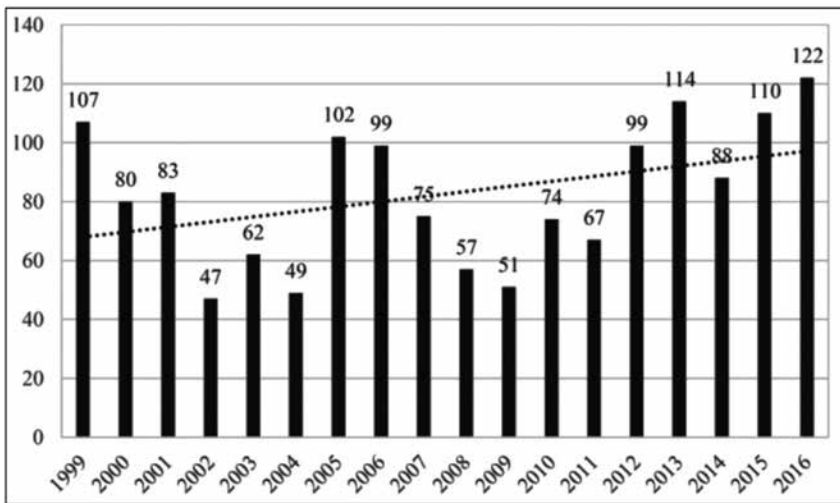


Figure 13.8 Industrial Actions in South Africa, 1999-2016. Source: Runciman (2019).

union political strategy is “corporatist,” demanding a seat at the table for big labor, alongside big business and big government, often resulting in gains for organized workers at the expense of the unorganized proletariat. South Africa’s unions often deployed this power aggressively, through regular inputs by the major labor federations into social policy and broader socio-political organizing. One result was the main federation’s contribution to forcing the governments of Thabo Mbeki (1999–2008) and Jacob Zuma (2009–2018) to leave office nine and fifteen months early, respectively.

There are, too, a variety of ongoing labor struggles against “unfree” labor through demands that transcend higher wages and more amenable political leadership. South African working-class battles continue against the commodification of life. One strategy is constructing a commons of state services via a more expansive social welfare policy, such as a long-delayed National Health Insurance plan still not introduced in 2020. Unfortunately, aside from the state’s extension of its somewhat tokenistic, \$90/month old-age grant to African workers (Bond, 2014), very little progress in social policy could be claimed by organized labor during the post-apartheid era, compared to the kinds of perks won in prior years *within the category of company benefits to workers*. However, such benefits are not properly “decommodified,” as argued by Esping-Andersen (1990), because if a worker loses employment with a company, then the healthcare, pension, and housing benefits also fall away. In such analysis of social policy, workers are still economically coerced to commodify their labor power (Barchiesi, 2011).

As for Luxemburg's critique of capital's "control over all natural resources," a new commons philosophy emerged among both conservationists—who in South Africa tend to be white and of greater wealth (and often guilty of promoting the advocating dispossession of communities in the vicinity of game reserves)—and advocates of "environmental justice." The latter most famously oppose the class and racial character of pollution, starting in the U.S. South during the 1980s (Bullard, 2000). But in two ways, a new resource-commoning philosophy is emerging from a fusion of the better tendencies of planetary stewardship—for example, the eco-feminist version of *Ubuntu* as explored by Christelle Terreblanche (2018)—and climate consciousness. The former is finding increasing expression in campaigns waged by a network, Mining Affected Communities United in Action, and its various allies (e.g., the feminists of Johannesburg support-NGOs, WoMin and ActionAid). Their "right to say No!" to mineral resource extraction has generated flashpoints and success stories in several sites (Bond, 2018). Likewise, a climate justice philosophy and practice emerged across the world, including South Africa, to tackle the degeneration of *all natural resources* due to climate change. Unfortunately, the challenge to capital's externalization of costs associated with greenhouse gas emissions proceeds at a pace that is so far inadequate to halt the potentially catastrophic damage (Bond, 2012; Satgar, 2018).

Finally, there are commoning struggles against a "commodity economy" that not only separates "trade and agriculture"—that is, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's "rise and fall of the South African peasantry," as Colin Bundy (1979) put it—but that also distorts all other socio-economic and environmental relations. Here, there are more encouraging signs of resistance. Cornell's first cut is revealing but incomplete:

The anti-hegemonic struggles against the ANC and their attempts to turn all the means of life into capital, from water to education, may stimulate people's struggles to create a commons that is outside capitalist relations . . . It is through direct participatory mechanisms that crucial decisions about resources are to be made. (2012, 193–197)

This was a prescient statement about one campaign that is still waged against water commodification, and about another that was underway and reached peak strength in 2015–2017, against costly tertiary education and the outsourcing of (super-exploited) university service workers. However, both involved *not* ideal-type "direct participatory mechanisms" allowing community and student "voice" within a consultative policy decision-making process (one that legitimizes the rulers and their rules), but rather

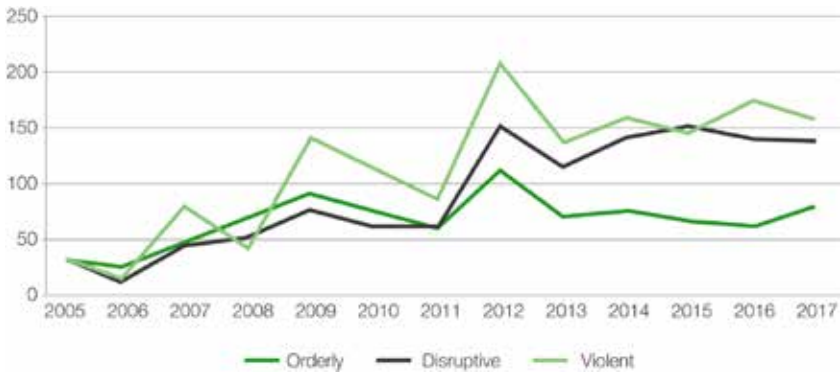


Figure 13.9 Media-reported Community Protests (Orderly, Disruptive, and Violent), 2005-17. Source: Alexander et al (2018: 38).

the opposite.⁷ Victories have been won through sustained protest against decision-makers, through the increasingly militant *delegitimization* of state elites, who are typically labeled “neoliberals” hostile to the interests of the black working-class majority (Bond, 2014).

In the first case Cornell cites, it was the 1998–2000 emergence of hundreds of “service delivery protests” (Bond, 2000) and the accident of a communist water minister (Ronnie Kasrils) who initiated a modicum of “Free Basic Services”: 25 kiloliters of water per person per day (two toilet flushes worth) and a household monthly electricity supply of 50 kiloWatt hours (which, typically for the working class, amounts to a week’s worth of supply) (Bond, 2002). Considered insufficient (even “tokenistic”), those free services have not deterred service delivery protests, which continue rising (since accurate measures began around 2005, drawing on police data). Using the criteria of “disruption or injury to persons or property,” University of Johannesburg scholars identify the category of “orderly” protests as neither, while “disruptive” protests include tactics such as road blocking but no injuries, and “violent” protests entail both. Taken together, the annual rate of major protests has risen inexorably from 60 to 360 from 2006 to 2017 (with a 2012 peak of 470 protests) (figure 13.9).

In working-class townships and shack settlements, activists intensified their disruptive capacity, the more that the neoliberal squeezing of municipal budgets—and repeated bankruptcies by local governments and massive deficits within the electricity parastatal Eskom—led to water and power

⁷ The liberal formulation emphasizing voice and participation also repeatedly surfaces on the radical left; see Mottiar and Bond (2012).

cut-offs (Ngwane et al., 2017).⁸ In 2019, the monthly rate of major protests against local government according to the most conservative researchers, in the consultancy Municipal IQ, had risen to 28/month by mid-year. This was a dramatic increase from earlier levels: 20/month in 2018, 14/month in 2017, and 11/month in 2016, and far more than the average of 2/month from 2004 to 2008 (Gous, 2019).

Reforms of the state to improve the supply of affordable basic services included not only municipal planning, environmental impact assessments, and similar “invited spaces” meant to assimilate opposition. The most feted direct-participatory mechanism was the formal justice system, via the 1996 Constitution’s oft-celebrated socio-economic rights clauses (Republic of South Africa, 1996). But in the cases of healthcare access (*Soobramoney v Minister of Health* in 1997), housing (*Grootboom v Oostenberg Municipality* in 2000), and water (*Mazibuko v Johannesburg Water* in 2009), the Constitutional Court failed the plaintiffs (Bond, 2014).⁹ Activists then resorted to extra-legal means of supplying, for example, AIDS medicines via illicit importation of generic drugs from India and Thailand during the early-2000s activism of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC); or what are termed “land invasions” to establish “shack settlements” in better-located areas;¹⁰ or informal reconnections of water and electricity. The latter strategy is most advanced in Soweto, where Eskom estimates 86 percent of connections are illegal (le Cordeur, 2016).

The most successful and internationally relevant of these decommodification struggles was TAC’s campaign to get access to drugs that strengthened the immune system of those who were HIV positive, known as Anti-RetroViral (ARV) medicines. In branded form, made by corporations in Europe and the United States, an annual course of ARVs cost \$10,000 in the late 1990s, limiting access to a few thousand (mainly white, male) South Africans. As Mandisa Mbali (2013) showed, TAC and its international allies (especially *Medicins sans Frontiers* and in the United States, *AIDS Coalition to Unleash*

⁸ In the latter case, this is not merely a local result of neoliberalism, for national-scale electricity supply disruptions (“load-shedding”) began in earnest in 2008, reaching peak levels in March 2019. That month, rising Mozambique Channel water temperatures—a feature of worsening climate change—caused the unprecedented intensity of Cyclone Idai, whose winds were sufficiently powerful to wreck pylons carrying a 1000 MegaWatt power supply to Eskom from a Mozambican hydropower facility. Coal-fired generators supply more than 90 percent of South Africa’s electricity, yet Eskom has been extremely slow to consider much implement decarbonization.

⁹ To be sure, there were Constitutional Court cases that improved rather than foiled socio-economic rights, but they were mainly defensive, in telling the state *not* to adopt certain policies or practices. The only pro-active decision of consequence to improve health rights was the 2002 decision to compel the state to make nevirapine available so as to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission (*Department of Health v TAC*).

¹⁰ As Ivan Turok (2018) remarks, “A recent surge in urban land occupations and invasions suggests that people’s tolerance of apartheid’s cruel geography is diminishing.”

Power, ACT-UP!) worked effectively against Big Pharma, the U.S. and South African governments, the World Trade Organization's (WTO's) Trade Related Intellectual Property System, and purveyors of Intellectual Property (IP) ideology, especially the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Their two most potent weapons were rising social anger at Big Pharma's ultra-profiteering commodification of life and ridicule of Mbeki's AIDS denialism. As the death toll rose into the hundreds of thousands, he was increasingly called a genocidaire and made unwelcome in local and international venues. Hundreds of TAC activists committed civil disobedience and were arrested to dramatize the urgent need for policy change. It was this pressure both inside and outside the ruling party that led to a reversal in policy in 2004. Similar pressure had been applied against U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick in 2001 at the Doha WTO summit, making possible widespread diffusion of generic ARVs that cost only \$100/year to produce. The quite miraculous result was that, after forcing Pretoria's policy shift, the ARV roll-out through public clinics reached more than five million patients within a decade, in turn raising national life expectancy from 52 to 64, with similar results across Africa and the world (Bond, 2014).

COMMONING LUXEMBURG, BEYOND THE CONTRADICTIONS

To conclude, there are both tendencies toward and away from the radical creolization of anti-capitalist politics Luxemburg would have endorsed that are evident in the discussion above, and the latter need further exploration before closing. For example, Jane Gordon shares this warning, which reminds us of South Africa's liberal advocates of reformist strategies for social change:

Those who benefit from partial arrangements masked as benefitting all are more likely to oppose the appearance of more legitimate alternatives that clearly reveal previous claims to generality or representativeness as phony. As such, they are more likely to reject further creolizing products as illicit, impure, or otherwise undesirable, opting instead for already existing and sedimented instantiations of mixture. (2014, 74)

In contrast, the framing put forward so spectacularly by TAC is of access to a genuine socio-economic commons of *life*, extending far beyond liberal "rights talk" (Bond, 2014). TAC's people's commons entailed the decommodified, destratified commoning of medicines, in contrast to those whose interest in

preserving private IP rights was the previous norm, particularly the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Bond, 2016).

However, a tragic dialectic is also at work in South Africa, in which a creolization process unfolds in the opposite way Luxemburg would have desired, due to a mortifying contradiction: the bleeding-over of anger from labor's super-exploitation into xenophobic sentiments, and also of community service delivery protests into periodic pogroms against immigrant suppliers of retail services ("spaza shops").

First, not all labor's broader social instincts are progressive, for there is a propensity among poor and working-class people not only to fight *against* capitalism but sometimes to return to the more barbaric identity politics of pre-capitalism, namely, artificial ethnic distinctions. These divisions were amplified by colonial-era and apartheid-era economic managers, with resulting conflagrations in South Africa between competing fractions of the working class dating to the early twentieth century, a reality Luxemburg did not have the tools (in the secondary literature she read) to observe.¹¹ Moreover, during the dying days of apartheid (1980–1994), all manner of old divisions between ethnicities were amplified (and some new ones created) by Pretoria's security apparatus, often through its patronage power over "tribal" Bantustans. Tens of thousands of deaths resulted from what was incorrectly termed "black-on-black violence," particularly involving the "Zulu nation" and its leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi's reassertion of ethnic power against the liberal, modernizing, detribalized Nelson Mandela.

Because so many ties to traditional homes were retained by male migrant workers, the apartheid-era melting pot of the mine, factory or commercial farm, or even temporary residence in a cosmopolitan township like Soweto, could not tear asunder ethnic identity. Instead, South Africa's economic creolization accentuated migrant labor's pre-existing cultures. And the persistence of migrancy was also the source of identity crisis after 1994, mainly when declining employment prospects for South African workers generated a surge of working-class xenophobia (Amisi et al., 2011). There is a certain obvious logic in this disarticulation of modes of struggle, insofar as neoliberal, globalized capitalism introduced much less expensive labor power to South Africa from even more faraway, desperate sites than during apartheid. Mass immigration—much of it illegal via porous borders or based on bribing the Department of Home Affairs for residence papers—today stretches further into the Southern African region (especially the Democratic Republic

¹¹ Even Mahatma Gandhi found it logical to endorse the alliance of Indian workers with their British colonial masters during the 1906 Bambatha Rebellion of the indigenous Zulu people against further land dispossession (Desai and Vahed, 2015).

of the Congo), and further still to Nigeria, to the Horn of Africa, and to South Asia.

Aside from the xenophobic *decommoning* of labor power, communities have grievances that also lend themselves to reject immigrants. The township xenophobes' main complaint is that immigrant purchasing networks have achieved economies of scale through their commoning of bulk buying power, hence undercutting locally owned shops, whose owners then regularly take revenge through looting (or worse), often in the midst of social protests. In addition to intra-micro-capitalist competition as a material basis of conflict, the official 2016 state commission investigating Durban's violent xenophobic outbreaks the prior year identified non-material explanations, also reflecting an uncomfortable creolization of the commons:

Many South Africans operating in the tuck shop and spaza sector made allegations that businesses owned by foreign nationals thrive due to unfair advantages, and that these improprieties directly undermine the viability of locally-owned businesses. Such businesses are not registered and do not pay taxes; foreign nationals sell products at prices below those that local business owners conclude are feasible and are therefore receiving illegal support; foreign nationals receive unfair privileges from wholesale companies due to shared religious beliefs; foreign nationals intentionally open spaza shops within close proximity to locally-owned businesses, thereby capturing some of the locals' markets; foreign-owned businesses sell fake goods or non-South African products; foreign businesses owners operate their shops for nearly 24 hours every day and even have workers sleeping there. (Madlala, 2016)

There is certainly scope, at least conceptually, for a resolution of this contradiction, in the form of regional proletarian solidarity (Bond, Ruiters and Miller, 2001). Historically, that would mean not only rejecting the inherited borders of the 1884–1885 Berlin colonial conference known as the “Scramble for Africa” and identifying how the regional workforce was forged within the migrant labor system, but then ensuring South Africa provides reparations for the sub-imperialist damage done to neighboring lands since at least 1910, the date the country came into being.

However, the regional powerhouse has not yet constructed a contemporary, post-1994 solidarity politics. During the neoliberal era, especially since at least 2008 when xenophobic attacks in working-class communities became ubiquitous, South Africa's left-wing leadership has failed to generate a grassroots and shop-floor “commoning” of the regional proletariat. Thousands of leaders and activists with anti-xenophobic principles do operate within contemporary socio-political movements, in townships (e.g., Johannesburg's United Front), trade unions (e.g., the SA Federation of Trade Unions), and

political parties (e.g., the Economic Freedom Fighters). But they continue to lose the battle for society's hearts and minds, as witnessed by major upsurges of xenophobic attacks in 2008, 2010, 2015, 2017, and 2019.

Aside from the contradictions of commoning associated with divergent identity and socio-spatial relations, as are so evident in South Africa, the traditional dilemma of "jumping scale" must be addressed. After Elinor Ostrom's (1990) concession that communities of 15,000 are the largest effort at commoning she could identify, Harvey insisted on higher scales of ambition: "the whole nature of the common-property problem and the prospects of finding a solution change dramatically. What looks like a good way to resolve problems at one scale does not hold at another scale" (2011, 102).

It is there that Luxemburg (1916) would join in a final argument, not content with the politics of people's commons, but instead, warning so clearly (ahead of her time by two decades and then, again, by a century), "Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads, either transition to Socialism or regression into Barbarism."

POST-SCRIPT (JUNE 2020)

The Covid-19 crisis that began shortly after this chapter was drafted amplified most of the extreme processes of super-exploitation. On March 1, 2020, Patient Zero and eight of his friends—wealthy Durban residents—brought the virus to South Africa following a skiing vacation in Northern Italy. In spite of a severe lockdown, within three months, nearly 30,000 were infected (as judged by tests which were scarce and not entirely accurate), leaving at least 600 dead, with contagion rapidly gathering speed. The victims were increasingly from the lower classes, subject to the health-apartheid system in which private medical aids support the healthcare financing needs of 14 percent of South Africans with half the expenditure, leaving public hospitals unable to cope with testing, and even masks.

At the time of writing, there was insufficient class-race-gender analysis available of the virus' spread, but in late May, the geographic "Covid-19 hot spot" sites that were identified in Cape Town made crystal clear that it was moving fastest through the slums. This was easy to predict, given the lack of social-distancing capacity in such dense quarters, and the much more vulnerable immune systems of residents who were already living with HIV and TB. Beyond such geographical nuance, there were few who would remark on the characteristics of Covid-19's victims. The best known in local politics was the leader of the left-opposition Economic Freedom Fighters, Julius Malema, who—as the lockdown's relaxation was announced on May 28—remarked

on how healthcare apartheid had persisted over the prior nine weeks because of lack of state inaction:

Government has not renovated any hospital or given any significant improvements. Admittedly, even the misguided 'events-based temporary' quarantine centres will not meet the demand that is coming. However, people in black communities who could have lived another 10 years, will die. Not because they have bad immune systems, but because they did not get healthcare. The white community and some insignificant minority black elites will rely on private healthcare – which is fully functional, fully resourced and ready to give them a fighting chance. (Tshabalala, 2020)

Malema had, in late March, called on President Cyril Ramaphosa to follow Spain's lead and nationalize healthcare resources, which led Ramaphosa to laugh at him outright during a press conference (Bhengu, 2020). Malema's former spokesperson Mbuyiseni Ndlozi tweeted an implicit race-class analysis:

Dr Zweli Mkhize [SA Minister of Health] should start releasing the racial breakdown of Covid-19 data. I personally don't think the white community can lose 165 of their own in 1 week over a pandemic without noise. The only lives that don't matter, that are dispensable & voiceless, are black lives. I think the SA Covid-19 lockdown was for the white community. It has finally flattened the curve in their white spaces & put all systems in place to function amidst Covid-19: private schools in particular. Now they want their cheap & easily disposable black workers back to work! (Ndlozi, 2020)

Although in South Africa's atomized society, there was no such thing as a "white community" as a coherent unit of analysis, there was nevertheless truth to the capital-labor angle within this allegation (Mvumu, 2020), as exemplified in the mining industry. Operations began prematurely, without the full Covid-19 testing called for by the trade unions. Within days the world's deepest mine (at 2.5 miles), AngloGold Ashanti's Mponeng gold mine, had to be closed down. After a Covid-19 outbreak on May 24, 650 workers were tested, and 164 tested positive (York, 2020). The pressure on South Africa's working class to return to "easily disposable" status grew intense, as other super-exploitative processes within the economy were amplified, especially in the credit system (Bond forthcoming). There was virtually no fiscal relief for ordinary South Africans in the first nine weeks, and then only a small temporary rise in the child support grant and an emergency grant (both less than \$20/month on average).

The contradictions were rising, and beyond emergency relief advocacy, the main question for those opposed to capitalism was whether "the economy"

would be given license to recommence its abusive relationship with the working class, women, and the environment. The alternative would be the expansion of the social and environmental justice agenda, which initially took three forms: first, NGOs and the mainstream labor movement doing mainly a combination of emergency relief services and (mild-mannered) advocacy, asking for more welfare funding and less restrictive survival conditions; second, the nationally coordinated activist groups—such as the center-left C19 People’s Coalition and the leftist “Cry of the Xcluded” network—which combine more radical labor and social movements with a structural critique and “non-reformist reform” advocacy (and to some extent, too, local commoning through mutual aid not simply charity); and third, the community-based struggles which included food riots and land invasions as well as wildcat labor strikers. The first were partially assimilated, integrated into the very limited state-capital “social contract”; the second were generally ignored; and the third were actively repressed by a state not in the least hesitant to deploy 77,000 army troops (in addition to the regular police and private security forces) to brutally repress local protests.

Within the first weeks of the Covid-19 crisis, the contradictions were severe, yet the inability to discover the basis for a united front was often psychologically debilitating. Luxemburg would have nodded sympathetically but urged the South African working class and its allies to redouble efforts, to reverse the slide into barbarism.

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Chapter 14

Primitive Accumulation and the Government of the State in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Ahmed Veriava

In August 2004, a large group of protesters from the sleepy town of Harrismith in the Free State descended on the N3 highway. To draw attention to their protest, they blocked traffic along this important road, charging that after ten years of democratic government, not much had changed for the country's poor. Seemingly, the promise of a "better life for all"—announced in 1994 and repeated with each successive election—had not been realized.

The response was unequivocal. In violent scenes reminiscent of apartheid-era repression, shotgun-wielding policemen fired rubber bullets at fleeing protesters. By the time an enforced calm returned to Harrismith, one protester was dead. The blockade had been put down, and those identified as the leaders of the protest were rounded up and charged with public violence and, for the first time in a new South Africa, sedition.¹

In the months following the Harrismith uprising—as if only needing a spark—other communities across the country took to the streets in similar acts of protest. Beginning in far-flung towns forgotten by the transition, protests soon spread to the country's cities, and with the muffled tones and curated images coming to us through the mainstream media, a recurring call was announced: "delivery." Although the phenomenon was far more heterogeneous—with deep roots in the political practices of opposition to apartheid and their mutating forms in the post-apartheid period—these minor insurrections came to be called "service delivery protests" and were to become such a regular feature of news reports that, by 2010, academics were confidently

¹ This charge was later dropped, no doubt because it was seen by many as ridiculous.

declaring the existence of a “movement of local protests amounting to a rebellion of the poor” (Alexander, 2010).

Ironically, the Harrismith protests coincided with a renewed emphasis on governmental assistance to the poor. And so, alongside the suggestion of a presence of a third force driving protests, then president Mbeki blamed “the slow pace of delivery” on local councilors and administrative inefficiencies of local government. And so, where protests were acknowledged as highlighting “legitimate” issues facing poor communities, these were said to be a consequence of “the legacy of apartheid” and shown to be exactly the target of the measures being rolled out by governmental agencies. Not surprisingly, the “service delivery protests” and their relationship to governmental practices also became the subject of some debate, and for a vocal group of left commentators, this “rebellion of the poor” was proof of the failures of governmental interventions and the social price of the ANC’s commitment to renewing capitalist accumulation through neoliberal restructuring.

In this chapter, I work at adding nuance to these narratives of fidelity and betrayal by focusing on the dynamic and often paradoxical nexus between neoliberalism, governmental practice, and the struggles of the poor. I begin, however, by taking up a set of theoretically centered debates that return to Marx’s concept of primitive accumulation and Luxemburg’s rethinking of the relationship between capitalist production and its outsides. Drawing these debates within the Marxist canon back to the post-colonial context, I show how thinking through “ongoing forms of primitive accumulation” opens a window to the changing dynamics of class formation and some of the ways in which governmental agencies and poor people enter into a political relation in post-apartheid South Africa.

The theoretical adjustment that underlies this line of argument owes something to the spirit of Rosa Luxemburg’s Marxism. Part of the lasting value of Luxemburg’s critical materialism was its insistence on pushing beyond the orthodoxies of our ways of thinking politically by returning to the concrete circumstances of social life and the relations ordering “the present state of things.” It was from the perspective of this critical materialism that Luxemburg recast the Marxist narrative of the accumulation of capital by showing the ways in which the reproduction of capitalist relations depends on social forms standing (so to speak) apart from it. And for her, the expanded reproduction of capitalism and its geographical expansion could not then be reduced to the already established relationship between the class of capitalists and that of workers but had to be thought through with an eye on ongoing forms of primitive accumulation and specific practices through which the capitalist economy was constructed in relationship with non-capitalist social forms.

Although the spatio-temporal dynamics of capitalist accumulation, and for that matter, imperialism, have shifted since Luxemburg wrote *The*

Accumulation of Capital, I want to extend from this line of argument to show how it might be useful in thinking through aspects of the struggles of the poor and the transformations taking place on the governmental terrains on which these struggles unfold. Specifically, then, this chapter works at reformulating a set of theoretical statements on the character of “development” in capitalist societies by looking at the ways governmental practices comes to relate to a particular subject: a proletariat separated from her social means of reproduction but with slim possibility of being integrated into capitalist wage labor. Part of what extending from Luxemburg’s work enables here is the possibility of seeing the ongoing character of forms of primitive accumulation, and the reproduction of capitalist relations of production and social classes that primitive accumulation sustains, is established in relation with forms of life standing, so to speak, outside of it. But returning to Luxemburg today from the post-colonial context also means going beyond Luxemburg. What I try to highlight therefore is the ways in which contemporary modes of capitalist restructuring produce and operate in a relation with forms of life standing outside of the circuits of capitalist wage labor and the regulatory field of post-colonial civil society. For this context, our challenge becomes rethinking the terrains of class struggle by focusing on these forms of life, and the ways they come to shape and be shaped by neoliberal governmentality.

THE CONCEPT OF PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION

As is well-known, Marx’s *Capital, Volume 1* begins with a conception of wealth as commodity.² Part of the brilliant, difficult, and seemingly upside-down symmetry of *Capital, Volume 1* is that where it begins with “the analysis of the commodity,” in what appears to be almost perfectly abstract forms, by its end the emphasis is on demystifying the concrete historical processes that underline any such form’s existence (and naturalization) in the present. And “So-Called Primitive Accumulation” was the heading Marx takes, at the end of *Volume 1*, when he sets out to demystify classical political economy’s “idyllic” mythologies of “origin” to show that capital’s origins lie, rather, in “conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder[;] in short, force” (Marx, 1992 [1976]: 874). What is important for Marx, however, is that it is with this historical process that the essential division and relation of capitalist society is established. At one end of the founding violence of primitive accumulation is the creation of a class in whose hands are concentrated vast quantities of

² “The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, appears as an ‘immense collection of commodities’” (Marx, 1992 [1976]: 125).

wealth that will become capital. At the other end stands a class dispossessed of its means of subsistence and production:

With the polarisation of the commodity-market into two classes, the fundamental conditions of capitalist production are present. The capital-relation presupposes a complete separation between the workers and the ownership of the conditions for the realisation of their labor. As soon as capitalist production stands on its own feet, it not only maintains the separation, but reproduces it on a constantly extending scale. The process, therefore, which creates the capital-relation can be nothing other than the process which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his own labor; it is a process which operates two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage laborers. So called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears as “primitive,” because it forms the pre-history of capital, and the mode of production corresponding to capital. (Marx, 1992 [1976]: 874)

A number of points follow from this characterization.

First, for Marx, establishing the “capitalist relation” implies a particular form of transformation, a transformation that produces both owners of capital and proletarians, as well as the conditions that determine the form of the “confrontation and contact” between them. Although Marx does not explicitly put it in these terms, we can also add that this transformation implies a mode of commodification as well, not only of the means of subsistence and production, but as part of the same process, also of labor (see also Luxemburg 2003 and Polanyi 2001 [1944], 1946).

Second, to the extent that, in the passage above, Marx underlines a mode of “separation” and “divorcing” of the “producer” from the “means of subsistence and production,” we can say that where Marx places his emphasis in summing up “primitive accumulation” is on this process of separation of people in relation to the social means of (re)production, and as such on the *producing of* a section of the population with no means of survival *and life* other than the sale of their labor power . . . that is, what Marx calls the proletariat, or free labor.

The third point centers on this subject—free labor, separated from her means of subsistence, and so forced to live by selling her labor on the “market.” The particular sense that “free” takes on here is important. In the line just preceding the passage I quote, Marx writes that “free labor” should be considered free in a “double sense.” On the one hand, unlike slaves and serfs, free labor does not “form part of the means of production.” Here free has a more political meaning. Free labor is free in so far as one is free of

“bondage.” On the other hand, being free also implies a form of vulnerability and precariousness. Thus, free labor is “free from, unencumbered by, any means of production of their own” (Marx, 1992 [1976]: 874). Just a few paragraphs later, Marx also clarifies free labor’s vulnerability in what are almost negative juridical terms: a subject “suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled onto the labor market *as free, unprotected and rightless proletarians*” (Marx, 1992 [1976]: 876; my emphasis).

As Ben Fowkes, the translator of the Penguin edition of *Capital* points out, Marx’s original term for the freedom of free labor is “vogelfrei,” “literally ‘free as a bird’—*free but outside the human community* and therefore entirely unprotected and without legal right” (Fowkes in Marx, 1993: 898; my emphasis). It should in fact come as no surprise that Giorgio Agamben (1998) explicitly correlates free labor—that is, Marx’s proletariat—with his own concept of “bare life,” such that what Marx calls the class struggle in Agamben becomes the strife that characterizes the relations between bare life and the politically qualified life of the citizenry, between the *people* as the excluded and destitute, and the *People* as the bearer of sovereignty.

The final point to underline centers on the distinction that is made between, on the one hand, an “original separation,” and, on the other, that which belongs to the ordinary run of capitalist production—or, as Marx says, “As soon as capitalist production stands on its own feet, it not only maintains this separation [of people from the means of subsistence and production], but reproduces it on a constantly extending scale” (Marx, 1992 [1976]: 874). Unlike in the case of primitive accumulation corresponding with the moment of original separation, in the ordinary functioning of established capitalism, “[t]he silent compulsion of economic relations sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker” (Marx, 1992 [1976]: 899).

A question arises here. Is this not simply a once-off process, making any discussion of primitive accumulation in relation to already established capitalist social formations anachronistic? While he tends to underemphasize the historical points of references in Marx’s discussion, it is hard to disagree with Kalyan Sanyal estimation that in this theorization “self-subsistent capital has an immanent history of how the preconditions of capitalist accumulation are created but that history is derived from the structural logic of capital in its state of *being*” (Sanyal, 2014: 48). The *ex post facto* nature of the concept then seemingly consigns primitive accumulation to the “prehistory” of a capitalist relation reduced now to the exploitative interaction between the class of capitalists and that of workers.

It is precisely here that the work of Luxemburg stands at the foot of a tradition that allows us to shift Marx beyond Marx. As Massimo De Angelis has pointed out, although Luxemburg “formally” accepts the idea that primitive

accumulation is a once-off process, her critique of the problems of realization and expanded reproduction opens up the possibility of reposing the question:

[For Luxemburg,] Marx's expanded reproduction schemes are only a representation of the mathematical conditions for accumulation in the case in which there are only two classes. In reality, she contends, capitalist production must rely on third parties (peasants, small independent producers, etc.) to be commodity buyers. Thus the enforcement of exchange relations between capitalist and non-capitalist production becomes necessary to realize surplus value. However, this exchange relation clashes with the social relations of non-capitalist production. To overcome the resistance to capital that arises from this clash, capital must resort to military and political violence. Here Luxemburg introduces a crucial thesis that, independently from the validity of her reasoning and interpretation of Marx's schemes, seems to me fundamental: the extra-economic prerequisite to capitalist production—what we shall call primitive accumulation—is an inherent and continuous element of modern societies and its range of action extends to the entire world.

PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION IN THE PRESENT

If Luxemburg's work opens up the possibility of posing the question of the ongoing relationship between the expanded reproduction of capitalism and forms of primitive accumulation, one of the most important intellectual heirs of this line of inquiry is David Harvey and his reconceptualization of the latter as "accumulation by dispossession." Explicitly taking Luxemburg as his starting point, Harvey in fact shows an intimate and sustained relationship between the "expanded reproduction" of capitalism and "accumulation by dispossession" where it is the limits encountered within expanded reproduction that drive capital to seek out new markets and areas for investment. "Accumulation by dispossession" thus comes to represent an important—if not the primary—means through which capital addresses the internal limits to accumulation encountered within expanded reproduction.

Significantly, this position is unfolded as part of an attempt at rewriting Luxemburg's account of the problem of realization. Flowing from a reading of Luxemburg, the story of capitalism's crisis tendency is told as follows. In order to realize surplus value, the worker must necessarily be paid less value than what she produces. Therefore, workers cannot consume everything produced and are an insufficient market for the sum of commodities produced if surplus value is to be realized. Although the capitalist class can consume some of these commodities, it cannot consume all of it since it is compelled to reinvest some surplus value to secure the reproduction of the system. Thus,

accumulation encounters a limit. The only way that surplus value can be realized is by trade with non-capitalist formations.

For Harvey, this thesis implies that the key problem is under-consumption as what underlies capitalist crises and the driving force of imperialism. But while this thesis would explain at least certain features of nineteenth-century capitalism and its relationship to colonialism, he argues that as a contemporary account of capitalist accumulation, the narrative needs reworking: rather than under-consumption, capitalist crisis tendency needs to be understood in relation to the problem of over-accumulation. This is because reinvestment itself within expanded reproduction “creates a demand for capital goods and other inputs” (Harvey, 2003: 139) while the geographical expansion of capitalism—through what he calls spatio-temporal fixes—helps stabilize the system because it “opens up demand for investment goods and consumer goods elsewhere.” Even in the face of systemic imbalances (local recessions, fluctuating business cycles etc.), it is possible to accumulate through the introduction of cheaper inputs such as labor power or raw materials.

Harvey is, however, working back to a crucial point of Luxemburg’s original thesis: that capitalism is dependent on an “outside” to stabilize the system. However, for him, capitalism “can either make use for some pre-existing outside . . . or it can actively manufacture it” (Harvey, 2003: 141). And for Harvey, much of the creation of this “outside,” as well as its subsequent capture in the form of investment goods, is what is at stake in modern instances of “accumulation by dispossession” (or primitive accumulation). From financialization to shifts in intellectual property rights facilitated by the World Trade Organization (WTO) to privatization of universities and public utilities, Harvey charts out a “secret history of Primitive Accumulation.”

What accumulation by dispossession does is to release a set of assets (including labor power) at very low (and in some instances zero) cost. Over-accumulated capital can seize hold of such assets and immediately turn them to profitable use . . . Privatization (of social housing, telecommunications, transportation, water, etc.) has, in recent years, opened up vast fields for over-accumulated capital to seize upon. (Harvey, 2003: 149)

Harvey’s intervention represents an important point of development of the concept of primitive accumulation/“accumulation by dispossession” and capitalist crisis. But it is also important to stay focused on the ways the struggles of the proletariat have been an important force in the creation of capitalism’s outsides. This is in fact one of the starting points for De Angelis’s statement on the ongoing character of primitive accumulation. Building on the work of Karl Polanyi, he suggests that capitalism is characterized by a double movement of the market and struggle: “On the one side there is the historical

movement of the market, a movement that has no inherent limits and therefore threatens society's very existence. On the other, there is society's natural propensity to defend itself, and therefore to create institutions for its protection" (2000: 13).

For De Angelis, this second movement often involves processes of "commoning," which may be characterized as the creation of "social spheres of life" aimed at providing "various degrees of protection from the market" (commons). And here, the determining crisis within capitalism is precipitated by the obstacles presented to accumulation by worker struggles. Primitive accumulation, taken as a form of enclosure, will thus entail

a separation between people and their conditions of life, through the dismantlement of rights, entitlements, etc. . . . The aimed end result of these strategies of enclosures share the same substance: to forcibly separate people from whatever access to social wealth they have which is not mediated or cooptable by the market. (2000: 13)

Part of "the take" from these two accounts is the ways they highlight how contemporary forms of privatization and the commodification of social services—flowing out of processes of neoliberalization—fit the broader conceptual frame of ongoing forms of primitive accumulation/"accumulation by dispossession."³ Unsurprisingly, then, both Harvey and De Angelis have found their way into debates over South Africa's transition in order to illustrate the ways in which post-apartheid governmental practice have been articulated with forms primitive accumulation/"accumulation by dispossession." What I would like to do, however, is focus on the paradoxical forms of these processes and the ways they are shaped by the politics of the poor in the post-colonial context.

PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION AND POSTCOLONIAL GOVERNMENT

In 2004, Partha Chatterjee published an ambitious attempt at putting forward a perspective on "politics in most of the world"—which is to say, the politics of formally colonized subjects. Part of the lasting importance of the book—called *The Politics of the Governed*—was his reworking of the concept of political society.

³ Specifically for the ways in which extra-economic means are deployed in the appropriation of social wealth and creation of new markets and areas for capitalist investment.

Working off Michel Foucault's lectures that introduce his concept of governmentality, Chatterjee presents a paradigmatic gulf between the abstract homogeneity and equality of a cohort of citizens belonging to civil society and seen as participating in the sovereignty of the state and the particular, heterogeneous identities of modern governmentality, whose subjects are not the figures of citizen or the people but categories of the national population. And it is in relation to modern governmentality that Chatterjee comes to highlight the opening up of a "domain" of political experience that he discusses through his concept of *political society*, and which he argues is marked by its difference from the narrow, associational grid of civil society.

At stake here are a wide set of practices found within the communities of "the governed," often skating the borders of legality, that anticipate and respond to governmental categories for administering to the life of populations—practices that are structured, for instance, to draw a particular subject or group into governmental fields of visibility in order to become a target of governmental intervention or to motivate/structure an exception to a rule. The protesters, for instance, from the Harrismith community—in their blocking of roads and their invocations of governmental categories like "the poor" or "delivery"—are arguably operating in exactly the domain of politics this concept attempts to describe.

Significantly for our discussion, in his 2011 offering, *Lineages of Political Society*, Chatterjee connects his discussion of political society to an account of post-colonial capitalism and ongoing processes of primitive accumulation/"accumulation by dispossession." Reflecting on the division between the formal and informal economy in India, Chatterjee extends the set of correlating oppositions described above (popular sovereignty/governmentality, civil society/political society) with his characterization of a "growth economy" differentiated from a "need economy," as well as a distinction between "corporate capital" and "noncorporate capital." The crucial figure for this turn in Chatterjee's research is Sanyal.

What is marked by this borrowing is the way Sanyal, like Luxemburg, shifts us away from an idea of capitalism characterized by a singular, homogenous form (i.e., a capitalism characterized exclusively by relations between the class of "capitalists" and that of "workers"). Moving away from this assumption does not, however, mean doing away with the Marxist concept of primitive accumulation. As Chatterjee summarizes, "[p]rimitive accumulation, [Sanyal] claims, must be seen as a process that not only brings pre-capitalist producers and their means of production within the circuit of capital, but also creates an area outside of capital" (2014: ix).

The original problematic that Sanyal's book develops and that Chatterjee takes over, however, centers on the fact that capitalist development and primitive accumulation in post-colonial societies often proceed with large sections

of those who lose their subsistence not subsequently being integrated into formal waged work. Here forms of dispossession operate alongside shifts in capitalist accumulation strategies to produce a surplus population—that is, a population “surplus” to the labor needs of capitalism and in this sense, an outside. However, for Chatterjee after Sanyal, one of the features of contemporary post-colonial societies—in the context of modern electoral politics and governmental practice reflecting a notion of “care”—is that those subject to primitive accumulation now also become beneficiaries of forms of governmental intervention which aim at the “reversal of the effects of primitive accumulation”:

While there is a dominant discourse about the importance of growth . . . it is at the same time, considered unacceptable that those who are dispossessed of their means of labor because of the primitive accumulation of capital have no means of subsistence. This produces . . . a curious process in which, on one side, primary producers such as peasants, crafts people, and petty manufacturers lose their land and other means of production, but, on the other, are also provided by governmental agencies with the conditions for meeting their basic needs of livelihood. (2011: 212)

And what constitutes the “basic needs of livelihood” is here not a “fixed quantum of goods determined by biological or other historical criteria.” It represents, instead, “a contextually determined socially produced sense of what is necessary to lead a decent life”—a goldilocks conception “neither unacceptably impoverished nor excessive and luxurious.”

This line of argument is connected to a reflection on the formal and informal economy where the latter stands as the economic realm of the surplus population, a need economy characterized by noncorporate capital and regulated by political society (i.e., regulated through the “arrangements” arising with the interactions between the political forms of subaltern classes and governmental agencies). Chatterjee suggests that corporate capital is hegemonic in civil society, reflected in the broad acceptance of its discourses of market efficiency and economic growth. This does not, however, mean that “Indian democracy” now reflects the “traditional” model of bourgeoisie capitalist democracy—and this is precisely because of the dynamic of political society. The critical difference then is that this domain “which represents the vast bulk of democratic politics in India, is not under the moral-political leadership of the capitalist class” (2011).

With these theoretical statements in hand I turn now to the concrete, unfolding drama of the politics of the governed in South Africa and the field of interaction through which the reproduction and extension of capitalist markets is articulated with a governmental practice that establishes itself in a relation with the black poor.

THE TWO ECONOMIES THESIS AND GOVERNMENTAL REASON IN SOUTH AFRICA

If the Harrismith protest in 2004 marked an important moment shaping mainstream perspective on the politics of the poor, 2003 was an important year in the development of a public discourse on the government of the poor.

In his 2003 *State of the Nation* address, Thabo Mbeki insisted on progress. He reminded those listening of the people's "long march against the system of white minority domination" and their eventual "transition to democratic majority rule." He reminded of trials and sacrifices along the way, but only before affirming that a "tide had turned": lives were changing for the better and the "economy [was] demonstrating resilience . . . that [was] the envy of many across the world."

However, the same speech also went on to foster a dualistic conception of society arising with the acknowledgment of the persistence of poverty:

With regard to the accomplishment of the task of ensuring a better life for all . . . government is perfectly conscious of the fact that there are many in our society who are unable to benefit from whatever our economy is able to offer . . . This reflects the structural fault in our economy and society as a result of which we have a dual economy and society. The one is modern and relatively well developed. The other is characterized by underdevelopment and an entrenched crisis of poverty. (2003)

For Mbeki, the implication of this "structural fault" was that the ("correct") interventions made at the level of "the first economy" did not have corresponding, poverty-alleviating outcomes at the level of what came to be called "the second economy," necessitating a realignment of governmental action.

While the "second economy" characterization fell out of favor in the years following Mbeki's removal, in the 2000s, its significance was to stand as a discursive emblem of a governmental framework aimed at offering *basic* social support to the poor. The elements of this framework crucially included a set of targeted grants, "life line" allocations for water and electricity, uneven municipal indigent management strategies, and—less crucially—jobs through public works campaigns. This evolving framework, along with the roll out of services and housing—at stake in invocation of the term "delivery"—continues to represent the broad means through which governmental authorities administer to the poor, connecting them to an evolving "social security framework" as specific but often overlapping subject categories. The introduction of these measures was independent of Mbeki's statement, but what is significant about this moment is an increase in spending on these

measures and the self-consciousness of official attempts at conceptualizing and aligning them within a more coherent overall strategy.

If we bracket Mbeki's original thesis and focus on the framing of governmental questions in later iterations, we get an insight into the rationality developing alongside a range of mechanisms targeting the poor. A good set of sources in this regard is a 2007 address by Joel Netshitenzhe, then head of the policy co-ordination and advisory services in the presidency, and a document produced by the presidency called "Brief Synopsis: Clarifying The Second Economy Concept."⁴

Early in Netshitenzhe's address he separates official usage of the two economies distinction from the "more orthodox" one, referring "to the existence of two socio-economic systems in one country." Instead, it represents a "utilitarian and very specific South African usage" (Netshitenzhe, 2007). But again, for both documents, the "first economy" is characterized as "cutting edge," "globally integrated," and possessing "a capacity to export manufactured goods, services and primary commodities," while the second economy is that which is "marginalized," "at the edges," "made up of the unemployed and unemployable," what "does not benefit from progress in the First Economy." But, more importantly, they also offer a reflection on governmental practice in this context. In the address, Netshitenzhe says that in order "to deal with marginalization and poverty," "economic interventions" should constitute the primary form of government action. In "Brief Synopsis: Clarifying The Second Economy Concept"—which has word-for-word resonance with Netshitenzhe's address—"economic" measures are contrasted with "social protection" measures: "the focus on meeting the growth and development challenges of the Second Economy is essentially an economic one, rather than one aimed at addressing these challenges through social protection measures such as social grants" (Republic of South Africa, 2006).

Economic interventions are measures that could stimulate growth to absorb the poor into the life of the first economy. However, because "transformation . . . will not happen in one fell swoop," the document adds that "comprehensive social security interventions are required." In this perspective, "interventions in the second economy require direct and active state action and leadership," as precisely that place where "the market cannot provide . . . solutions" (Republic of South Africa, 2006).

⁴ See Netshitenzhe, "Opening Address" (2007) and Republic of South Africa, "Brief Synopsis Clarifying The Second Economy Concept" (2006). Although it is possible to trace the development of the two economies characterization over a wide set of statements, as well as its connection to older debates over the existence and relation between "two economies" in South Africa, in this chapter I emphasize these two statements.

We have here two seemingly conflicting logics of governmental action deployed alongside each other. The first, strongly in line with liberalism's symbolic framework, presents the ideal of governmental action as a form of "economic management," understood here as a mode of indirect governance through market effects. *The model here is providential* and for this form of "economic management" intervention is about creating "the right disposition of things" (for instance, appropriate laws and an enabling framework for a market-centered allocation of infrastructure and resources) to bring about desired political ends.⁵ For the second logic, political ends, like mitigating poverty, are brought about through direct intervention and support to specific subjects by governmental agencies and through non-market means. In addition to the bag of social security interventions undertaken by government then, and economic interventions aimed at growing the first economy, what is also needed are "catalytic" programs to encourage "mobility" between the second economy and the first (Netshitenzhe, 2007). And here there is emphasis on education and a statement of the need to foster entrepreneurial habits and to create conditions for the development of enterprise.

It is important to notice how "this problem" of poverty becomes *visible*. In his address, we are told that the idea of the second economy emerged with the examination of data on employment, inequality, and growth as part of government's ten-year review process (i.e., examination of statistics focused on the population). He goes on to point to what is described as a growing sense that "even as the economy grew by 6% and more, there would still be a large sediment of an 'under-class' imprisoned in the poverty trap" (Netshitenzhe, 2007). It is in fact in relation "to the need to define the phenomenon of the under-class" that the concept of the second economy is said to have emerged. It is also in this context that Netshitenzhe characterizes the state's orientation as "post GEAR," with policies looking beyond "economic interventions" aimed at stimulating growth, to more direct forms of governmental administration to the poor.

The perception of an underclass—as a section of the population facing structural obstacles to entry into the labor market—is not without precedent. Just a year prior to Netshitenzhe's remarks, Seekings and Natrass (2006) made a case for the use of the concept and offered a statistical representation of the phenomenon. The problem that Seekings's and Natrass's numbers point to is one that many researchers have highlighted. In popular discourse, it is referred to as "the problem of jobless growth," and, in more academic discourses, the question of a surplus or superfluous population. As we saw in relation to our discussion of Chatterjee, it speaks to the fact that a large section

⁵ For a discussion of the economic-theological theme of providence, see Agamben (2011).

of the population is unlikely ever to find a place in formal economic activity given the shape of capitalist development today. But the issue goes deeper. In fact, in its representation of liberation and citizenship, post-apartheid officials continue to imagine the poor's entry into the formal labor market as the basis of their social inclusion. In this context, measures for administering to the poor are necessarily represented as temporary, stopgap measures, to help them on their impossible journey to the first economy.

There is a way, then, that Chatterjee's work provides us with an interpretive key for thinking about what is at stake in this discussion. In a very real way, official framing of the governmental challenges of the first and second economy resonates with Chatterjee's discussion, highlighting the duality of a governmental framework that works, on the one hand, to grow the first formal economy, and on the other, to "reverse the effects of primitive accumulation." Indeed, one might well read in Netshitenzhe's characterization of the second economy and the governmental imperatives that flow from the confirmation of Chatterjee's insistence that, faced with the poverty of a surplus population, governmental agencies come to focus on meeting "the basic livelihood needs of the poor." But to say this, and nothing else, misses a crucial element of the form of political reason at work here.

GOVERNMENT AND THE POOR

In deepening the discussion of the form taken by practical measures targeting the poor, it is necessary to go beyond statements on the second economy to the measures themselves and the dynamic political field in which they are constantly being (re)shaped. In this section, I focus on how the restructuring of the delivery of water in the city comes to draw together processes for commodifying water with "indigent management strategies." What I highlight here are aspects of the rationality that underlie this connection, as well as the ways the measures deployed came to be shaped by the struggles of the city's poor.

Today, Johannesburg city managers claim progress. Officially the amount of "free water" and "electricity" available to "the most indigent" households has been progressively increased since the apartheid era. In the case of water, although the city no longer offers a universal free allocation of six kiloliters, qualifying households signed onto the city's indigent register can claim up to fifteen kiloliters of water per month for free, in addition to other services and concessions. This seemingly represents a step forward from the free basic water lifeline—an important instance of the non-market, second economy type measure introduced to provide for the "basic" needs of the poor. On the face of it, then, alongside progress in extending services to the poor,

there are developing systems for ensuring that access to these services stays open—even to the poorest of the poor. But behind this framework is both an eroding set of normative imperatives as well as a history of struggles against commodification.

To be clear, the “commodification” of a social good like water is never achieved once and for all. Nevertheless, in recent decades, governmental rationality for the management of water services has moved toward treating water as a commodity—a movement that, as we have seen, is associated with ongoing processes of primitive accumulation. On the one hand, this entails transforming how water is measured, distributed, and billed for—involving institutional transformations, as well as the introduction of new practices, technologies, and indicators that allow for the identification and mitigation of losses. On the other hand, and more importantly, commodification means ensuring people pay. Focusing on the latter, we confront a paradoxical set of imperatives guiding municipal strategies and the concessions offered to the poor.

Early post-apartheid policies like the Municipal Infrastructure Investment Framework (MIIF) seeded a commitment to the principle of “user pays” (Tomlinson, 2002). But this principle turned out to be harder to implement in practice. This was partly due to institutional constraints. A more enduring problem, however, was widespread nonpayment in poor communities. Ascribed to the legacy of apartheid-era rent boycotts, official consensus was that beyond material poverty, at the root of the problem was a “culture of nonpayment.” The political conduct of movements in the 1980s—in particular, the boycotting of rent and service charges—is seen to have persistent effects on the conduct of the population that governmental measures need to address. Moreover, managers increasingly came to link nonpayment with wasteful practices, especially in the usage of water, and in relation to which a usage-linked cost was seen as a disciplining force.

As is well-documented, in the mid-1990s, the response of a newly elected ANC government to the problem of nonpayment was what McDonald and Pape (2002) characterized as the “gentle arm twisting” of a campaign-like-initiative called Masakhane, which introduced a pedagogy of good citizenship, using media and public events hosted by ANC leaders, to stress civic responsibility through payment. There is strong evidence that ANC officials were, in this period, taking on a governmental rationality threaded through with themes of empowerment through responsabilization, best illustrated by Mandela in a Masakhane speech that (re)figured the work of government as creating “the conditions in which every South African has the opportunity to create a better life *for themselves*” (Mandela, 1998).

These themes deepened, extended, and became more complex in years to come. But with Masakhane’s failure to significantly increase payment levels,

officials outgrew the initiative and looked to more severe cost recovery strategies like cut offs from services for nonpayment (McDonald, 2002). It is in this context that the need for a municipal strategy to manage an indigent population became an ever more urgent imperative; a strategy imagined as working to separate those who “truly” can’t pay for services—so defined as “indigent”—from “those who can pay but are refusing to” (Moosa, 1997).

It is in fact along this axis, and in terms of the development of a distinction between the poor who can’t pay and the poor who won’t pay, that in the late 1990s, municipal indigent management came to be seen as a necessary support for cost recovery measures. While in principle this implied a bare minimum of social support for indigent households (“the can’t pays”) and punitive measures for “the won’t pays,” in practice municipalities still often lacked the administrative capacity to manage their rate base, let alone to make the kinds of distinctions necessary to establish and manage an indigent register. This did stop municipalities from getting tough (i.e., disconnecting) with those who had not embraced the spirit of Masakhane (Fill-Flynn, 2001; Bond, 2004). As a number of writers have now noticed, the resistance that officials encountered, from individual acts of complaint, avoidance, and refusal to organized civic action, is what reinforced the need for an “indigent management strategy” (Hart, 2006; Naidoo, 2010).

Moving in step with the shift to punitive forms of cost recovery, in 1998 the city of Johannesburg initiated an Indigent Policy that managed to register only a modest number of applicants and which, according to the city, was from the start faced with administrative problems. The failures of this policy were, no doubt, highlighted when, in direct response to the disconnecting of people from service networks, new social movements emerged explicitly mobilized in opposition to “cutoffs” and openly, and to great effect, advocating the organized, albeit illegal, reconnection of services (Fill-Flynn, 2001; Bond, 2004). The development of the struggles of the local civic organizations in the early 2000s in Johannesburg—like the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) and Orange Farm Water Crisis Committee (OFWCC), which arose to advance struggles against cost recovery for water and electricity, or the Thembelihle Crisis Committee which campaigned against being removed from occupied land and later for the extension of services to area—were in fact bound to the development of governmental projects and cost recovery drives.

This is where the importance of the work done by the concept of “political society” sits. That is, it shows a mode of interaction in which the governed contest the strategies for governing them through practices often at odds with repertoires of political action associated with civil society. There is, however, good reason to think of the concept of political society as pointing more to a “style of political engagement” (Chatterjee, 2011). In Johannesburg, this style

was reflected in practices and forms of claim-making that attempted to secure de-commodified access to social goods like water and electricity. But it is worth noting that the forms of claim-making that we associate with political society were accompanied, within a single movement, by ones that drew on nationalist narratives, constitutionalism, and even Marxism. Even the name “poor,” as Prishani Naidoo’s work shows, in the ways the term was mobilized in the struggles of the OFWCC, reflected a consciousness of its meaning as a governmental category, working to draw attention to this movement’s members as subjects deserving of governmental support. On the other hand, as Naidoo also shows, this governmental meaning did not exhaust the political meanings given to it by those who invoked it as a form of self-identification (Naidoo, 2007).

The growth of local movements struggling against cut offs and state-driven evictions in the early 2000s came to be widely celebrated, highlighted by Ashwin Desai’s well-traveled narrative of the emergence of a new political subject calling itself “the poors” (Desai, 2002). The embellishments and optimism of celebratory accounts notwithstanding, it is important to notice how the struggles of these movements emerged on and were shaped by a governmental terrain. But for this very reason, at the height of their influence, they were able to win formal and informal concessions and exceptions by frustrating the realization of cost recovery programs (as was the case for the SECC and OFWCC) as well as attempts at removing the poor from informal settlements (as was the case for TCC). They did so through a diverse set of means, many formally illegal, and often without any processes of negotiation.

Gillian Hart, reflecting on the two economies thesis, connected it immediately to the struggles of these movements:

First/Second Economy discourses can be seen as part of an effort to contain the challenges from opposition movements that reached their zenith [in 2002] . . . and render them subject to government intervention. What is significant about this discourse is the way it defines a segment of society that is superfluous to the ‘modern’ economy, and in need of paternal guidance . . . As such they are deserving of a modicum of social security, but on tightly disciplined and conditional terms. (Hart, 2006)

Hart correctly goes on to draw our attention to the way in which municipal indigent management strategies developed in relation to the resistance of the poor to cost recovery initiatives (although these include forms of resistance that were unorganized or independent of actions undertaken by social movements). It is in this light that we can read the introduction of the 2002 Special Cases Policy in Johannesburg, which was explicitly geared to determining “special cases in respect of payment for basic services” (Palmer Development

Group, 2004). The same strategy goes on to list among its objectives “to enhance credit control measures by providing a safety net for the poorest of the poor and identifying those using poverty to not pay for basic services.”

To understand what is at stake in the ways this distinction (between can't pay and won't pay) has developed, it is worth thinking about the way it was mobilized in support of the Free Basic Water (FBW) policy. FBW was introduced in 2001 and took the form of six kiloliter allocation per month to all households. It is worth noting that this universal allocation was rolled out in the context of institutional unevenness in the capacity of municipalities to establish municipal indigent management frameworks that could identify the “deserving poor” and target concessions to them. One of the criticisms of this policy was that, given the average size of poor households, the amount was significantly less than what was promised by the ANC in its 1994 election manifesto. And rather than reflecting an estimation of the real needs of the poor, it was shown to be based on an economic calculation (reflecting the fact that, in an important test case, it was found that giving six kiloliters for free was cheaper than billing and attempting to recover payment for that amount). More importantly, it was pointed out that, at the time of its introduction, officials rationalized FBW by suggesting that it worked to strengthen the principle of “user pays” by creating a means of separating the can't pay from the won't pay (Ruiters, 2005, 2007).

Here the distinction between the so-called can't pay and won't pay (terms that also suggest a problem of disobedience to political authority) comes to be figured as a relationship between household consumption and payment of services, where what separates a “can't pay” from a “won't pay” is the former's willingness to cut consumption to within the very basic allocation or to what can be paid for in excess of this amount. And in both the case of FBW and early iterations of Johannesburg's indigent management strategy, the identification and classification of an indigent population is made functional to the broader cost recovery program for basic services, where *as one trajectory moves toward “meeting basic needs,” another concerns forms of discipline* (organized around the mechanism of a cut off). But this story doesn't end there, and the struggles of the cities' poor have shifted authorities beyond this allocation.

In the early 2000s, with little progress in improving payment levels, Johannesburg began rolling out prepaid water meters (PPWM). This also meant shifting to metered usage and billing rather than the flat rate that residents were previously billed (regardless of the extent of their usage). But, right from the start of the roll out of PPWMs, there was resistance.

When the initiative shifted to Soweto after an initial pilot project in the township of Orange Farm (which catalyzed the formation of the OFWCC), it became the central focus of the mobilizations of SECC (which had been

formed earlier in opposition to cut offs of electricity). In the first months of the project, community resistance had significantly damaged the roll out through sabotage of infrastructure as well as marches, door-to-door visits, and media campaigns. In this context of growing resistance to the installation of PPWMs, with many residents refusing to sign service agreements, the city amended its indigent management policy, offering to scrap the arrears of indigent households signed onto the city's register, on condition that they also sign onto prepaid systems of delivery.

Later, as pipes were being laid under heavy security presence and an initial set of meters already installed, the campaign shifted focus. On the one hand, as the movement in Soweto attained the skills to illegally bypass meters, the SECC organized activist plumbers to connect residents to the water delivery network. On the other hand, using networks created by its affiliation to the Anti-Privatization Forum (APF), the SECC also obtained access to legal resources that allowed it to launch a constitutional challenge to PPWMs and the sufficiency of the 6 kiloliter lifeline allocation. In 2007, in the face of this constitutional challenge, as well as illegal reconnections and other forms of resistance, the city announced that, in addition to increasing its allocation from 6 to 10 kiloliters, it would no longer be providing the basic amount, except to residents signed onto its indigent management register. The city, however, quickly backtracked when it faced internal resistance to the plan from local councilors.

Apparatuses for governing the poor in Johannesburg are, however, machines that work by constantly breaking down, forcing a constant process of reconstitution. The principle of change for these rapidly morphing forms is often opposition, resistance, and counter conduct. In spite of the APF losing its constitutional challenge to PPWMs and years of struggles of the city's poor, the city's attempts at mitigating these (and at becoming constitutionally compliant) and official attempts at warding off nonpayment and illegal connections have constantly worked to shift free water allocations to the poor upwards, at the same time as they become more targeted.

It is clear that the city still faces tremendous institutional challenges in establishing a working framework of service rebates and indigent support. All the same, it is through imperfect initiatives, however imprecise they may be in their actual implementation, that it becomes more competent in making interventions in other areas, establishing processes for identifying and conditionally integrating those classified as indigent, potentially enabling new fields through which modes of inclusion and exclusion, activation and abandonment, are decided. The current framework in Johannesburg then, based on bands of assistance for different categories of the poor, arises from and remains caught in a crisis-driven cycle of amendments centered on working toward the "commodification" of services, albeit on increasingly

more narrow terms—that is to say, as subject to more politically motivated exceptions.

In other words, the development of the struggles of the poor in Johannesburg is tightly interwoven with the measures and institutional forms administering to them. However, this is not a simple causal relation, but instead reflects a complex interplay, a double movement even, between neoliberal governmentalization, and the resistance of the poor.

NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY, PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION, AND THE COUNTER MOVEMENT

To say that neoliberalism has shaped governmental practice is a mundane academic truth, and there is an extensive literature outlining its influence in the post-apartheid period. To say that the social security frameworks targeting the poor have been as well is more contentious. Neoliberalism is not, however, the absence of social security but a particular orientation to it. Fredrick Hayek, for instance, speaks in clear terms of the “necessity” of public assistance or “relief” for the poor (Hayek, 2007). But what is also clear is that, for Hayek, whatever assistance is made available to the poor should be of *an absolute minimum* and geared toward combating “welfare dependency.” And, where the “amount of relief” is likely to be “more than absolutely necessary to keep alive and in health,” he suggests that it is inevitable that this relief will not only be used by those not able to provide for themselves—“the deserving poor”—but also by some who would have otherwise been induced to provide for themselves. In this account then, the corollary of the duty of “the public” to provide for the “extreme needs” of vulnerable sections of the society is an effort to compel them to make provision “against those common hazards of life” themselves.

In an important respect, a similar perspective is reflected in the social security frameworks I have discussed above, structuring how allocations are made and initiatives are organized. It is important to see that what is at stake here is not so much a “contextual sense of a dignified existence.” For this political rationality, social grants and lifeline allocations must in fact be at an “optimum minimum”—warding off welfare dependency at the same time as they ward off resistance. Rather than working to secure a dignified existence for those belonging to the surplus population, for a neoliberal governmentality, dignity is precisely what governmental measures must work to avoid. And the measures to meet the “extreme needs” of the poor must themselves work to ensure that the poor are turned to a life conditioned by market relations. At the same time, as my discussion above highlights, the struggles of the poor constantly work to push benefits across new thresholds as they struggle for a

life beyond bare existence. But even where they are successful, they become increasingly subject to new modes of surveillance and discipline.

A number of authors have drawn a connection between our social security framework and the nineteenth-century English poor laws.⁶ What makes the poor laws a useful analogy is the ways in which measures targeting the poor reflect a division between a deserving and undeserving subject, where the anxiety of officials is one of fostering the “correct” conduct of the poor. Like those of the nineteenth century, today’s measures targeting the poor operate to make a life lived under the sign of indigence as unattractive as possible in order to ensure that the poor should rather look to the market for any lasting escape from the condition of poverty—that they should look to themselves for empowerment.

An important reflection on the poor laws comes from Polanyi, for whom the 1834 amendment moved the emerging mode of production toward an unbound labor market forming in the shadow of the workhouses, marking for him the “starting point of modern capitalism” (Polanyi, 1946: 85). The lasting weight of Polanyi’s study is, of course, its perception of a “double movement”—on one side, the drive toward a self-regulating market, a drive threatening to destroy society itself, and on the other, society which will act to defend itself against this drive. The backdrop of the “movements” that Polanyi described were, as he reminds us, the enclosures and the longer processes through which the poor were progressively dispossessed of “their share in the common” and steered to the factories in the newly emerging manufacturing towns (1946: 43)—that is, processes of “primitive accumulation.”

The crucial point, however, is that the poor transformed into free labor did not naturally move toward the capitalist labor market taking shape—they needed to be pushed, just as such a market needed to be created. In fact, both are part of the same process. With this in mind, we can return to Chatterjee’s discussion of primitive accumulation and the line of questioning I opened up earlier. The poor live in a world of marketized relations and have to be made subject to these. At that same time, the value created by the labor of the informal economy, Chatterjee’s noncorporate capital, also often ends up in the ledgers of corporate capital. As Hardt and Negri have argued, under conditions of contemporary capitalism, social life increasingly comes to be functional to the creation of value that can then become subject to appropriation through extra-economic means (2000). In contextually closer terms, Melanie Samson shows how Sanyal’s discussion of the need economy misses how value created by informal sector workers becomes subject to forms of “accumulation by dispossession” (Samson, 2015).

⁶ See for instance, Hart (2007); Everatt (2008); Naidoo (2010).

Part of the problem with Chatterjee's discussion is that, while full of key insight,⁷ he makes little reference to recent debates over the ongoing character of primitive accumulation or to the ways that the concept helps us understand features of contemporary neoliberal governmental practice, including the commodification of social services. This means that a reader unaware of these debates could miss the ways in which the extra-economic powers of "the state" have come to be an important driver of contemporary forms of dispossession.

To be clear, the invocation of the poor laws in contemporary South Africa can only be an analogy. This is not only a question of strategy or severity. In the nineteenth century, wage labor was on the rise. One of our challenges is to rethink the concept of primitive accumulation in a society without work. Reflecting on the Johannesburg context, what I have tried to show is that where one trajectory of governmental practice has gone toward meeting basic needs, another is far more concerned with disciplining the conduct of the poor. Even where there is an official acknowledgment of the implausibility of entry into the formal economy for vast sections of the population, governmental practice is one of "acting as if" a life in the formal economy will be the form of escape from poverty.

In summing up an important line of recent discussions centered on "primitive accumulation," writers have taken up the notion of enclosure, as a metaphor for the extension of the market into ever-wider areas of social life and the deepening commodification of social goods. What I have worked to show is that governmental powers, as part of a linked process, come to work toward *the foreclosure* of individual and collective life strategies, and as a consequence, of specific forms of life that resist integration into marketized relations. Still, the poor act for something else.

CONCLUSION

How do we take up Luxemburg's lessons in thinking about the accumulation of capital and class struggle today in a post-colonial context? Stepping back to a higher level of abstraction (without assuming a universalist or global perspective), what I have highlighted are some of the questions that emerge when—with Luxemburg—we think about the ways in which the reproduction of capitalist relations and social classes are shot through with political and economic crisis, opening up new rounds of primitive accumulation/"accumulation by dispossession." As writers like Harvey and

⁷ For a selection of perspectives on the question see, Perelman (2000); Harvey (2003); De Angelis (2000, 2001); Hardt and Negri (2000); Federici (2004).

De Angelis illustrate, aspects of what we call neoliberal restructuring often involve unfolding practices that employ extra-economic means in remaking our contemporary world by economically rationalizing social life. What I have also shown is something of the particularity of the post-colonial problematic of primitive accumulation in the present—that is, primitive accumulation in a society without work—and the forms of political struggles that are developing in this context. There are many ways one might take up this problematic. My contribution has been to draw attention to a double movement between neoliberal governmentalization and struggles of the poor—a double movement unfolding on the governmental terrain.

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Chapter 15

Rosa Luxemburg and the Primitive Accumulation of Whiteness

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We need a concept of primitive accumulation, Marx writes toward the end of the first volume of *Capital*, in order to account for the violent processes “preced[ing] capitalistic accumulation” and creating its preconditions, and to avoid the fallacy of theorizing a “never-ending circle” in which capitalism seems to arise *sui generis* (1977: 873). Critical race theory encounters a similar problem. At a broad level, the prevailing approaches understand race “to occur only in *modern* time,” positing “high modernist racism as the template of *all* racisms” and rehearsing “a *grand récit* that reifies modernity as *telos* and origin . . . [that] entrenches the delivery of a paradigmatic chronology of racial time” (Heng, 2018: 16, 18, 20, emphasis in original). Even if one constructs race as a primarily or exclusively modern invention, how are we to not trap ourselves in our own tautology of race and racism emerging as if out of nothing, whether it be in 1492, the beginning of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, or the Enlightenment’s political theoretical and scientific racisms? What are the antecedent enabling conditions of these articulations and enactments of race and racial violence? What is the relationship between the primitive accumulation of capital and historical processes of race-making? What are the structural conditions of possibility for the expansion and reproduction of racial capitalism? This chapter mines and creolizes Rosa Luxemburg’s reworking of the Marxist concept of primitive accumulation in order to theorize the relationship between capital accumulation and constructions of race and whiteness from the European Middle Ages onward. We turn to Luxemburg because she offers a way to theorize the violence of imperialism and primitive accumulation as an organic and continuous part of capitalism, across its history. At the same time, we turn to theorists of medieval race-making—and, later, to analyses of contemporary “neoliberal imperialism,”

a term usefully mapped in Godfrey et al. (2014)—to deepen and complicate Luxemburg’s prescient analyses of capitalist imperialism.

We argue that what we call the *primitive accumulation of whiteness*—a concept we develop by reading Rosa Luxemburg alongside Geraldine Heng’s work on the medieval constructions of race and the forging of a white, Christian, European subject (*homo europaeus*)—is a necessary condition of possibility for the ongoing primitive accumulation of capital. Specifically, we contend that the constant (re)consolidation of an idealized white subject is configured into the logic of capital, facilitating and enabling the bifurcation of human populations and their respective territories. This (re)production and accumulation of whiteness—operating inseparably with the reproduction and accumulation of capital—allows capital to open up bodies and territories to modes of expropriation that exceed capital’s exploitation of normative wage labor. While we trace the beginnings of the primitive accumulation of whiteness, following Heng, to the medieval period, we also contend alongside scholars of racial capitalism that the accumulation of whiteness is not a historical artifact but a continuous feature of the contemporary capitalist world system. We do not conceive of “whiteness” as a transhistorical category divorced from material social relations; rather, we dialectically connect Luxemburg’s analyses of primitive accumulation and imperialism with Heng’s arguments about the “invention” of race and *homo europaeus* to articulate one genealogy of racial capitalism.

As such, we argue that the primitive accumulation of whiteness is a useful concept for theorizing racial capitalism. The primitive accumulation of whiteness: identifies and elucidates a mechanism/dynamic by which racial capitalism operates; connects processes of racialization, the consolidation of whiteness as a racial-civilizational category, an originary and ongoing imperial accumulations of capital; situates Luxemburg and Heng as theorists of racial capitalism; explores racial capitalism in what Heng calls “deep time” (2018: 22–24); and ensures that accounts of early modalities of whiteness in medieval race-making and later in neoliberal modes of imperialism do not understand whiteness or race as phenomena separate from capital.¹

Our interest is in structurally theorizing the processes by which material social relations change and are changed in order to consolidate white

¹ The general dynamic of racial capitalism is most lucidly explored through Cedric Robinson’s foundational account in *Black Marxism*: “[The] development, organization and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force, then, it could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism. I have used the term ‘racial capitalism’ to refer to this development and to the subsequent structures as an historical agency” (1983, 2–3). The theoretical incorporation of Luxemburg, Robinson, and Heng together in this chapter elucidates the primitive accumulation of whiteness as one of the central mechanisms of the development of racial capitalism.

European national identity that could ground and launch modern racial projects. Primitive accumulation functions theoretically in this way, focusing our account on the enabling conditions of racial capitalism. The primitive accumulation of whiteness, we will show, is not epiphenomenal to or contingently related to later “modern” practices of proletarianization, race-making, and capitalism but rather constitutes and structures racial capitalism as such. The primitive accumulation of whiteness ought to be part of the theory of racism, white supremacy, and the ongoing primitive accumulation of capital. This is the case for the genealogy of racial capitalism, as we demonstrate in our analysis of medieval European race-making, and it is also the case for contemporary modes of racial capitalism, as we detail in our exploration of the primitive accumulation of whiteness in neoliberal imperialism.

It is by creolizing Rosa Luxemburg’s account of capitalist accumulation that we work to do this. Jane Anna Gordon and Neil Roberts articulate creolization as a political theoretical project involving a “method of reading that couples figures who are not typically engaged together,” and in the process “bring[ing] interrelated, contradictory faces of modernity closer, creating conversations among worlds entangled by colonizing projects” (2015: 2).² Crucially, they argue that this is *not* a banal compare and contrast but rather a “robust theoretical *métissage* that yields new modes of thought, that, at their best, are more than the sum of their parts” (2015: 3). For us, such a creolization entails bringing together Luxemburg with theorists and historians of racism and colonialism, where the sum of the theoretical parts illuminates the worlds constituting and constituted by colonizing projects in a way that is different than Luxemburg, Heng, or Robinson would explore on their own.

The first section starts to develop the concept of the primitive accumulation of whiteness by examining Luxemburg’s analysis of the structural dependency between capitalism and imperialism in *The Accumulation of Capital* and suggests how an analysis of race is necessary to fully develop the account of capitalism. The second section turns to two examples of race-making projects in medieval Europe—violence against Jews in England and European narratives of the Mongol Empire—to illustrate how and why the primitive accumulation of whiteness, as a concept, proves vital to analyses of racial capitalism and imperialism. This culminates in a brief discussion situating primitive accumulation, racial capitalism, and Luxemburg’s theorizing as operating across multiple temporalities. The third section picks up this temporal cue and examines the primitive accumulation of whiteness as it operates in twenty-first century “neoliberal imperialism,” where relations between private industries, the American government and military, and the

² For a fuller account of the cultural, political, and theoretical genealogies of creolization, see Gordon (2014).

racialization of Muslims and Arabs in the United States function to reproduce racial capitalism. The conclusion briefly sketches the kinds of political solidarities that would be needed to struggle against the primitive accumulation of whiteness and the dynamics of which it is a part.

ACCUMULATION AND RACE IN LUXEMBURG'S THEORIZING OF CAPITALIST IMPERIALISM

Over the past few decades, a number of scholars have returned to Marx's notion of "so-called" primitive accumulation to theorize the relations of violence intrinsic to the reproduction and perpetuation of capitalist social relations. Ranging from Marxist feminist scholarship to settler colonial studies to Marxist-inflected analyses of race to neo-Marxist analyses of neoliberalism (Coulthard, 2014; Federici, 2004; Harvey, 2005; Ince, 2018; Melamed, 2015; Mies, 1986; Nichols, 2015; Singh, 2016), a number of scholars have productively refashioned Marx's teleological conception of primitive accumulation by drawing, either implicitly or explicitly, on Rosa Luxemburg's (2016) insights about the *continuous* character of primitive accumulation. While sometimes disagreeing with Luxemburg on the specific causal mechanisms that require capitalism to resort to extra-economic coercion,³ these scholars utilize Luxemburg's insistence (contra Marx) that "capital does not merely come into the world 'dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt,' it also imposes itself on the world step by step in the same way" (2016: 330). Through the prism of primitive accumulation as an *ongoing* aspect of capitalism, and not a stage prior to the emergence of capitalism proper, Luxemburg uncovers how imperialism is bound up with the dynamics of capital accumulation. This move by Luxemburg—which reworks Marx's analytic of primitive accumulation and simultaneously breaks with V.I. Lenin's analysis of imperialism—is theoretically foundational for contemporary scholars grappling with the elements of force unleashed by capitalism.

To fully appreciate Luxemburg's contemporary relevance and ubiquitous presence in debates around capital's violence and primitive accumulation, we return to her arguments about the structural links between imperialism and capitalist development in *The Accumulation of Capital*. In the spirit of Luxemburg's political and theoretical interventions in Marxist theory, then, this chapter seeks to *creolize* Luxemburg's concept of primitive accumulation and her critique of imperialism by thinking about the ways racial domination,

³ For instance, Harvey disagrees with Luxemburg's emphasis on effective demand and "underconsumption" as the forces driving capitalist imperialism; rather, he suggests that capital deploys force and violence to resolve crises of *over-accumulation* (Harvey, 2005: chapter 4).

racial hierarchy, and the historical production of whiteness complicate, supplement, and are bound up with Luxemburg's prescient analyses. In other words, we enlist Luxemburg to think through *racial capitalism*. To this end, this section fleshes out Luxemburg's arguments about primitive accumulation, delving into the interconnections between imperialism and the development of capitalism. We particularly interrogate how attention to processes of race-making in both the European Middle Ages and in contemporary neoliberal imperialism might enrich Luxemburg's observations about the reproduction of capital and its necessary relation to militarism, imperialism, and war.

One of the key problems framing Luxemburg's inquiry in *The Accumulation of Capital* is a historical-theoretical dilemma she identifies in Marx's analysis of expanded capitalist reproduction. In a straightforward manner, Luxemburg asks, "What is the source of the constantly increasing demand underlying the progressive expansion of production?" (2016: 87). More directly, Luxemburg points out that Marx "gives no answer to the question of for whom expanded reproduction actually occurs . . . [suggesting] that capitalist production realizes its entire surplus value exclusively by itself, employing the capitalized surplus value for its own requirements" (2016: 235). The theoretical assumptions underlying Marx's analyses—the universality of the capitalist mode of production and the existence of only workers and capitalists—unfortunately hide the problems of effective demand and its relationship to the *expanded* reproduction of capital (2016: 87, 250). Indeed, the realization of surplus value is necessary for capital to accumulate and reproduce itself. As Luxemburg states, "the successful realization of the commodities produced in the preceding period of production appears as the first condition of reproduction for the capitalist producers" (2016: 14). Marx, according to Luxemburg, does not satisfactorily account for this vital process of realization, which hinges on an increase in effective demand. So, how does capital resolve this dilemma of effective demand?

Historically analyzing how capitalist development ensures the existence of a large enough consumer base to buy commodities and realize surplus value, Luxemburg argues that the continued reproduction, expansion, and accumulation of capital depends on capital's subjugation of non-capitalist spheres via imperialism, militarism, and war. Although conceding that Marx, in his analysis of so-called primitive accumulation at the end of *Capital, Volume I*, details how capital appropriates non-capitalist social relations and means of production, the problem in Marx's account is that these processes of proletarianization and expropriation—whether of the English peasantry and their lands or of European colonialism's extractive relationship with its non-European colonies—"merely illustrate the genesis of capital . . . As soon as Marx begins his theoretical analysis of the process of capital (of production as well as circulation), he constantly returns to his presupposition of the

universal and exclusive dominance of capitalist production” (2016: 262). Yet, as Luxemburg observes, capital’s need to appropriate and transform non-capitalist sectors is not limited to the historical birth of capitalism but extends into and encompasses capitalism’s mature forms (Ibid). In order for capital accumulation to proceed smoothly, Luxemburg explains that capitalism “requires non-capitalist social strata as a market in which to realize its surplus value, as a source for its means of production and as a reservoir of labor-power for its wage system” (2016: 265). Consequently, given capital’s “powerful drive” to capture non-capitalist territories (2016: 263), imperialism—including a kind of internal imperialism against non-capitalist strata within capitalist countries—emerges as the “political expression of the process of the accumulation of capital in its competitive struggle over the unspoiled remainder of the non-capitalist world environment” (2016: 325). Far from being simply part of capital’s origin story or peripheral to capitalist development, Luxemburg thus surfaces the ways imperialism and colonialism are built into capital’s structuring logic.

By recasting Marx’s analysis of primitive accumulation into an ongoing feature of capitalism, Luxemburg develops the theoretical tools to reveal how capital accumulation operates through the simultaneous logics of wage-labor exploitation and the imperialist expropriation of non-capitalist spheres. Where Marx’s critique of political economy focuses on penetrating the veil of liberal market exchange to highlight capital’s extraction of surplus value at the point of production via the exploitation of labor, Luxemburg deepens this analysis by adding a second dimension that is no less central to capital accumulation, namely, capital’s imperial relationship with non-capitalist sectors of the globe. The latter mode of accumulation via imperialism works primarily through the overt use of violence and fraud, relying on the methods of “colonial policy, the system of international credit, the policy of spheres of interest, and war” (2016: 329). These two dimensions of capital accumulation are “organically bound up with each other through the very conditions of the reproduction of capital, and it is only together that they result in the historical trajectory of capital” (2016: 329–330).

Luxemburg’s grounding of imperialism as a structural component of capital accumulation powerfully intervenes in and opens up Marxism to account for capital’s violent relations with the non-capitalist world, yet it also raises questions that Luxemburg does not directly pursue. Most of all, on what basis is capital’s global imperialist violence organized? Differently stated, why are populations designated as “non-white” the disproportionate bearers of imperialism and naked violence unmediated by liberal rights or wage-contracts? This is not to suggest that Luxemburg is unaware of the role race has played in the imperial/colonial expansion of capitalism. For instance, Luxemburg states, “Capital needs other races to exploit territories where the

white race is not capable of working, and in general it needs unrestricted disposal over all the labor-power in the world” (2016: 261). Elsewhere she points to capital’s use of hybrid forms of labor domination, particularly in the colonies, which range from the exploitation of “free” and “unfree” forms of labor (for example, slavery⁴). Luxemburg certainly provides an incisive economic explanation for imperialism and the violence meted out against non-European peoples and territories; however, how might the construction of *homo europaeus* in the European Middle Ages augment Luxemburg’s analysis? In what ways is the accumulation of race and whiteness intertwined with the ongoing primitive accumulation of capital? In sum, by bringing contemporary scholarship on medieval race-making and neoliberal imperialism to bear on Luxemburg’s analyses, we seek to creolize her work—especially her refashioning of Marx’s notion of primitive accumulation—to shed light on histories of racial capitalism in the next section and on its contemporary manifestations, as we explore in the section after that.

Resonant with the way Luxemburg extends Marx’s critique of capital and primitive accumulation, we thus extend Luxemburg’s critique of imperialism by examining the ways imperialism and capital accumulation more generally are enabled and mediated by the primitive accumulation of whiteness. The historical production of *homo europaeus* (the “white,” European subject), which is always in antithesis to an internal and/or external Other, we suggest, is a missing condition of possibility for the analysis of capital accumulation that Luxemburg presents. We contend that Luxemburg’s analysis of imperialism as a second dimension of capital accumulation can be productively complemented by attending to the ways the metabolism between capitalist and non-capitalist territories is also simultaneously a metabolism between *homo europaeus* and non-white peoples. Indeed, the shifting boundaries of “whiteness” designate which subjects and territories are marked to face the naked violence of imperial domination from those that are subject to exploitation under the guise of the liberal social contract. Luxemburg is keenly attuned to capital’s expropriation of the labor, land, and resources of non-white populations, and we more explicitly draw out how racial hierarchies—especially the constitution of the white European subject—serve as a structural precondition for capital accumulation, particularly in terms of accumulation via imperialism. From the outset, then, the consolidation of *homo europaeus* configures and overdetermines capital’s violence as it expands across the globe.

⁴ Luxemburg notes the role of racialized slave systems established by the British on the cotton plantations of the South American colonies (2016: 261–62) and by the Dutch in South Africa (2016: 298–99) in imperial capital accumulation.

THE PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION OF WHITENESS AND MEDIEVAL RACE-MAKING

To theorize such violence, this section reads Luxemburg's concept of accumulation back into accounts of race and racial capitalism, particularly in relation to Heng's work on racialization in the European Middle Ages.⁵ More specifically, we engage in a close reading of two key historical phenomena from Heng's text in order to analyze medieval race-making as a primitive accumulation of whiteness, and hence as a fundamental mechanism of racial capitalism—or perhaps proto-racial capitalism. Our claim here is that Luxemburg, Heng, and Cedric Robinson activate an account of the primitive accumulation of whiteness *as a concept for analyses and theories of racial capitalism*. In order for whiteness to accumulate, it requires an ongoing violent relation to non-white worlds, both geographically within and without Europe. The expanded reproduction of capital, according to Luxemburg, necessitates ongoing relations with, sale of materials to, and transformation of, non-capitalist milieus, all in order to realize the part of surplus value that is necessary for capitalization and thus accumulation (2016: chapter 26). Whiteness consolidates in conjunction with processions of dominion over land, trade, resources, and proto-capital, the imperial destruction of natural and peasant economies, transformation of communal land into private property, and imperial ventures by capitalist states. These processes, which Luxemburg details as fundamental to capitalist imperialism, are at the same time imperial race-making projects. Creolizing Luxemburg and reading her alongside Heng—and, later in this section, Robinson—enables us to think through how these processes are connected as modalities of racial capitalism. Heng provides historical-theoretical analysis of medieval race-making that, we suggest, can be generatively theorized through Luxemburg as a primitive accumulation of whiteness, while we later use Robinson's theoretical framework of racial capitalism in order to clarify how this accumulation unfolds.

Whiteness must be consolidated in medieval Europe for it to launch itself into multidimensional violent regimes of racism in modernity, and also, as Luxemburg shows with regard to capitalism, requires an ongoing violent relationship to non-white peoples and strata. This section focuses on a close reading of Heng's account of the racial-economic-religious assemblage involving Jewish people in medieval England and of the mercantile imaginary's

⁵ In doing so, we admittedly (and perhaps inevitably) flatten many of the more complex facets of Heng's extensive, magisterial text even as we draw from it for theoretical framing and concrete historical examples. See, for example, her discussion of the multivalence of color and skin color, the multiple forms through which tropes of color are expressed, and the variable relationship color has to 'race' in the Middle Ages (2018: 42–44, chapter 4). It is well worth one's effort to engage fully with the intricacies of the text.

description/fantasy of the Mongol Empire. In doing so, we articulate these phenomena as formative dimensions of racial capitalism through the concept of the primitive accumulation of whiteness. We turn to these specific examples from Heng's work because we think they forcefully crystallize the concept of the primitive accumulation of whiteness, the broader historical-theoretical argument about racial capitalism, and the critical potential of the project of creolizing Luxemburg. Moreover, we find that Luxemburg and later Robinson provide a vantage point to elaborate how proto-capitalism conditions medieval race-making more extensively than Heng's account alone does. The racialization of English people as white through the violent racialization of Jews as well as the mercantile-racial imaginary about the Mongols are not the *only* examples of what we are calling the primitive accumulation of whiteness in medieval time. Rather, they are especially salient for developing this concept and for the project of creolizing Luxemburg through Heng's account of medieval race-making.

Accumulating Capital, Accumulating Whiteness, Accumulating Violence: Jews in Medieval England

Amid Heng's examination of Jews in medieval England as a racialized "internal minority" subjected to nation-making and race-making state violence (2018: chapter 2), she analyzes the intertwining of Jews' racial, economic, and religious situation (2018: 58–65). This analysis, we argue, helps significantly develop an account of the primitive accumulation of whiteness: the social status of Jews, their economic positioning, and their racialization intersect to elucidate the closely linked dynamics of the accumulation of capital and the establishment of a white European subject against a non-white other. In these ways, Heng's example of Jews in England helps crystallize our account of the primitive accumulation of whiteness. In twelfth- and thirteenth-century England, Jews were at the same time "the engine of economic modernity" because of their central role in "credit markets" and "a commercializing land market" (2018: 58) *and* subject to disproportionate taxation, land expropriation, stigma, and finally violence and expulsion underwritten by their racialization as not-white and not-English. In Heng's analysis, these phenomena work together to constitute Jewish racialization in a way that requires one to think race and proto-capitalism—and religion, as it is situated vis-à-vis these two other processes—together. In other words, racial (proto-) capitalism positions Jewish subjects in medieval England as racially inferior, and we will claim that the concept of the primitive accumulation of whiteness explicates the dynamics contained therein.

The financial role of wealthier Jews in medieval England operated in relation to their racialization and the violence against them. Heng demonstrates

that “the widespread identification of Jews with economic difference, and the hydra-headed personality of capital, and capital accumulation”—supported by both the “allure, presumptive power, dangers, and threat of money” and “Christian culture’s proscriptions and ambivalence” rendered Jews the “personification” of turbulent forces of capital (2018: 58–59). Even short of periodic state and vigilante violence or eventual expulsion, this rendered Jews subject to anti-Semitic tropes, accusations of usury, disproportionate taxation by the state, wealth and land appropriation, and at the same time their constriction to outsider economic activities like moneylending (2018: 59–64). As Heng points out, while one could imagine a scenario where the “logic of capital” and economic success in a “commercializing economy” might confer “advantages . . . social, material, and other benefits” to the successful group (2018: 62), yet Jewish people in the medieval period experienced no such status. The crucial point for our analysis is that the oppressed position of Jews in a capitalizing economy cannot be accounted for or understood through “purely” economic reason. Rather, “the allure and threat of capital can be transformed into a politics of race,” generating violence that is *both* a “politics of race” *and* an “economics of class,” featuring “class heterogeneity among the anti-Jewish assailants” (2018: 62). Jews, as racialized subjects, were not white yet essential to capital accumulation. Their participation in commercializing processes is weaponized against them *through race*, such that an economic analysis alone would be insufficient to explain violence carried out against them. Here, the conjunction of race and (proto-)capitalism synthesizes racial and class politics, transmogrifies economic success into exposure to violence, and conscripts a cross-class coalition to carry out that violence.⁶

These are dynamics of racial capitalism. Indeed, Heng insists that while they were “unquestionably an important factor in the violence and destruction visited upon Jews, economic motives should not be assumed to offer adequate explanation, nor should they be assumed to be unconditioned by a politics of race” (2018: 63). These “economic motives” were, rather, thoroughly racialized, in a way that is typical of racial capitalism.⁷ The racialization of Jews as a distinct homogenized and inferior minority conditions their economic

⁶ Heng notes that everyone from “peasants and townfolk, knights of the shire, monastic houses, and great magnates” all made Jews “targets” of “resentment” (2018: 61). This targeting essentialized all Jews as a homogenous economic-qua-racial threat/subjects, even as wealth was disproportionately distributed among the Jewish population and poverty was present among Jews in England (2018: 62–63).

⁷ See, for instance, Robin D.G. Kelley’s essay on racial capitalism, where he articulates—drawing on Robinson—the way that the “first European proletarians were *racial* subjects (Irish, Jews, Roma or Gypsies, Slavs, etc.) and they were victims of dispossession (enclosure), colonialism, and slavery *within Europe*” (Kelley, 2017). Also see Heng’s account of the racialization of the Irish in relation to their economic status and practices (2018: 37–39).

roles, possibilities, and activities, and also the social consequences of those activities. Simultaneously, the dangers and turbulence stuck to commercializing capital heightens the danger posed by their racialization. The feedback loop of their economic role and racialization constitute one another, which sows a “fertile ground for generating racialized modes of group redress” that reach “its logical extremity” in the 1290 expulsion order (2018: 61). Jews in medieval England are not just racial subjects or economic subjects but subjects of racial (proto-) capitalism, as they become the racialized other against which a white subject coheres and accumulates. Examining the biopolitical management of Jews in medieval England, Heng elucidates how the Church and the State used various physical, theological, and ideological mechanisms and technologies to separate and demarcate the Jewish population from the larger Christian population (2018: 15–16, chapter 2), through which a white Christian, Anglo-Saxon English national identity consolidates.

In this consolidation, whiteness and capital accumulate together. In the twelfth century, a prominent abbot proposed a plan to confiscate Jewish lands and use the revenue to finance crusades against Muslims in the holy land (2018: 61). Not only does this proposal “seamlessly link . . . the disciplining of the infidel within Europe to the disciplining of the infidel without” (Ibid) in a move that coheres the figure *homo europeas* against its variably racialized Others, it also constructs a chain of linked accumulations of capital. The plan would expropriate proto-capital from Jews in Europe, use that capital to engage in imperial ventures—or, in Luxemburg’s terms, realize that proto-capital in non-European/non-white/non-proto-capitalist zones—which would lead to plunder that could then be re-circulated back through Europe, all underwritten by the racialization of Jews and Muslims against the white European Christian subject.

In England more specifically, capital accumulation happens through Jewish economic agents in two ways. First, “land transfer through Jewish financial transactions,” a process linking land, capital, and credit that “capitalized the market in land to such an extent as to threaten and undermine feudal obligations and relationships, destabilizing the basis of land-based feudalism” (2018: 59). Luxemburg herself identifies the marketization of land for the purpose of establishing a system of private property—and thus the description of feudal and “natural” socioeconomic systems—as one of the central mechanisms of imperial capitalist accumulation, with India and Algeria as her two main examples (Luxemburg, 2016: chapter 27).⁸ A similar process takes place in England itself as a more originary accumulation that involves relations with a racialized population, the destruction of more

⁸ The establishment of credit flows is also essential to capitalist accumulation (Luxemburg, 2016: 304–5).

traditional forms of property and social relations, and the circulation of land-qua-private-property. Second, the state appropriated wealth directly from the Jewish population of England, subjecting them to “special tallages and other fiscal exploitation,” such that, for example, half of aggregate Jewish wealth was transferred from individuals to the Crown from 1241 to 1258 (Heng, 2018: 64). Here, accumulation takes the more direct form of plunder or theft from an internal minority. In both of these processes, the racialization of the population from which capital is circulated and extracted enables accumulation to operate, such that whiteness and (proto-)capital are accumulated alongside and through one another.

More broadly, then, this close reading of Heng’s examination of Jews in medieval England demonstrates the importance of a concept such as the primitive accumulation of whiteness for analyses of racial capitalism. In an abstract sense, the concept connects processes of racialization, the consolidation of whiteness, and both originary and ongoing imperial accumulations of capital. In the concrete example of Jews in medieval England, it crystallizes the racialization of Jewish subjects and the white Christian European subject they constitute, the economic role of Jews in England, violence against Jews in England, the financing of imperial Crusades, and specific mechanisms of capital expropriation and accumulation. Rather than unfolding separately from the primitive accumulation of capital, the process of racialization of Jews in medieval England enables and mutually constitutes the realization of surplus value. The primitive accumulation of whiteness illuminates this process of racialization as it is intertwined with capital accumulation. In the next subsection, we move from thinking about the primitive accumulation of whiteness within Europe to the accumulation of capital and whiteness in relation to the Mongol Empire in order to see a different racial-economic-geographical process of this accumulation.

Accumulations and the Logic of Differentiation: Imagining the Mongol Empire

Heng extensively analyzes the text *Le Devisement du Monde*⁹ (c. 1311), written by an author of Arthurian courtly narratives, Rustichello da Pisa, on the basis of his conversations with the Venetian merchant Marco Polo while they were both imprisoned in Genoa in 1298–1299 (Heng, 2018: 323–49). The text purports to chronicle the travels of Marco Polo, especially his time with Kublai Khan, head of the Mongol Empire, in present-day China. Heng

⁹ The literal translation of the title is *The Description of the World*, while the more common English name is *Book of the Marvels of the World* or *The Travels of Marco Polo*. Following Heng, we refer to it as *Le Devisement*.

assesses the ways that—in stark distinction to prevailing European views of Mongols and other Asian peoples—in the text, Marco expresses consistent admiration of and occasional identification with Mongols, most of all through his mercantile attention to cataloging the wealth, commodities, and architectural grandeur amassed by Kublai Khan and the broader Khanate (2018: 327–29). Assimilating “material success and moral righteousness” through “a calculus of equivalence,” *Le Devisement* situates material success as a kind of “admission to the society of *humanitas*” such that the “Mongol race has been welcomed into civilization” (2018: 329). The “mercantile imaginary” (2018: 331) about the Mongol Empire thus seems to mitigate some of the hierarchal racializing tendencies of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Europe (2018: 327–34, 346–49), even if “religious race does not disappear” (2018: 348–49).

What substitutes, at least in this instance, for racial hierarchization? Heng argues that for the Marco Polo of *Le Devisement* and the mercantile imaginary he characterizes, human difference becomes another kind of material for the logic of taxonomy and differentiation:

. . . a reflexive mechanism of identifying, tagging, and tallying the things he sees, and quantifying their value, affords Marco an important means of taxonomizing the world . . . In [this] global transversal, taxonomies of this kind help to make intelligible and manageable the inexhaustible variety that is encountered, so that the world’s diversity can be processed. . . . And, just as with merchandise, differences among the peoples can also be a necessary condition for their yielding of value. (2018: 331–32)

The proto-capitalist standpoint emphasizes racial/civilizational *difference* as part of a broader economic categorization project¹⁰ rather than racial/civilizational *hierarchy*, at least so far as the powerful and wealthy Mongol Khanate and its goods are concerned. In this sense, European racialization of the Mongols reverses the relationship between wealth and race enacted through anti-Jewish violence: there, the wealth of some Jews marks out Jews as a population against whom racialized violence will be carried out, whereas for *Le Devisement*, the wealth of some Mongols mitigates and mediates the possibility for immediate racialized violence. However, this less overtly dominating framework itself sustains primitive accumulation, racial capitalism, and imperialism. The taxonomizing rationality of Marco Polo depicted in *Le Devisement* can be considered as a version of the logic of differentiation that constitutes racial capitalism for Cedric Robinson. He contends that

¹⁰ That there are resonances across deep time between this mercantile grid of intelligibility and neoliberal reason’s translation of human difference into economized subjectivities for differentiated population management (see Brown, 2015) is not lost on the authors.

the “tendency” of European racial capitalism was “*not to homogenize but to differentiate—to exaggerate regional, subcultural, dialectical differences into ‘racial’ ones*” (1983: 26, emphasis in original). Even if this narrative of Mongol civilization foregoes an explicit racism, it still conduces to a broader racial capitalist imaginary in its push to differentiate and categorize for racial capitalist exploitation and/or expropriation. In this sense, its internal logic lays groundwork for a (proto-)racial capitalism that instrumentalizes systems of differentiation.

The mercantile taxonomic framework extends to the circulation of women’s bodies, a description-qua-fantasy in *Le Devisement* of a sort of “sexual tourism” through which international (male) travelers receive lodging and “hospitality sex” in an Orientalized Asia (Heng, 2018: 333–34). Heng argues that an economic logic undergirds these “exchanges”:

. . . [T]he relative values of commodities around the world run parallel to the relative values of human behavior and female sexuality around the world . . . In a world gridded by commerce and trade relations, not only are goods exchanged, but people also circulate in relations of exchange that produce profit calculable by the participants: This is how a mercantile imaginary sees the world. All human relations are economic relations of a sort where participants seek to profit from trading, including intimate kinds of trading. But profit, of course, can be unequal for the participants in exchange relations, since those in control often decide the conditions of trading. (2018: 333–34)

If the general mercantile-racial logic of differentiation suggests the dynamic analyzed by Robinson, the mercantile-sexual logic points us to Silvia Federici, who theorizes primitive accumulation as not just a “concentration of exploitable workers and capital” but also as “*an accumulation of differences and divisions within the working class*, whereby hierarchies built upon gender, as well as ‘race’ and age, became constitutive of class rule” (2004: 63, emphasis in original). We thus witness a series of differentiations in the service of accumulation whereby the general mercantile imaginary functions through the creation of taxonomies and categories. For those accumulating capital and whiteness, these grease the wheels of trade relations encompassing kinds of racial differentiation that are central to racial capitalism, and of related gender and sexual differentiation central to a proletariat-centric understanding of primitive accumulation; for those racialized as non-white Others, expropriated, and dispossessed, such processes are anything but smooth.

Luxemburg helps think through these differentiations across longer-term capitalist trajectories. At the very least, we speculate that the economic information generated through the narrative is background knowledge and imperial

“research” that can be useful for later European imperialist ventures. More substantively, Heng points to the possibility for *profit extraction* created by Marco Polo’s mercantile imaginary, as the taxonomies, descriptions, and differentiations enable the merchant to “know how to profit from difference and otherness” (2018: 332) and to “see how profit can be extracted ad hoc from local conditions” (2018: 334). The central point of Luxemburg’s *Accumulation* is that capitalism requires non-capitalist strata and societies as sites of realization of surplus value for capitalization and thus accumulation and expanded reproduction. The knowledge of difference—racial, gender, civilizational, and religious difference included—in relation to non-Western locales presented by *Le Devisement* makes possible processes of capitalist accumulation. The ascription of these hierarchical differences onto non-European spaces becomes the non-capitalist societies necessary for the expanded reproduction of capital.

There is a broader theoretical point here that illustrates the generativity of a notion of the primitive accumulation of whiteness and the kinds of analyses the concept reads together. In deep time, it is possible to theorize a connection between Luxemburg’s account of accumulation and this modality of medieval race-making. On one hand, there is the accumulation of economic, commodity, racial/civilizational, religious, and gender differences in relation to the Mongol Empire in present-day China, all in a literary epic of the European Middle Ages. On the other, there is Luxemburg’s account (2016: 279–85) of violent imperial war in China as an especially salient exemplar of capitalist accumulation by “the integration of communities . . . into commodity exchange,” a process occurring “after—or through—the destruction of these communities” (2016: 279). Both processes evince a superficial quasi-tranquility: the Mongols of *Le Devisement* receive “admiration,” “awe,” and accession to human status (Heng, 2018: 334), while bourgeois economists and liberal theorists represent the introduction of commodity economies as “the beginning of ‘peace’ and equality,” fair economic competition, and “mutual interests” (Luxemburg, 2016: 279). Meanwhile, “religious race does not disappear” even if the Mongols are granted a partial or full measure of humanity (Heng, 2018: 349), and of course the introduction of commodity economies in non-capitalist zones is in fact foundationally constituted by war, “theft, extortion, and flagrant fraudulence” (Luxemburg, 2016: 279). This dynamic is in fact characteristic of racial capitalism, which for Robinson involves—“from the twelfth century forward”—state and class powers who both “initiated and nurtured myths of egalitarianism” and “seiz[ed] every occasion to divide peoples for the purpose of their domination” (1983: 26). In their contiguity, whiteness and capitalism saturate their

supposed universalisms with grids of differentiation that sustain their accumulations¹¹—the non-white/non-capitalist others are resources to dominate and expropriate in the service of the reproduction of racial capitalism. The primitive accumulation of whiteness thereby enables future accumulations of capital, and the realization of surplus value through capitalization reinforces hierarchies of difference that constitute the white, European subject over time, even as whiteness disavows these violent, extractive race-making histories.

The Primitive Accumulation of Whiteness in Deep Time

These two examples demonstrate, in two different ways, that the reproduction of racial capitalism and its attendant social relations require the “invention (which is always a reinvention)” (Heng, 2018: 24) of whiteness and of a white subject. Keeping in mind the flexibility and historical specificity of this white subject, including the racialized others it defines itself against, we contend that the unceasing creation and maintenance, no matter how partial, of whiteness is a stabilizing, structuring force that makes capital accumulation possible. Following Luxemburg in recognizing that primitive accumulation is an ongoing process ensuring that the structural conditions for capital accumulation are in place, we thus claim that the primitive accumulation of whiteness is also a necessary enabling condition for racial capitalism to *successfully* function. Indeed, whiteness and the primitive accumulation of capital (in Luxemburg’s sense) are necessarily co-imbricated, forming the relentless foundation upon which racial capitalism reproduces itself. This is why we position the primitive accumulation of whiteness—a concept generated by creolizing Luxemburg through Heng and Robinson—as a concept for racial capitalism.

To bring this section to a close, we contend that the concept of the primitive accumulation of whiteness helps think through the *multiple temporalities* of racial capitalism. Heng asserts that we must theorize race in “deep time”¹² rather than focus on the so-called origins of racism only in modernity, for the latter approaches construct a “narrative of bifurcated polarities vested in modernity-as-origin [that] have meant that the tenacity, duration,

¹¹ One sees this dynamic elsewhere in Heng’s work, for instance as one possible explanation for the remarkable appearance of a sculpture depicting Saint Maurice as a Black African (2018: 222–42), where Heng identifies a European universalism functioning in the service of imperial ambitions (2018: 228). Relatedly, other Europeans performed a kind of orientalizing in their perceptions and depictions of Spain due to the influence of Moorish rule and culture (Fuchs, 2011).

¹² There is further potential exploration to be had about this approach in relation to queer theories of temporality (for example, Freeman, 2010; Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 2009), explorations Heng hints at in her text.

and malleability of race, racial practices, and racial institutions have failed to be adequately understood or recognized” (2018: 23). The problem with such accounts is that the “long history of race-ing” gets “foreshortened” and “elided” (Ibid). In response, Heng advocates a notion of *deep time* in which the past can “be non-identical to itself, inhabited too by that which was out of *its* time—marked by modernities that estrange medieval time in ways that render medieval practices legible in modern terms” (2018: 22; emphasis in original). We suggest that Luxemburg’s account of capital accumulation situates the notion of primitive accumulation itself in a kind of deep time. Marx’s classic account of early colonialism and the enclosure of the Commons are non-identical with themselves insofar as Luxemburg demonstrates how such historical violent processes of accumulation are simultaneously contemporary, because capitalism necessarily requires them for its expanded reproduction. By creolizing Luxemburg through an engagement with Heng, the idea of the primitive accumulation of whiteness can elucidate how whiteness must be accumulated historically as a condition of possibility for high modern racism and racial capitalism, *and* always already is also a continuous yet variable force. That is, just because phenomena like primitive accumulation or medieval race-making could be presented exclusively as originary prehistories does not mean they no longer exert force or exude activity. The primitive accumulation of whiteness may have its “origins,” so to speak, in medieval Europe through processes like the racialized and economized violence against Jews or the imaginary of Mongol difference, but—as we articulate in the next section—its constitutive power operates across multiple temporal scales.

NEOLIBERAL IMPERIALISM AND THE ONGOING PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION OF WHITENESS

As the forms of coercion justifying the imposition of capitalism and European supremacy to non-capitalist markets has shifted across time and space, so too does the primitive accumulation of capital and racial domination shift under racial capitalism in our contemporary moment. To this end, two particular elements of Luxemburg’s analysis—the *ongoing* nature of capital accumulation and the role of imperialism and militarism in enabling expanded reproduction—allow us to track how the material and ideological conditions of possibility for racial capitalism shift over time. As we articulate above, thinking about Luxemburg’s insistence on the *ongoing* nature of capital accumulation as itself a form of “deep time” allows us to read the racialization of Jews in Europe and of non-Europeans more broadly, as a simultaneous accumulation of capital by expansion into new, non-capitalist strata. Coupled with her attention to imperialism and the notion that “Capital needs other

“races to exploit territories where the white race is not capable of working” (2016: 261), Luxemburg invites us to think about ongoing mutations in the primitive accumulation of whiteness and capital in their mutual imbrication. For Luxemburg, “in its forms and laws of motion, capitalist production reckons with the whole world as the treasury of productive forces, and has done so since its inception. In its drive to appropriate these productive forces for the purposes of exploitation, capital ransacks the whole planet” (Ibid). At the same time, the primitive accumulation of whiteness and of capital do not always move neatly in step with one another. The close ties between corporate elites across imposed binaries such as East/West and Muslim/non-Muslim, for example, suggest how the logic of capital accumulation can also supersede or differently negotiate categories of racial domination, as we discuss below.

As we suggest in this section, such an analysis helps trace continuities and ruptures in contemporary and historical forms of racialization, imperialism, and capitalist reproduction. Of course, this is not to suggest that there are never instances where the primitive accumulation of whiteness and of capital diverge. Indeed, the messy entanglement of racism and capitalism is such that racism does not in all instances serve the needs of capital accumulation. Nevertheless, by attending to the ongoing nature of the accumulation of whiteness and capital, we can trace their contingent relationship, a point to which we return in the conclusion. The primitive accumulations of whiteness and of capital constantly take new forms as the social relations undergirding them shift across time and space, and they are thus differently felt by variously racialized and gendered bodies across geographical and temporal contexts. Luxemburg suggests as much in her attention to different historical examples of the expansion of capitalism to non-capitalist markets through military force, whether by the British in India and Egypt, the Germans in Asia, the Dutch in South Africa, and European-descended settlers during westward expansion in the United States. In the tradition of Luxemburg, investigating various imperial turns demonstrates new iterations in the expansion of capitalist markets through military imperial force and the modes of racialization enabling and produced anew by them.

A rich body of scholarship has detailed the development of “neoliberal imperialism” in the post-9/11 United States (cf. Godfrey et al., 2014). The neoliberal imperial turn demonstrates how differentializing racialized and gendered hierarchies enable the realization of surplus value and the expansion of racial capitalism, and thus illustrate how the primitive accumulation of whiteness and of capital morph over time. At a general level, neoliberal imperialism involves the explicit use of war and military occupation as a means of profit generation, whether through the arms industry, oil extraction, or private military contractors (Godfrey et al., 2014; Pieterse, 2004).

Though the use of militaristic invasions for profit is not new—indeed, it is a point central to Luxemburg’s understanding of expanded reproduction—it is now overtly interlinked with U.S. security strategy as the stated goals of the arms industry, financial markets, and the so-called “war on terror” come to overlap (Pieterse, 2004). This post-9/11 imperial turn has led to a rise in the Private Security Industry (PSI), which has doubled in size since the 1990s and increased more rapidly since 9/11 after the invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan (Leander, 2005 referenced in Godfrey et al., 2014). Through the outsourcing of what were previously Department of Defense functions to for-profit contractors and subcontractors, the U.S. government has strengthened its relationship with private corporations in the business of war.

As we delineate below, the post-9/11 characterization of spaces inhabited by Muslims as uncivilized, pre-modern, and terroristic, and the racialization of Muslims compared to U.S. citizens racialized as white, both justify and are reinforced by efforts to expand U.S. economic influence in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the “Global South” more broadly. Though the racialization of Muslims is by no means new, its post-9/11 iteration is reinforced by a general rise in the PSI.

Under the auspices of the “war on terror,” the resignification of *homo europaeus* thus works in tandem with the expansion of financial markets and for-profit security companies, ensuring the reproduction of racial capitalism. Through widespread criminalization, public rhetoric, strategy reports, national addresses, social exclusion, and post-9/11 Homeland Security laws and policies enabling surveillance, the U.S. government—particularly under the G.W. Bush and Trump administrations—has characterized Muslims across the world as “a threat to Western cultural values,” opponents of democracy and freedom, terroristic, pre-modern, patriarchal, and homophobic (Selod, 2015: 78).¹³ While the racialization of Arabs and Muslims in the United States predates 9/11, their increased targeting and criminalization through laws and policies “ostensibly designed to protect the American public” has rendered them a more visible non-white minority counterposed to the ideal white, Christian citizen (Sheth, 2017: 2; also see Selod, 2015). The passing of the PATRIOT Act; the creation of a Department of Homeland Security, state-level bills and amendments vilifying Muslim religious life; the surveilling of Muslim individuals and communities since 9/11; the torture of Muslims in Guantanamo, Iraq, and Afghanistan; Trump’s 2017 Muslim ban; and lack of punitive measure for hate crimes of Muslims all mark a shift in their racialization as external threats to the American public and to national security (Considine, 2017).

¹³ Also see Bayoumi (2009) and Considine (2017).

The “War on Terror” is itself a “technology of race” creating the “racial imaginary” of a “Homeland” besieged by (non-white, non-Christian) outside enemies (Sheth, 2017: 348). Though Arabs are classified by the U.S. Census as white, since 9/11 the signifier “Arab” has become more interchangeably associated with “Muslim” and “non-white” in the popular imaginary. As Selod argues, by naming “terrorism rather than individual nations” as its target, the “War on Terror” creates a monolith of the Muslim world, putting responsibility for any political volatility on Islam as a religion, helping constitute what Mahmoud Mamdani terms “Culture Talk” (Selod, 2015: 80, drawing on Rana, 2011; Mamdani, 2004). Simultaneously, “the Homeland” becomes a site of “affective associations, ethnic ties, and cultural unity” whose citizenry, national values, and ways of life are under attack (Sheth, 2017: 348). The “war on terror” has thus racialized the Muslim at home as an “enemy within” assumed to be of non-black, Middle Eastern and/or Asian origin, and the Muslim abroad as inhabiting a primitive, anti-modern, violent geographical space outside “the West.” Through this logic, the “*ricing* of space,” or the “depiction of space as dominated by individuals . . . of a certain race,” occurs alongside a “spacing of race,” wherein particular individuals are “imprinted with the characteristics of a certain kind of space” (Mills, 1997: 41–42). The racializing of the Middle East and South Asia as non-white and Muslim is simultaneously a *spacing* of Arabs, Muslims, and those of Middle Eastern or South Asian descent, as belonging to a non-Western, monolithic Muslim world.

Though the myth of a “clash of civilizations” between a Christian, “Western” culture and a Muslim, “non-Western” culture precedes 9/11, and as Mamdani argues (2004), is indeed tied closely to Cold War ideology, the primitive accumulation of whiteness underlying these Islamophobic arguments has been transformed and expanded upon since 9/11 to meet the goals of the “War on Terror.” In this sense, there has been a resignification of *homo europeaus* that justifies—and is justified by—the economic imperatives of post-9/11 U.S. imperialism. Post-9/11 mutations in whiteness thus build upon a genealogy of the primitive accumulation of whiteness and of capital, where white supremacist, Orientalist views of the Middle East have historically justified imperial intervention to secure strategic access to capital, namely in the form of oil (Jones, 2012), the arms industries, and PSIs. To apprehend racial capitalism in our contemporary moment is thus to see the primitive accumulation of whiteness and capital as ongoing and continuously morphing under different forms of imperialism, rather than as originary historical moments preceding the emergence of racial subordination and capitalism.

Imperialist policies of intervention are thus inextricable from the primitive accumulation of whiteness. Such processes of the accumulation of whiteness include Orientalist characterizations of Jews, Muslims, and Middle

Easterners as “backward, decadent, and untrustworthy” in popular culture as early as the 1700s; 1990s media depictions racializing Israeli Jews as moderate and non-Jewish Middle Easterners as “ruthless, rich, or radical Arabs”; and academic research attributing a “backwardness, cultural decline, indeed, fossilization” to Arab societies (Little, 2009: 3, 35, quoting Patai, 1973). This mutation in the construction of whiteness vis-a-vis the imaginary of a homogenized “Muslim world” has in turn justified and perpetuated imperial interventions designed to secure the accumulation of capital through the oil and the arms industries. As Little asserts:

Once the orientalist mindset of imperial Britain insinuated its way into the White House, the Pentagon, and Foggy Bottom during the late 1940s . . . U.S. policies and attitudes toward the Middle East were . . . [i]nfluenced by potent racial and cultural stereotypes . . . that depicted the Muslim world as decadent and inferior. (2009: 11)

Attention to the primitive accumulation of whiteness across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries thus underscores how it has been intertwined with the accumulation of capital through imperial intervention in the Middle East. Luxemburg presciently argues:

[M]ilitarism lurks behind international credit, railway construction, irrigation systems, and similar civilizing projects as the executor of the accumulation of capital. Even though the states of the Middle and Far East hasten feverishly along their development from the natural economy to the commodity economy, and then on to the capitalist economy, they are still devoured by international capital, because they cannot accomplish this radical transformation without placing themselves in the hands of the latter. (2016: 320)

The ongoing expansion and morphing of racial capitalism has, hence, been predicated upon the ongoing accumulation of whiteness and capital as they become encoded in “civilizing” missions that take economic-military forms.

At the same time, this entwinement does not mean they always move in step; corporate elites across racialized binaries may forge alliances conducive to the accumulation of capital, just as racist tropes may hinder capital gain. As but one example, the close connection between the government of Saudi Arabia and U.S. defense contractors, the automobile industry, and multinational conglomerates, such as General Electric, reveal how exceptions to Islamophobic racial logics take place. Such corporate and imperial alliances do not suggest that a racial logic is not present; rather, they demonstrate how the racializing of a “good” Muslim, as the exception to a racial logic of exclusion and domination, is predicated upon its contrast to a “bad” Muslim

(Mamdani, 2004). Thus, the primitive accumulation of whiteness may also enable the reproduction of capital through recourse to the racial exception rather than through overt racial domination and coercion. However, such exceptions, by virtue of existing in contrast to a presumed general rule, reinforce Orientalist logics painting Muslims as the antithesis of an imagined “West.” Neoliberal shifts in U.S. imperialism that underwrite the realization of surplus value have continued to transform the racialization of Muslims. It is here that Luxemburg’s engagement with expanded reproduction and the ongoing nature of capital accumulation is especially instructive. For Luxemburg, “Imperialism is the political expression of the process of the accumulation of capital in its competitive struggle over the unspoiled remainder of the non-capitalist world environment” (2016: 325). Furthermore, expanded reproduction through militarism and imperialism takes place through the extraction of resources of non-capitalist countries and strata and through the expansion of consumer markets abroad. Thinking through these different facets of expanded reproduction through an analysis of the primitive accumulation of whiteness and of capital reveals important continuities and discontinuities in the post-9/11 neoliberal imperial turn.

From the side of consumption, neoliberal imperial policies in Iraq and Afghanistan have engineered a growth in specific consumer markets that allow the United States to actualize surplus value outside of late capitalist economies. This is evident in the greater demand for U.S. manufactured arms abroad, security technologies created by U.S. corporations, and the forceful imposition of genetically modified seeds in Iraq, as but three examples. Tellingly, between 2009 and 2017, the Department of Defense spent \$209 billion on private contracts in the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan (Peters and Plagakis, 2019: 17), and four out of the five arms manufacturers who have benefited the most from war are American companies (Calio and Hess, 2014). The \$39.5 billion that oil company Haliburton, once run by Dick Cheney, amassed from war-related contracts is evidence of how post-9/11 war profiteering “turns overseas conflict into another business proposition” (Pieterse, 2004: 125). In this way, the accumulation of capital takes place through militarism, as Luxemburg details near the end of *Accumulation* (2016: 340–41), but what is crucial is that racializing forces are necessary for this accumulation of imperial capital (and imperial whiteness). That accumulation occurs through imperial force and violence is further evidenced by the Bremer Orders instituted in Iraq, which: “mandated selling off several hundred state-run enterprises, permitting full ownership rights of Iraqi businesses by foreign firms and full repatriation of profits to foreign firms, opening Iraq’s banks to foreign ownership and control, and eliminating tariffs – in short, making Iraq a new playground of world finance and investment” (Brown, 2015: 142). In particular, the bombing of Iraq’s national seed bank

forced Iraqis to accept genetically modified seeds from agri-business corporation Monsanto, expanding the company's consumer market, and eventually generating profit for it (Brown, 2015: 145–50). This example underscores the force of militarism and war that enables the expanded reproduction of capital. As Luxemburg remarks, it is through ostensible “great works of civilization” that the colonizer justifies the expropriative expansion of commodity markets (2016: 279).

The examples above also illustrate how the primitive accumulation of whiteness underwrites the expanded reproduction of capital and the continuation of racial capitalism more broadly. Revealingly, the 2002 U.S. National Strategy for Homeland Security portrays the defeating of an imagined Muslim enemy—and a “modernizing” of the Muslim world—as inextricably tied to the expansion of capitalist markets. Not only does the Strategy racialize “the Muslim world” as that space which harbors “our enemies,” it equally declares that these “enemies have seen the results of what civilized nations can, and will, do against regimes that harbor, support, and use terrorism to achieve their political goals.” At the same time that the Bush Administration painted “the Muslim world” as synonymous with “global terrorism,” it argued for the defending of “our democratic values and way of life” not only through military might but also through the “(promotion of) economic growth and economic freedom beyond America’s shores . . . (underscoring) the benefits of policies that generate higher productivity and sustained economic growth.” It is thus “market economies, rather than command-and-control economies” that are “vital to U.S. national security interests” (“The National Security Strategy 2002,” 2002). Though the present neoliberal period of late capitalism is marked by financialization and recourse to the language of human capital and entrepreneurship (Brown, 2015), Luxemburg’s prescient analysis helpfully lays out how racialization and the realization of surplus value are intertwined. By situating Luxemburg’s concept of primitive accumulation in relation to post-9/11 U.S. imperialism, we see that the accumulation of capital is inextricably tied to, and in dialectical relationship with, the primitive accumulation of whiteness. Such an analysis reveals how racial capitalism is mutually constituted by the ongoing resignification of *homo europaeus* and the particular imperial form capital accumulation takes at a given moment. To treat post-9/11 mutations in whiteness and accumulation as wholly new is to overlook the many imperial projects upon which they stand. This, in effect, erases historical forms of racialized violence constitutive of the United States itself, such as settler genocide against indigenous peoples and the use of slavery to amass capital (Byrd, 2011). At the same time, by viewing the primitive accumulation of whiteness and capital as ongoing and as mutually constitutive, we can foreground the latest iterations imperialism takes, such as financialization, drone warfare, imposition of particular development

policies, debt imposition by international financial institutions, and new forms of racialization that incorporate the language of multiculturalism into constructions of whiteness. As Heng argues, “race is a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences, rather than a substantive content” and has the ability “to stalk and merge” with hierarchical systems such as class, gender, and sexuality (2018: 262), a transformation that the primitive accumulation of whiteness and capital helps us center.

CONCLUSION: INTERRUPTING THE PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION OF WHITENESS

In creolizing Luxemburg’s analysis of capitalist imperialism and ongoing primitive accumulation, we have elucidated how the primitive accumulation of whiteness is organically linked to the accumulation of capital. We have also specifically articulated the ways that the historical and ongoing (re) constitution of *homo Europaeus* mediates and enables the reproduction and perpetuation of racial capitalism, from the European Middle Ages to our contemporary moment of neoliberal imperialism.

Through the lens of the primitive accumulation of whiteness, we can theorize race as a historical contingency rather than an inevitability that always and automatically separates producers from the means of production. In this way, primitive accumulation, in “its most speculative iteration” but also “at its heart,” can become “a way of grasping the unforeseeable capacity for radical contingency that exists within even the most seemingly entrenched structures” (Rosenberg, 2019: 368). Meanwhile, Heng consistently demonstrates how the substance, form, and content of race can mutate within particular historical moments, which we think points—as does Luxemburg’s theorization of the ongoing nature of accumulation—to the salience of historic specificity in shaping the social relations undergirding racial hierarchy and capital exploitation. The contingent, changing nature of such accumulations allows us to grasp salient properties of the primitive accumulation of whiteness: it constantly takes new forms as the social relations undergirding it shift across time and space; and as a result, it is differently *felt* by variously racialized and gendered bodies across imperial contexts. Tending to the *embodied*, specific accumulation of whiteness reveals the heterogeneous impacts of racial capitalism on individuals and collectivities and the surprising forms of solidarity that might arise among them.

Understanding the embodied, contingent, and structural constitution of whiteness as a precondition for capitalism and its mutations across time and space is necessary to make visible how it is resisted by non-white groups and movements. It is equally important in forging solidarities by moving away

from colorblind conceptions of capitalism's violence. Rather than drawing a neat separation between anti-capitalism and anti-racism, our analysis suggests that robust anti-capitalist politics must necessarily include active and explicit organizing against white supremacy. At the level of both theory and politics, left analyses must be re-oriented to center an analysis of, and fight against, capital's structural entanglement with whiteness and racial domination. Through our framework of the primitive accumulation of whiteness, then, we contribute to better theorizing this entanglement. We also emphasize the need to build solidarity across capitalism's racialized exploitation and expropriation continuum, and not simply at the point of production within the boundaries of the nation-state.

Luxemburg is clear in *Accumulation* that because capitalism is a "living historical contradiction" with particular laws of motion the critic can identify and analyze, an internationalist movement can (and should, and will) struggle against it to build a different world (2016: 341). Creolizing Luxemburg and developing the concept of the primitive accumulation of whiteness generates, we hope, a more incisive account of imperialism, of racial capitalism, and—following Luxemburg—of the potentialities for anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist practice.

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Chapter 16

Creolizing *The Accumulation of Capital* through Social Reproduction Theory

*A Distinctively Luxemburgian Feminism*¹

Ankica Čakardić

Luxemburg did not write many texts on the so-called “woman question.”² However, that does not mean that her work should be omitted from a feminist-revolutionary history. On the contrary, it would be highly inaccurate to claim that her works, and specifically her critique of political economy, lack numerous reference-points for the development of progressive feminist policy and female emancipation, throughout history and today. With Luxemburg’s *The Accumulation of Capital* in mind and her strong emphasis on the vibrant dynamics between capitalist and non-capitalist space, let us try to take Luxemburg’s theory a step further. Is it possible to speak of a “Luxemburgian feminism”? Is it possible to speak of a Marxist-feminist approach to Luxemburg’s theory of accumulation? Is it possible to establish a connection between the Luxemburgian “dialectics of spatiality”

¹ This article is a slightly changed version of the paper titled “From theory of accumulation to social reproduction theory: A case for Luxemburgian feminism,” published in *Historical Materialism*, 2017 (25/4): 37–64.

² Restricting ourselves to the available English translations, several works/speeches from the period from 1902 to 1914 in relation to the “woman question” can be identified: “A Tactical Question” (1902), “Russian Women Workers in Battle” (1902), “Address to the International Socialist Women’s Conference” (1907), “Women’s Suffrage and Class Struggle” (1912) and “The Proletarian Woman” (1914). All texts are printed in Hudis and Anderson (2004), except “Russian Women Workers in Battle,” which appears in Hudis, Fair-Shulz, and Pelz (2018). Here we shall refer to all five essays.

and social reproduction theory? Can the framework of the Luxemburgian critique of political economy be used for the Marxist-feminist analysis of women's reproductive work and its economic role in the reproduction of accumulation? In this chapter, the above questions shall be analyzed in more detail through (a) a presentation of Luxemburg's critique of bourgeois feminism and subsequently (b) an established connection between crucial elements of Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* and social reproduction theory.

On the eve of World War I, after about fifteen years of preparation, Rosa Luxemburg published *The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to an Economic Explanation of Imperialism* (Luxemburg, 2015a [1913]), her most comprehensive theoretical work and one of the most relevant and original classical works of Marxist economics. *The Accumulation of Capital* was a follow-up to the *Introduction to Political Economy* (Luxemburg, 2013),³ which Luxemburg wrote while preparing her lectures on political economy, held between 1906 and 1916 and delivered at the German Social-Democrats' Party School.

Briefly put, *The Accumulation of Capital* sought a way to scientifically study and explain the conditions of capitalist monopolization, extended reproduction and imperialism, while taking into account the dynamic relation between capitalist and non-capitalist spatiality. Luxemburg held that Marx had neglected capital's spatial determination, while in his critique of capital he had centered exclusively on "time," that is the temporal dimension of the internal dynamics of capitalist reproduction. In contrast, Luxemburg "sought to show that capital's inner core consists of the drive to consume what is external to it—non-capitalist strata" (Hudis, 2014). Luxemburg's goal was to articulate her own theory of extended reproduction and critique of classical economics, which would contain not only a temporal but also a "spatial analytical dimension." This spatial determination of capitalist accumulation Peter Hudis has termed "dialectics of spatiality" (Ibid).

Throughout her work, especially in her *Introduction to Political Economy*, *The Accumulation of Capital*, and *Anti-Critique*, Rosa Luxemburg emphasized the importance of the understanding of the strong inherent drive of capitalism to destroy non-capital communal formations in order to reproduce itself. She vividly demonstrated that imperialism was inseparable from the law of motion of capitalism. In her critique of Marx's formulae of expanded reproduction at the end of Volume Two of *Capital* and in her effort to further develop his "temporal" theory of accumulation, she underlined that "Imperialism is the spatial correlate to capital's cooptation of time" (Ibid).

³ Also translated as the *Introduction to National Economy* (see Mattick, 2003).

In this essay, I will argue that Luxemburg's critique of political economy framed around "dialectics of spatiality" might be also used for analyzing specific registers of social reproduction. My goal is to suggest a specific Marxist-feminist reading of Luxemburg's theory of accumulation based on the analysis of the dynamic relation between household and market in order to propose an analytical method that goes beyond usual feminist approaches which are often based on several isolated episodes from Luxemburg's life. I believe that feminist analysis of Luxemburg's theoretical and revolutionary legacy should make an effort to make use of what her theory of accumulation is actually offering us and what is worth comprehending in Marxist-feminist terms as we try to understand and change the world around us.

Before we move to the Marxist-feminist analysis of Luxemburg's theory of accumulation, let me briefly make a few introductory remarks concerning the reception of *The Accumulation of Capital* once it was published. The moment *The Accumulation* appeared, friends and enemies alike piled sharp criticism upon Luxemburg for noting Marx's "glaring inconsistencies," which, she believed, were "defects" of his approach to the problem of accumulation and expanded reproduction from the second volume of *Capital*.⁴ In a letter to Franz Mehring referring to critiques of her *The Accumulation of Capital*, she wrote:

In general, I was well aware that the book would run into resistance in the short term; unfortunately, our prevailing "Marxism," like some gout-ridden old uncle, is afraid of any fresh breeze of thought, and I took it into account that I would have to do a lot of fighting at first. (Luxemburg, 2011: 324)

Lenin stated that she "distorted Marx" (quoted in Day and Gaido, 2012: 677), that "she was mistaken on the theory of the accumulation of capital" (quoted in Brangsch, 2019: 66), and that her work was interpreted as a revision of Marx, in spite of the fact that it was Luxemburg who mounted a vehement attack on the revisionist tendencies within the German SPD. In opposition to the Social Democrats who grouped around "epigones" and an opportunistic current of political practice which "corrected" Marx into a gradual dismissal of socialist principles, revolutionary action, and internationalism, Luxemburg insisted on harnessing a living Marxist thought in order to offer more-precise responses to and explanations of the growing economic crisis and newly appearing facts of economic life.

⁴ See the critiques of Anton Pannekoek, Gustav Eckstein, Otto Bauer, and Karl Kautsky in Day and Gaido (2012). On the other hand, there were also positive responses; see Franz Mehring's review where he states: "While some reject the work as a complete failure, even denouncing it as a worthless compilation, others consider it the most significant phenomenon in socialist literature since Marx and Engels took up the pen. This reviewer belongs completely to the second group" (in Day and Gaido, 2012: 746).

Although *The Accumulation of Capital* was met with severe criticism upon publication by the opportunistic-reformist and revisionist elements of the SPD, as well as by orthodox Marxists led by Karl Kautsky, it was not only her work that was criticized as ostensibly suspect in its Marxism. These critics often used cheap psychological and conservative arguments that were meant to undermine the credibility of Luxemburg herself and expose her as supposedly inept or insufficiently acquainted with Marxist texts. A good example of this type of criticism is provided by Werner Sombart, who stated in his *Der proletarische Sozialismus*:

The angriest socialists are those who are burdened with the strongest resentment. This is typical: the blood-thirsty, poisonous soul of Rosa Luxemburg has been burdened with a quadruple resentment: as a woman, as a foreigner, as a Jew and as a cripple. (quoted in Bulajić, 1954: viii)

Even within the German Communist Party she was dubbed “the syphilis of the Comintern,” and Max Weber once “assessed” Rosa Luxemburg as somebody that “[belongs] in a zoo” (quoted in Thomas, 2006: 154). Dunayevskaya writes:

Virulent male chauvinism permeated the whole party, including both August Bebel, the author of *Woman and Socialism*—who had created a myth about himself as a veritable feminist—and Karl Kautsky, the main theoretician of the whole International. (1981: 27)

Dunayevskaya’s gendered social analysis also cites a part of a letter in which Victor Adler writes to August Bebel on the subject of Luxemburg:

The poisonous bitch will yet do a lot of damage, all the more so because she is as clever as a monkey [*blitzgescheit*] while on the other hand her sense of responsibility is totally lacking and her only motive is an almost pervasive desire for self-justification. (Ibid)

In question was evidently a certain type of conservative political tactics that amounted to attacking prominent women, which in this case included a serious sexist dismissal of Luxemburg’s work. Luxemburg was well aware of a “suffocating” sexism that pervaded not only society as a whole but also the rank and file of the Social Democratic movement. In an article from 1902 entitled “A Tactical Question,” she wrote:

In its [Social Democracy’s] political and social life as well, a strong, fresh wind would blow in with the political emancipation of women, which would

clear out the suffocating air of the current, philistine family life that rubs itself off so unmistakably, even on our Party members, workers and leaders alike. (Luxemburg, 2004a: 236)

In an introduction of the *Anti-critique* she stressed how no other Marxist book received such harsh reviews as her *Accumulation*:

Such a fate has befallen no other party publication as far as I know, and over the decades Social Democratic publishers have certainly not produced all gold and pearls. All these events clearly indicate that, in one way or another, there have been passions at work other than those of “pure science.” (Luxemburg, 2015b: 348)

Although this important aspect of social and gender history will not be further discussed here, its ubiquity needs to be borne in mind when discussing the theoretical and numerous quasi-theoretical critiques of *The Accumulation of Capital* and Luxemburg’s experience as a woman theoretician, teacher, and revolutionary.

Bearing in mind that texts tackling the feminist dimension of Luxemburg’s theory are few and far between,⁵ here I shall try to make a contribution to the Marxist-feminism of Rosa Luxemburg or to a so-called “Luxemburgian feminism.” If feminist analyses of Luxemburg’s works in general are rare, even rarer are feminist engagements with her *The Accumulation of Capital*.⁶ If there is any interest in feminist interpretation of Luxemburg’s work, it is usually defined in relation to her personal life and rather occasionally on her critique of political economy.

Luxemburg not having written much on the subject of the “woman question” certainly contributed to the fact that the subject of most interpretations of Luxemburg’s feminism is linked to episodes from her life and intimacy. These are, naturally enough, highly important subjects, particularly bearing in mind that historical scholarship has traditionally avoided women and their experiences. However, here I am aiming to step away from that sort of interpretation in order to analyze Rosa Luxemburg’s writings on women but with the larger aim of showing how Luxemburg’s *Accumulation* can be creolized

⁵ Further “complications” are added by the fact that such analyses which do exist, like the one developed by Hannah Arendt, are not carried out within the Marxist tradition. Her interpretation is focused primarily on Luxemburg’s personal life, portraying a woman who encounters a range of sexist barriers within the top layer of the party. Even if we were to agree with Arendt’s indisputable claim that Luxemburg’s life as a woman in a man’s world of politics was extremely difficult, a claim which is in line with our introductory remarks to this paper, I am still faced with Arendt’s questionable methodological conclusion, suggesting that Luxemburg should not be interpreted in the Marxist tradition and that it “might be doubted that she was a Marxist at all.” See Arendt (1968: 38).

⁶ We must bear in mind the contributions from Dunayevskaya (1981) and Haug (2007).

through being put in conversation with contemporary Marxist-feminist social reproduction theory. While developing this kind of approach we will ask questions, such as, what can the few Luxemburg texts and written speeches tackling the “woman question” tell us about her feminism? Can we use these works to identify discursive entry-points that can be used to establish a connection with her critique of political economy? The answers to these questions affirm a Luxemburgian feminism or even an updated version of Luxemburg’s fierce criticism of bourgeois feminism as failing to address class inequalities in the context of neoliberalism. In the following section, I shall attempt to identify Luxemburg’s underlying position vis-à-vis the so-called “woman question” in order to move to the second part of the chapter where I shall establish a connection with her theses on the accumulation of capital and the role of non-capitalist spatiality in multilevel processes of social reproduction.

LUXEMBURG’S CRITIQUE OF BOURGEOIS FEMINISM

Luxemburg did not exclusively devote herself to organizing female workers’ groups; her activity in that field was obscured by the fact that she usually worked behind the scenes. She fervently supported the organizational work of the socialist women’s movement, understanding the importance and difficulties of work-life for female emancipation. Usually she showed her support through cooperation with her close friend Clara Zetkin. In one of her letters to Zetkin, we can read how interested and excited she was when it came to the women’s movement: “When are you going to write me that big letter about the women’s movement? In fact I beg you for even one little letter!” (Luxemburg, 2011: 153) Relating to her interest in the women’s movement, she stated in one of her speeches: “I can only marvel at Comrade Zetkin that she . . . will still shoulder this work-load” (Luxemburg, 2004c: 237). Finally, although rarely acknowledging herself as a feminist, in a letter to Luise Kautsky she wrote: “Are you coming for the women’s conference? Just imagine, I have become a feminist!” (cited in Dunayevskaya, 1981: 95).

Besides the fact that she was working “behind the scenes” and privately showing her interest in the “woman question,” she still engaged herself in an open discussion concerning the class problem faced by the women’s movement. In a speech from 1912 entitled “Women’s Suffrage and Class Struggle,” Luxemburg criticized bourgeois feminism and assertively pointed out:

Monarchy and women’s lack of rights have become the most important tools of the ruling capitalist class If it were a matter of bourgeois ladies voting, the

capitalist state could expect nothing but effective support for the reaction. Most of those bourgeois women who act like lionesses in the struggle against 'male prerogatives' would trot like docile lambs in the camp of conservative and clerical reaction if they had suffrage. (Luxemburg, 2004d: 240)

The question of women's suffrage along with the philosophy of the modern concept of law based on the premises of individual rights played an important role in the so-called big transition from feudalism to capitalism. For Rosa Luxemburg, the question of women's suffrage is a tactical one, as it formalizes, in her words, an already-established "political maturity" of proletarian women. She goes on to emphasize that this is not a question of supporting an isolated case of suffrage which is meaningful and completed but of supporting universal suffrage through which the women's socialist movement can further develop a strategy for the struggle for emancipation of women and the working class in general. However, the liberal legal strategy of achieving suffrage was not class-inclusive and did not aim to overturn the capitalist system. For Luxemburg, the metaphysics of individual rights within the framework of a liberal political project primarily serve to protect private ownership and the accumulation of capital. Liberal rights do not arise as a reflection of actual material social conditions, they are merely set up as abstract and nominal, thus rendering their actual implementation or application impossible. As she contemptuously argued: "these are merely formalistic rubbish that has been carted out and parroted so often that it no longer retains any practical meaning" (Luxemburg, 2004a: 235). Luxemburg rejected the traditional definition of civil rights in every sense, including the struggle for women's suffrage, and she pointed to its similarity with the struggle for national self-determination:

For the historical dialectic has shown that there are no "eternal" truths and that there are no "rights" In the words of Engels, "What is good in the here and now, is an evil somewhere else, and vice versa" – or, what is right and reasonable under some circumstances becomes nonsense and absurdity under others. Historical materialism has taught us that the real content of these "eternal" truths, rights, and formulae is determined only by the material social conditions of the environment in a given historical epoch. (Luxemburg, 1976: 111)

What Rosa Luxemburg suggests in the aforementioned quotation from "Women's Suffrage and Class Struggle" pertains to classical problems initially raised and debated within the framework of socialist feminism from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century: the role of bourgeois feminism in capitalist reproduction and the use of feminist goals as a means of achieving profit. Whenever capitalism is in crisis or needs "allies" for its restoration

or the further accumulation of capital, it integrates marginalized “Others” into its legal liberal political form, be they women, children, non-white races, or LGBTIQ people—whoever is disposable or potentially useful for further commodification:

Thus one of the fundamental conditions for accumulation is a supply of living labor that matches its requirements, and that capital sets in motion The progressive increase in variable capital that accompanies accumulation must therefore express itself in the employment of a growing workforce. Yet where does this additional workforce come from? (Luxemburg, 2015a: 330)

According to Luxemburg’s economic theory, the capitalist mode of production reproduces itself by creating surplus values, the appropriation of which can only be hastened by a concomitant expansion in surplus-creating capitalist production. Hence, it is necessary to ensure that production is reproduced in a larger volume than before, meaning that the expansion of capital is the absolute law governing the survival of any individual capitalist. In *The Accumulation of Capital*, Rosa Luxemburg establishes the premises for understanding capitalism as a social relation which permanently produces crises and necessarily faces objective limits to demand and self-expansion. In this sense, she developed a theory of imperialism based on an analysis of the process of social production and accumulation of capital realized via various “non-capitalist formations”:

There can be no doubt that the explanation of the economic root of imperialism must especially be derived from and brought into harmony with [a correct understanding of] the laws of capital accumulation, for imperialism on the whole and according to universal empirical observation is nothing other than a specific method of accumulation. . . . The essence of imperialism consists precisely in the expansion of capital from the old capitalist countries into new regions and the competitive economic and political struggle among those for new areas. (Luxemburg, 2015b: 449–50)

Unlike Marx, who abstracted the actual accumulation by specific capitalist countries and their relations via external trade, Luxemburg claims that expanded reproduction should not be discussed in the context of an ideal-type capitalist society.⁷ In order to make the issue of expanded reproduction easier

⁷ She poses a question directly criticizing Marx and his “bloodless schemes” of the relations between the two departments (c+v+s) from the second volume of *Capital*: “How then can one correctly conceive of this process and its inner laws of motion by using a bloodless theoretical fiction that declares this entire milieu, and the conflicts and interactions within it, to be nonexistent?” See

to understand, Marx abstracts foreign trade and examines an isolated nation, to present how surplus value is realized in an ideal capitalist society dominated by the law of value which is the law of the world market.⁸

Despite Luxemburg's objections, she nevertheless realizes that Marx's analysis of the problem of variable capital serves as the basis for establishing the problem of the law of the accumulation of capital, which is the key to her social-economic theory. Equally, that line of argument allows for understanding the highly important distinction between productive and non-productive labor,⁹ without which it would be almost impossible to understand social reproduction theory as a specific reaction to neoclassical economics and its partnership with liberal feminism. Precisely for this reason in *The Accumulation of Capital* Luxemburg quotes Marx:

The laboring population can increase, when previously unproductive workers are transformed into productive ones, or sections of the population who did not work previously, such as women and children, or paupers, are drawn into the production process. (Luxemburg, 2015b: 587)

This type of economy and liberalistic inclusion of the "labor population" obviously has low democratic potential and lacks any aspiration to emancipate the oppressed class. Rights are allocated very cautiously, on an identity-level basis (as opposed to the material social level), and exclusively according to the formula designed primarily to safeguard the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. Bourgeois women from the early nineteenth century do not have the abolition of the class system in mind; on the contrary, they support it. Moreover, bourgeois feminism affirms capitalism and one's own class position and disregards the rights of working-class women. The processes of

Luxemburg (2015b: 450). As underlined by Krätke (2006: 22): "Any effort to improve or enlarge the Marxian schemes is futile. In her view, the Marxian reproduction schemes were fundamentally flawed and no reformulation could save them."

⁸ Although Luxemburg rightly claims that Marx does not deal with external trade in detail, she disregards the fact that he unequivocally placed the society he researched and analyzed in the context of the global economy: "Capitalist production never exists without foreign trade. If normal annual reproduction on a given scale is presupposed, then it is also supposed together with this that foreign trade replaces domestic articles only by those of other use or natural forms, without affecting ... value ratios.... Bringing foreign trade into an analysis of the value of the product annually reproduced can therefore only confuse things, without supplying any new factor either to the problem or to its solution." See Marx (1992: 546).

⁹ The difference between productive and non-productive labor is interpreted through Marx's concept but also through an elaboration of Savran and Tonak (1999) and Cámara Izquierdo (2006). The authors state that the aforementioned difference presents the basis for understanding capitalism as a whole, and particularly in analysis of specific traits of twentieth-century capitalism. The emphasis is on the duality of the problem, depending on whether we refer to "productive labor in general" or "productive labor for capital." This distinction is considered very important in understanding the relation between reproductive (domestic) labor and the problem of non-productive labor.

accumulation of capital, the modern state, the aspirations of liberalism, and then bourgeois feminism move along the same path:

At a formal level, women's political rights conform quite harmoniously with the bourgeois state. The examples of Finland, of American states, of a few municipalities, all show that a policy of equal rights for women has not yet overturned the state; it does not encroach upon the domination of capital. (Luxemburg, 2004b: 244)

Luxemburg explains that the role of the women's suffrage movement is reactionary not only because of the simple failure of bourgeois women to support the struggle for workers' rights and the social rights of proletarian women but also because of their active participation in affirming the oppression of women which arises from social relations based on the reproductive work of women within the household sphere. The central methodological point of Luxemburg's theory of economics consists of an assertive clash with classical political economics. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that the subjects of her critique also include precisely those social phenomena and processes which enable capitalism: liberalism and the role of the bourgeoisie in the transition from feudal monarchy to capitalism. Rights, laws, and modern-day social contracts are institutions that played a key historic formal role in the affirmation of capitalism.¹⁰ But also, bourgeois feminism plays an important part in the maintenance of capitalist class structures. On the one hand, the bourgeois class of women demands the political right to vote only for the ruling class of women, and from an individualist standpoint, they hold no interest in tackling the issue of the position of women in general or class-related causes of the oppression of women. In Luxemburg's opinion, the role of bourgeois women is very important and it maintains an active presence in perpetuating the established social relations:

Aside from the few who have jobs or professions, the women of the bourgeoisie do not take part in social production. They are nothing but co-consumers of the surplus value their men extort from the proletariat. (Luxemburg, 2004d: 240)

By opposing the goals of bourgeois women to the goals supported by proletarian women, Luxemburg clarifies that the problem here is not only gendered, a "woman problem", but also a classed problem. Talking about women in general while feigning universality will not do because gender analysis without class analysis is reductive. Women belonging to the higher classes

¹⁰ For a more detailed elaboration of a social-historic approach to Western liberal theory and modern political thought, with an emphasis on "transition," compare Wood (2012).

mostly do not participate in production within the framework of market processes and thus consume surplus value, which has been drained through the exploitation of the working class; thus, their role in the reproduction of social relations is of a “parasitic nature”:

They are parasites of the parasites of the social body. And co-consumers are usually even more rabid and cruel in defending their “right” to a parasite’s life than the direct agents of class rule and exploitation. (Ibid)

Thus, Luxemburg adds, the only social role of bourgeois women is to maintain and reproduce the existing order; in almost all cases, they are not taking part in social reproduction and functioning as parasitic co-consumers. Empowered with the vote, they therefore viciously supported the interests of the ruling class, shoring up the bourgeois state and the domination of capital:

The women of the property-owning classes will always fanatically defend the exploitation and enslavement of the working people by which they indirectly receive the means for their socially useless existence. (Ibid)

Luxemburg is not alone in her sharp criticism of bourgeois feminism. Clara Zetkin, Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya, and Alexandra Kollontai, among others, contributed a great deal, particularly if we bear in mind their standpoint toward the reactionary attitudes of liberal women on the emancipation of women. Socialist women’s universal demands arose as an effect of social material motives and causes, ultimately finding more in common with men belonging to the same class than with the women of a higher class. This was in spite of the fact that, historically, the appearance of women in the labor market was frequently seen as an attempt to introduce cheaper competition for the male labor force, which in turn influenced the decline in the price of labor. Considering the problem of the female labor force, socialist women point out that the workload of women is additionally aggravated by reproductive labor within the household sphere. One could almost speak of the “first wave” of (or “early”) social reproduction theory, when Zetkin states: “Women are doubly oppressed, by capitalism and by their dependency in family life” (cited in Riddell, 2014).

SOCIAL REPRODUCTION THEORY AND LUXEMBURG’S THEORY OF ACCUMULATION

Luxemburg’s Marxist standpoint in all of her analysis of economics, particularly in *The Accumulation of Capital*, stems from the critique of classical

economics and capitalist social formations. In her social-economic analysis of labor and the labor theory of value, Luxemburg, in the wake of Marx, introduced a distinction between productive and non-productive labor. One such example comes from her interpretation of the societal role of the family. Referring to Engels, in a speech from 1912, she differentiated between labor in the market sphere and labor in the household sphere, thereby laying the foundations for early social reproduction theory:

This kind of work [bringing up children, or their housework] is not productive in the sense of the present capitalist economy no matter how enormous an achievement the sacrifices and energy spent, the thousand little efforts add up to. This is but the private affair of the worker, his happiness and blessing, and for this reason non-existent for our present society. As long as capitalism and the wage system rule, only that kind of work is considered productive which produces surplus value, which creates capitalist profit. From this point of view, the music-hall dancer whose legs sweep profit into her employer's pocket is a productive worker, whereas all the toil of the proletarian women and mothers in the four walls of their homes is considered unproductive. This sounds brutal and insane, but corresponds exactly to the brutality and insanity of our present capitalist economy. And seeing this brutal reality clearly and sharply is the proletarian woman's first task. (Luxemburg, 2004d: 241)

In her article "The Proletarian Woman," referred to earlier, Luxemburg focused on the issue of the "political maturity" of working-class women and the ways in which ruling-class individualism during the transition from feudalism to capitalism strongly influenced the restructuring of the family and the gender division of labor within it. She continued to argue that bourgeois women, who existed smoothly alongside the processes of establishing and formalizing private ownership, had no interest in struggles relating to the inclusion of women in that "great workshop of social production," and also how "[f]or the property-owning bourgeois woman, her house is the world" (Luxemburg, 2004b: 243). Due to the very fact that bourgeois women do not participate in the economic functions of society, Luxemburg highlighted that the historic appearance of women in the productive sphere is marked by a highly conservative reflex. It is a structure of capitalism which is now being additionally formalized with regard to feudalism through a specific and entirely new pattern of social reproduction. As Lise Vogel put it, a huge gap between the sphere of surplus production and the domestic sphere was established in capitalism:

While women have historically had greater responsibility for the ongoing tasks of necessary labor in class-societies, it is not accurate to say that there is some

universal domestic sphere separate from the world of public production. In class-societies based on agriculture—feudalism, for example—the labor processes of necessary labor are frequently integrated with those of surplus production. It is the development of capitalism . . . that creates a sharp demarcation between the arena in which surplus-labor is performed and a sphere that can properly be called domestic. To the extent that analysts assert the universality of some invariant domestic sphere, they are in fact projecting onto non-capitalist class-societies a distinction that is the product of capitalist relations of production. (Vogel, 2013: 152)

Thus, women appeared for the first time in history as a labor force which reproduces both the capitalist mode of production and the working class itself, by caring for employed and unemployed family members (children and the elderly). Luxemburg underlines the key analytical issue we face if we are to attribute the disadvantageousness of women's position simply to the ideology of the "antagonism" between women and men, instead of the capitalist mode of production. That warning illustrates how wrong and reductive it is, according to Luxemburg, to interpret the oppression of women trans-historically and in line with liberal feminism, instead of interpreting it as a product of the antagonism between capital and labor:

The call for women's equality, when it does well up among bourgeois women, is the pure ideology of a few feeble groups without material roots, a phantom of the antagonism between man and woman, a quirk. Thus, the farcical nature of the suffragette movement. (Luxemburg, 2004b: 243)

Lise Vogel takes a very similar critical stance in *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*:

In the theoretical sphere, the first requirement for further forward motion is to abandon the idea that the so-called woman-question represents an adequate category of analysis. (Vogel, 2013: 142)

Luxemburg begins *The Accumulation of Capital* with "The Problem of Reproduction." She points out that the problem of the reproduction of the entire social capital was identified by Marx in his theory of political economy (Luxemburg, 2015a: 43). She goes on to explain that reproduction is repetition, "renewal of the process of production," hence implying that

the regular repetition of production is the general precondition and foundation of regular consumption, and is thus a prerequisite of human civilization in each of its historical forms. (Ibid)

In order for society to survive, it needs to reproduce. Social reproduction theory points out that “reproduction” may allude either to the process of the regeneration of the conditions of production which enable society to survive or to the regeneration of humankind (Čakardić, 2018). To simplify, using the example of classic industrial labor, it would mean that reproduction is used to secure work operation, its regularity, to invest in the machines, factories, and raw materials. When machines break down, they need to be repaired or replaced, or new ones need to be purchased in their place. Moreover, the labor force which delivers the production and reproduces the relations of society must be secured. Analogous with the machines, when laborers grow old or die, they are “replaced,” while those of working age need to eat, rest, and renew their strength in order to be fully ready for work:

Ordinarily, generational replacement provides most of the new workers needed to replenish this class, and women’s capacity to bear children therefore plays a critical role in class-society. (Vogel, 2013: 135)

In order to present my arguments relating to a connection between Luxemburg and social reproduction theory in a clear manner, I shall elaborate on the ways in which I intend to use its key points and notions.¹¹ We are presented with the task of placing “the reproduction of labor-power in the context of overall social reproduction,” due to this aspect of reproduction not being adequately dealt with in the contemporary tradition of socialist theory, as pointed out by Lise Vogel (2013: 142).

In the capitalist mode of production, the capitalist secures through the market the means needed for the operation of a factory and workers’ wages. Wage labor enables the working class to secure/consume items and services necessary for life—like food, clothes, covering household expenses—however, those needs are met in the household, not on the market. Moreover, in order to eat, one needs to take into account the preparation of food; if one buys clothes, they need to be washed and maintained. Additionally, physical care needs to be provided to elderly members of the family or children. Unlike labor in the “productive” sphere of society, domestic labor belongs to the “reproductive” sphere. And to conclude, both capitalists and laborers, one way or another, consume food prepared at home, have clothes that must be washed, or depend on some other kind of reproductive labor. Therefore, their life and work in the productive sphere is mediated through a range of activities belonging to the domestic sphere. Much of the problem lies in the

¹¹ I here have in mind elaborate analyses of Marxist feminism directly related to social reproduction theory: Vogel (2013); Bhattacharya (2017); Gimenez (2019); Arruzza (2013); Ferguson and McNally (2013).

fact that both the working and capitalist classes perceive reproductive work as being in no need of explanation, as to-be-taken-for-granted, as “natural.” This structural and spatial gap between the reproductive and productive spheres of society indicates the fundamental reason for the oppression of women in capitalism. On what basis can we make this claim?

Historically, the reproduction of the working class is mostly undertaken by women outside the productive sphere and is unpaid.¹² Reproduction of the working class in capitalism represents three aspects of necessary labor: (a) maintenance of direct producers, (b) maintenance of non-laboring members of the subordinate class (usually implying care-giving to old people, children, and unemployed), and (c) generational renewal of workers and their lives (birth taken for granted as the biological reproduction of new labor force) (Ibid: 150). This indicates the ontological level of the problem: activities not defined as labor (food preparation, cleaning, care, breast-feeding, giving birth) and lacking any market value are *not* considered labor. The mathematics is clear here: if the labor in question is transferred to, for example, a capitalist with an employee, he would be obligated to organize a range of activities, invest time and money which are traditionally free and a burden to the household, in other words, to women. The question of an alternative, more egalitarian distribution also requires significant shifts in attitude toward the market, changes which cost and are thus not feasible.

Marxist feminism has tackled the problem of social reproduction in various ways.¹³ Feminists supporting the “Wages for Housework” campaign in a dual-system manner offered one approach. A second (materialist) approach is found in Christine Delphy’s characterization of social reproduction as a series of actions within the domestic sphere, which she sees as a separate mode of production. Finally, Lise Vogel offers a “unitary” approach, in which social reproduction is taken to mean the simultaneous reproduction of the labor force and class society.

Autonomist feminists involved in the Wages for Housework Campaign initiated discussion in the early 1970s in relation to the unpaid labor of women. This was announced in the pamphlet by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (1975), *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, and the debate was followed later by a text written by Silvia Federici (2012), “Wages against Housework,” and the book *The Arcane of Reproduction*

¹² It should be noted that the reproduction of labor-power in family households represents only one possible mode of renewing the bearers of labor-power. Vogel points out that labor-camps and dormitory facilities can also be used to maintain workers, and that the work-force can be replenished through immigration or the enslavement of foreign populations, as well as by generational replacement of existing workers. Cf. Vogel (2013: 144–145).

¹³ For a more detailed overview, see Arruzza (2013), especially chapters 3 and 4, pp. 79–124.

written by Leopoldina Fortunati (1996). For our current purposes, we shall shortly refer only to Fortunati.

Leopoldina Fortunati, just like Rosa Luxemburg, started from Marx's formula $c + v + s$ in an attempt to further develop his labor theory of value by focusing on the role of reproductive labor in the production of surplus value. Although she misinterpreted the model of the labor theory of value by equating productive and reproductive work (as was also the case with the Wages for Housework campaign, which tried to apply the abstract model to individual households), she nevertheless accomplished a veritable epistemological leap in both feminist and Marxist theory by pointing to the dialectics of the market and the household: accumulation is impossible without reproductive labor.

The basic analytical unit of Fortunati's political-economic theory functions through (what she calls) the "obvious antithesis": production/reproduction. She believes that the capitalist mode of production and its cycles cannot be fully analyzed while holding on to the dual ontology in which production connotes value and reproduction connotes un-value. Moreover, according to her understanding, this would represent an omission and a methodological error in Marxism. Criticizing the naturalization argument (which understands reproductive work as natural, as opposed to produced by the relations of production) in this sense also means casting doubt on the thesis that only production creates surplus value—unlike reproduction which, according to the Marxist interpretation, has no such potential. In short, Fortunati questions the assumptions of orthodox Marxists who claim that reproductive labor is a precondition of value production, but valueless in itself.

Lise Vogel, as a response to the domestic labor debate, argues that reproductive labor does not produce surplus value, only use values. She also uses Marx's theory of accumulation to offer an alternative interpretation of the oppression of women. Although the domestic labor debate produced a view of domestic work as "productive labor—a process or set of activities upon which the reproduction of (capitalist) society as a whole depends" (Ferguson and McNally, 2013: xix), we could hardly find a more important contribution to the socio-materialist foundations of women's oppression in terms of Marxian political economy. Equally so, this debate undoubtedly served as a springboard for *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, particularly in so far as it offered a "unitary" analytical framework to theorize domestic labor as an integral part of the capitalist mode of production.

When Luxemburg (much like other socialist feminists from the late nineteenth century) criticizes bourgeois feminism and states that the oppression of women is an integral part of the capitalist mode of production, developing her theory of accumulation as the dynamics between capitalism and non-capitalism, her analysis parallels in important respects the conclusions of the

“unitary” theory of Lise Vogel.¹⁴ While the reasons behind Luxemburg’s and Vogel’s drive to expand the conceptual reach of key categories of *Capital* are not similar, their specific, individual contributions and their expansions of *Capital* can be connected. On the one hand, Vogel proposes to extend the key categories of *Capital* in relation to researching the biological, social, and generational reproduction of labor power, whereas Luxemburg was trying to create a theory of capitalist reproduction starting from Marx and drawing on dialectics of spatiality. It seems that both elements of these contributions are crucial to grasping the wider notion of reproduction or the accumulation of capital, respectively. Although domestic labor produces only use value and not exchange value, and therefore does not directly produce surplus value, domestic labor “is [possibly] its own mode of production, operating according to a distinct pre- or non-capitalist labor” (Ferguson and McNally, 2013: xx). The commodification of domestic labor presents a key connection point of the Luxemburgian critique of political economy and social reproduction theory: only when a large part of the population is dispossessed and forced to sell its labor power on the market, including the female workforce, is it possible to talk about the systematic process of capital accumulation.

The market, in order to accumulate capital, is maintained by spreading to non-capitalist spaces, integrating into the productive sphere populations which were not traditionally part of the market. The specificity of the historical-materialist method which places the feminist understanding of reproductive labor in the framework of the dialectics of spatiality is that it offers an explanatory analysis of the systemic correlation of women’s work and the reproduction of accumulation. If we wish to look at reproductive labor through the lens of the Luxemburgian analysis of surplus realization, it would be necessary to take into account the relation toward the household as a non-capitalist space, that is, its commodification and surplus accumulation.

Domestic labor is not a productive part of the market, and can, for the purposes of this discussion, be treated as an “external” element of the capitalist economy. It does not have a value or a price and ontologically does not have the status of labor. The commodification of domestic labor could, in the Luxemburgian framework, be viewed as a typical example of the expansion of capitalism into a non-capitalist field. From the mid-1970s onward, social welfare was increased through the inclusion of households in market circulation. A whole variety of economic activities was concentrated around

¹⁴ Ferguson and McNally state that Brenner rightly criticizes Vogel “for her overly narrow review of the socialist tradition on the ‘women question,’” disregarding, for example, Emma Goldman and Alexandra Kollontai. See Ferguson and McNally (2013: xxxii). We could add a similar complaint in the case of Vogel’s treatment of Rosa Luxemburg, not only in relation to the “woman question,” but also when it comes to Luxemburg’s political economy.

domestic work, care and similar services previously offered in a non-capitalist manner. The neoliberalization of the market through the introduction of part-time labor contracts, the flexibilization of the workforce and deregulation of labor and welfare legislation are all phenomena related to the 1970s crisis and stagflation, when the neoliberal regime was being formalized, in part, through women's labor and the commodification of domestic work. From the mid-1990s onward, this trend is even more present (Farris, 2017: 135) and, following on from the European directive and seeking to secure the resources provided by the integration funds, since 2007 a number of programs have been adopted to mobilize the female workforce including non-EU/non-western migrant women in the national labor market (Farris, 2017: 124).

Vogel points out in her theory of social reproduction that the family as a social-economic formation is not an exclusive unit that allows for the reproduction of capitalism. She stresses that labor camps and dormitory facilities can also be used to maintain workers, and that the work force can be replenished through immigration or the enslavement of foreign populations, as well as by generational replacement of existing workers (Vogel, 2013: 144–145). Her historical-materialist approach traces the arguments of Luxemburg who, in her analysis of imperialism, insists on the historicization of capitalist accumulation and its tendencies to spread and “adjust” to the requirements of reproduction. As such, historicization of a case demonstrates that, with time, social units which were traditionally not a constitutive element of the productive sphere become integrated into market circulation. Female migrant labor is certainly one such example, which illustrates how female migrant labor is useful for carrying out reproductive labor. It should be noted that from the mid-1970s the growth of female migration to western Europe “represents the unintended consequence of the guestworker systems established in northern Europe after World War II” (Farris, 2017: 147), still being employed in the informal sector, doing the famous “three D” jobs: dirty, dangerous, and demanding. In terms of the articulation of general civic integration policies which promote migrant women's employment, the social reproduction sector (care and domestic work) appears to be the only branch of the economy where these women are encouraged to work, even volunteer (Farris, 2017: 130–131). Sara Farris notes:

Since the late 1980s . . . European women have entered the paid labor force *en masse*. Albeit at different paces and in different forms in each country, the majority of working-aged women are now in some form of employment outside the household. Furthermore, the immigrant population is no longer predominantly male; on the contrary, in some European countries women constitute the majority of migrants. . . . The demand for carers, cleaners, child- and elderly-minders, or social reproducers in general has grown so much in the last thirty

years that it is now regarded as a phenomenon brought about by the global crisis of social reproduction as well as the main reason for the feminization of migration. (Farris, 2015)

Given that today half of the world's migrant population is women, we may confidently speak of the phenomenon of the feminization of migration (Morrison, Schiff, and Sjöblom, 2008). Within the framework of "new imperialism" and neoliberalism, female migrant work—a cheap and precarious labor force—becomes the ideal force for the reproduction of capitalism. Integration of the migration problem into the analysis of capitalism facilitates an understanding of the "new imperialism," by pointing to a necessary link between the accumulation of capital and imperialism. The concept of social reproduction contributes to the analysis of capitalism in its entirety because it integrates both market and non-market aspects of capitalism. It should be noted that, despite the fact that migrant women were integrated into the productive sphere through the market, their appearance on the international labor market in no way constitutes competition for the male working class. That is because they mainly participate in a work sector connected to reproductive labor. On the one hand, Western upper-class women have attained "emancipation" and have thus outsourced their domestic work to migrant women; but on the other, by outsourcing that labor they treat migrant women, whose labor they buy, as they might any commodity on the market (Farris, 2015). History repeats itself through the paradox of liberal feminism. In the midst of the crisis of social reproduction, the labor of migrant women in households and in care-work primarily plays a "support" role to the female workforce in the Global North and migrant women are "called upon," as Farris underlines, "*to clean up* this whole mess—literally" (Farris, 2017: 138).

As opposed to the earlier trend of women leaving their homes and home countries as part of the family, today women undertake this move independently, often accompanied by children (Eisenstein, 2010: 158). As such, the dynamics of the countries of the Global South are to be understood through the concrete consequences of migration processes, bearing in mind the role of women in such vibrant dynamics. This is a highly specific configuration of capitalism in the context of its imperialist tendencies, achieved through cheap female care-taking labor that is materialized in rich countries. Thus, contemporary analyses of political economy should broach the phenomenon of female migrant work, as it enables us to understand how the crisis of social reproduction functions and the ways in which modern-day trends of accumulation are being realized using the relations of, as Luxemburg puts it, the capitalist and non-capitalist worlds. This relation is particularly enhanced in the specific connection of capital and gender, as Selma James has stated: "It is impossible to speak of the relation of women to capital anywhere without at

the same time confronting the question of development versus underdevelopment” (James, 2012: 104).

Luxemburg devotes a lot of attention to the problem of foreign trade in her critique of political economy, hence developing arguments for her theory of imperialism. Even if we were to disagree with her claim that imperialism is based on the problems of insufficient demand and under-consumption, which cause capitalist crises, her undisputed and topical thesis on the relation of crises and elements “outside” capitalism through which the system is stabilized or crises are overcome remains:

Growing profits (surplus value) meet the barrier of realization resulting from insufficient aggregate demand. In other words, there is a tendency to create a surplus of accumulation that has no rational use, or, from the other perspective, to create the demand gap that does not realize the production made. In order to reduce this barrier it is necessary to find, or even create a demand that would realize the production, and thereby capitalist profits. Luxemburg presented examples of forming these (additional) artificial sources of demand: primarily expansion to non-capitalist economies, but also militarization of the economy and international loan expansion. (Tomidajewicz, 2014: 158)

This is precisely the reason that I have insisted on the importance of the “dialectics of spatiality” and of the dynamics between productive and reproductive labor, particularly within the framework of neoliberalism. Similar historical examples, such as that of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, which also unfolds through the transformation of social reproduction that is now, of course, capitalist, enable insight into the modern-day relations of productive and non-productive labor:

Once the small peasants have been ruined, domestic production frequently becomes the main occupation of men, who work for capitalists either under the putting-out system or as wage-laborers in the factory, while agricultural production devolves entirely on the women, old people, and children. (Luxemburg, 2015a: 595–6)

Luxemburg considers the integration of the non-capitalist elements of society into the circulation of the capitalist economy as necessary to achieving capital growth, but the mode of integration varies throughout the course of history. At a certain point in time, the productive sphere of the economy, or rather its non-productive “external” counterpart, encompasses different populations in specific ways. Contemporary global capitalism’s tension between the developed and developing worlds should be considered through the connection between capitalism and the non-capitalist social environment:

On this basis, the conceptions of internal and external markets, which have played such a prominent role in the theoretical disputes around the problem of accumulation, can be revised. Internal and external markets certainly each play a great and fundamentally differentiated role in the course of capitalist development – not as concepts of political geography, however, but rather as ones of social economy. From the standpoint of capitalist production, the internal market is the capitalist market, this production is itself the purchaser of its own products and the supplier of its own elements of production. The external market, from the point of view of capital, is the non-capitalist social environment, which absorbs its products and supplies it with elements of production and labor-power. (Luxemburg, 2015a: 335)

Neoliberalism brings certain innovations into that relation, which David Harvey would call “creative destruction” (Harvey, 2005). One such example is certainly the commodification of domestic labor and female migrant labor. Moreover, despite the fact that the aforementioned quotation dates from 1913, it still bears the stamp of cold reality and not merely in relation to agriculture in Third World countries and the role of female labor within it but also in relation to the actual consequences of the dichotomy of productive and non-productive labor. The historicization of the capitalist mode of production and the tendencies of the “new imperialism” indicate the contemporary relevance of Luxemburg’s thesis concerning the dialectics of spatiality, particularly once the theory of reproduction is integrated into it.

CONCLUSION

This chapter functions as a contribution to Marxist-feminist analyses that are methodologically based on Luxemburg’s critique of political economy, and also as a contribution to contemporary social reproduction theory that aims to integrate Luxemburg’s legacy alongside that of Marx.

The aspect of Luxemburg’s political economy was analyzed as a problem of the “dialectics of spatiality” which serves as a key link between her critique of political economy and social reproduction theory. In order to establish a connection between Luxemburg’s dialectics of spatiality and the feminist interpretation of the role of reproductive labor in surplus creation, the chapter opened with an overview of Luxemburg’s critique of bourgeois feminism or the basis of her socialist feminism. Since I argued that Luxemburg’s contributions to feminism were of an intermittent and incomplete nature, the chapter “filled gaps” in the existing structure of her critique of bourgeois feminism and thus functioned as an introduction to a concept we termed “Luxemburgian feminism,” based on the link between Luxemburg’s theory of accumulation and social reproduction theory.

In a certain way, I discussed the Luxemburgian critique as a tool for a materialist analysis of the connections between the household and the market. Although it may seem that both frameworks function as independent analytical elements, the contemporary methods of capital accumulation and women's reproductive labor are two interconnected processes. This is illustrated in the chapter using the example of women's reproductive work, particularly with a view to its commodification, such as is typical of neoliberalism. I demonstrated the importance of discussing contemporary methods of capital accumulation, having in mind migration processes and their role in social reproduction. Moreover, it would be also very interesting to analyze the problem of commodification (or to use the "law" of the dialectics of spatiality) when it comes to the contemporary feminist movement. From the 1970s onward, in line with the process of the neoliberalization of society, the feminist movement established itself as a useful niche market (Fraser, 2013; Eisenstein, 2010; Roberts, 2012, 2014; Čakardić, 2017; Farris, 2017). The NGO-ization of social movements undeniably meant their inclusion in the market, which had become actively state-regulated as part of the process of neoliberalization, either through "outsourcing" (with the state transferring its tasks in the field of welfare to NGOs, such as women's groups working with victims of violence) or the direct inclusion of women's organizations in the circulation of the market (as with women entrepreneurs or free-market feminism). In a way, the problem about which Luxemburg warned has continued. Bourgeois feminism from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries underwent shifts which have, through the neoliberalization of social movements and in the absence of a systematic critique/struggle, recurrently indicated tangible support for processes of reproduction of the capitalist market.

Although Rosa Luxemburg's enduring support for feminist socialist activity was not a central feature of her published writing, focusing her public speeches and writings mainly on non-gendered arguments about class, her brief public statements about the suffrage and fundamentally class-inflected interests of different sectors of women read together with her dialectics of spatiality outlined in *Accumulation* offer ample resources for the development of a contemporary Marxist-feminist social reproduction theory. Ironically, even if she mainly avoided public reflections on the specificity of being female, it informed her attention to the ongoing reliance of capitalist exploitation on its outsides in ways that made her ideas especially useful for understanding the limits of bourgeois feminism under neoliberal conditions.

As neoliberalism successfully exploits gender for the purposes of the class interests of capital, we are facing an important task of designing anti-capitalist strategies based on the resistance to the market and its reproduction, thereupon focusing simultaneously on the domestic sphere and reproductive processes within the framework of the capitalist mode of

production. At a time when systematic analyses of the relation between the market and the state—either at the national or international level—are necessary starting points for a discussion of any short- or long-term alternatives to the capitalist mode of production, Luxemburg’s dialectics of spatiality and her connection to social reproduction theory seem to present not only a valuable introductory reference, but also a political model well-suited to organizing alliances among parallel structures and aligning their progressive goals.

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**UNFINISHED CONVERSATIONS
AMONG REVOLUTIONARY
WOMEN**



Figure 17.1 Image from *Red Rosa: A Graphic Biography of Rosa Luxemburg* by Kate Evans, Verso Books, 2015.

Chapter 17

“Staying Human”

Rosa, Raya, and Total Revolution

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Rosa Luxemburg and Raya Dunayevskaya. Jewish women born in Eastern Europe (Luxemburg in 1871 in Poland, and Dunayevskaya in 1910 in Ukraine); revolutionary Marxist intellectuals and leaders; critics who challenged Marxist orthodoxies and helped creatively and critically challenge Marxist theory.

At first glance it would seem that Dunayevskaya’s focus on Rosa Luxemburg—her critique of women liberationists who ignored her, and her unearthing of Luxemburg’s unknown feminist dimension in *Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution* (1991 [1981])—is a product of an identity between the two thinkers.¹ But what might be considered a creolization of Luxemburg produced by Dunayevskaya’s revolutionary feminism of the 1970s followed several decades after Dunayevskaya’s earlier extensive engagement with Luxemburg in the 1940s.

Luxemburg’s *The Accumulation of Capital* was published in 1913, just before the imperialist war, subtitled “A Contribution to an Explanation of Imperialism.” Dunayevskaya published a two-part sharp critique of *Accumulation of Capital* in the April and May 1946 issues of the *New International*.² Appreciating Luxemburg’s hatred of imperialism, Dunayevskaya takes issue with her argument that, whatever the theoretical importance of Marx’s idea of expanded reproduction, *in practice* capitalist

¹ After being expelled from the Communist Party in 1928, Dunayevskaya became part of the Boston group of Trotskyists led by feminist and co-founder of the Communist League of America, Antoinette F. Buchholz Konikow.

² *The New International* was a Trotskyist journal, which after April 1940 was associated with the Workers Party and edited by the Party’s leader Max Shachtman. The journal published a number of articles by both Raya Dunayevskaya and C.L.R. James. James was named as a member of the editorial board in 1941 and also in November 1946 to July 1947 after which the Johnson–Forest Tendency left the Workers Party and rejoined the Socialist Workers Party.

accumulation depends on the constant search for non-capitalist markets to realize surplus value. The issue appears to lie in the different ways each intellectual combined theory and practice, but both had different understandings of what had to be opened and rethought in different contexts. Luxemburg's creolizing does so in a genuinely internationalist's scope, focusing on the central place she gives to imperialism and to anti-imperialism in spite of her tone deafness on the national question; Dunayevskaya's creolizing, based on a fidelity to Marxism, does so in rethinking who can emerge as revolutionary subjects and is essential in thinking past the national chauvinism of the workers' movement that supported imperial wars.³

In this period of the 1940s, Dunayevskaya doesn't think of women as autonomous revolutionary subjects and, while for Luxemburg, women are divided fundamentally by class, both experience what it is to be revolutionary and woman but do not offer a developed theory of this conjunction. It is with the advent of the women's liberation movement and the emphasis on the notion that "the personal is political" in the early 1970s that Dunayevskaya turns with renewed appreciation to the person of Luxemburg as thoroughly revolutionary. It is this appreciation that leads her to read beyond her earlier critique of Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital*, finding special poignancy in Luxemburg's idea of a politics of "staying human," which is expressed in a letter to a Mathilde Wurm. Seeing the way Luxemburg relates to other women in letters seems to parallel the work of translation in Dunayevskaya—an unrecognized, unprized work that should not be dismissed as personal but is instead an expression of the full range of Luxemburg's reflections, relations, and revolutionary humanism. Thus, Dunayevskaya seems to do what Luxemburg didn't, which is to bring women as a subject into the center of her written revolutionary reflections. In this sense, Dunayevskaya's Marxist Humanism may have engaged in elements of a more thorough creolizing, in the sense that women entered the center of Dunayevskaya's liberatory thinking.

To understand Dunayevskaya's appreciation of Rosa Luxemburg as a revolutionist, a feminist, and an anti-imperialist, this chapter is divided into two parts. The first is the context for Dunayevskaya's critique of Luxemburg in 1946 and the politics of the state-capitalist Johnson–Forest Tendency in the Workers Party in the 1940s. The second is her return to Luxemburg thirty years later. What seemingly connects these two periods is Dunayevskaya's critique of Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital*. In other words, while she does not abandon her critique of Luxemburg, reworking the majority of her 1946 critique in her 1981 book, the real reason for Dunayevskaya's

³ On the issue of creolization and dialectic see Michael Neocosmos (2017: 6–23).

reconnection comes in the midst of the Women’s Liberation movement that helped open Luxemburg, the revolutionary, to her “hidden feminist dimensions.” The connecting thread and creolizations between these two periods of intellectual engagement is what Dunayevskaya considers the dialectics of liberation. One way to understand this concept is to think about it in terms of the working titles of Dunayevskaya’s books. First the “Lenin book,” which became *Marxism and Freedom* (1958), and, second, the “Luxemburg” book, which became *Rosa Luxemburg Women’s Liberation and Marx Philosophy of Revolution* (1991 [1981]).

JOHNSON, FOREST, AND THE REVOLTS OF 1943

To fully appreciate what could be considered the Luxemburg/Dunayevskaya relationship as a creolized one requires first traversing the development of Dunayevskaya’s Marxist Humanism, which emerged out of her analysis of Russia as a state-capitalist society, her appreciation and theorization of the autonomy of black revolt in the United States, and her work with C.L.R. James in the 1940s and early 1950s. This work was an engagement with Marx’s *Capital* against the leading Marxist theorists who argued that the “law of value” could not operate in the Soviet Union’s planned economy where internal markets did not exist. Luxemburg, who had said nothing on this subject but who had emphasized the importance of new markets for capitalists to realize surplus value, was drawn into this discussion. What separated Dunayevskaya, who emphasized alienated labor as central to the capitalist hunger for surplus value, from Luxemburg, who emphasized the importance of new markets to realize of surplus value, was Luxemburg’s “orthodoxy” vis-à-vis the working class as alone revolutionary. While Dunayevskaya did focus on worker revolts in production, she also began to “shift the geography of reason” to other forces beyond the working class. The working class for Luxemburg, though, was not undifferentiated; the differentiation between rank-and-file workers and trade unions was important to her thinking in *The Mass Strike*. Nonetheless, as Dunayevskaya argued in a letter to C.L.R. James in 1948, the general strike remained for Luxemburg an economic but not political action.

In 1941, C.L.R. James (Johnson) and Raya Dunayevskaya (Forest) began independently to develop theories of Russia as a state-capitalist society.⁴ After the Workers Party convention in September 1941, they formed

⁴ See James (1941a and 1941b) and Dunayevskaya (1941).

the State-Capitalist Tendency, which renamed itself the Johnson–Forest Tendency (JFT) in 1945.⁵

The JFT was Leninist, not Luxemburgist, in nature, and what became central to JFT was the question of what roles independent forces, like national liberation (or what was called the national question) as well as rank-and-file labor, could play in the socialist revolution. At the same time, JFT heralded Luxemburg as a revolutionary and serious intellectual, as C.L.R. James wrote in celebration of Liebknecht and Luxemburg in *Labor Action* in January 1946: “For years she fought an unrecognized fight against those who, like Kautsky, wanted to remove the revolutionary socialist content from Marxism.” James concluded the piece,

The New York Times of January 14th, tells us that in Germany on January 13th, 10,000 Berliners filed through shattered streets and snowfall to honor the memory of Liebknecht and Luxemburg. They went to the Friedrichsfelde Cemetery, the site of the monument to these great revolutionaries. It was destroyed by Hitler. Where is he today? But Luxemburg and Liebknecht are beginning to regain their positions in the hearts and lives of the German people.

Luxemburg was a consistent internationalist so much so that she opposed the self-determination of nations. She dismissed what Marx had written on the “Polish question” as being historically specific and no longer relevant, which put her out of step with “Orthodox Marxism.” For her the “right of nations to self-determination” always meant bourgeois nationalism and, as such, flew in the face of proletarian internationalism. With the outbreak of World War I, she continued to insist that all national liberation struggles were inherently bourgeois, arguing in the *Junius* pamphlet (smuggled out of prison in 1915 but not published until 1916): “In the era of rampaging imperialism there can be no more national wars. National interests can only serve as a means of deception of *betraying the working masses*” (quoted in Dunayevskaya, 1991: 55, my emphasis).

There were two debates among those within the Workers Party in the 1940s that became essential to the development and praxis of the JFT. The first was the “Russian question,” which, for Dunayevskaya, linked empirical research to a deep engagement with Marx’s *Capital*, as well as to the first English translations of Marx’s 1844 manuscripts on “Alienated Labor,”⁶ and

⁵ In this chapter I refer to the tendency, before and after 1945, as the Johnson–Forest Tendency (JFT).

⁶ See Dunayevskaya’s quotations from the 1844 Manuscripts in her 1943 piece “Labor and Society,” which was conceived as the Introduction to Part II of her “The Nature of the Russian Economy” and was the first time Marx’s “Humanist Essays” were brought into the development of the Johnson Forest Tendency. Grace Lee (Boggs), the third leader of the Johnson Forest Tendency, made the first full English translation of Marx’s *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts* from the German in

also further connected other writings with *Capital*. Not limited to an analysis of Russia’s five year plans, the Russia question spoke to the question of politics in the “age of state capitalism,” but it was Dunayevskaya’s analysis of the Russian economy that led to a year-long debate in the *American Economic Review* and a front-page article in the *New York Times* about the revisions to teaching Marx in the Soviet Union. In an article from the Soviet journal, *Pod Znamenem Marxizma (Under the Banner of Marxism)* No. 7–8, 1943), Russian political economists revised their view arguing that the law of value *did operate* under socialism. Dunayevskaya’s analysis of this article appeared in “A New Revision of Marxian Economics” and in the *American Economic Review* (September 1944) and was taken up in *The New York Times* (October 1st, 1944) and debated in several issues of the *American Economic Review* in 1945.⁷ The second debate that was essential to the JFT concerned what was called “the national question,” especially in the United States, which became articulated by Dunayevskaya and James in terms of the independence and autonomy of black freedom struggles. If the first was intimately connected with Marx’s *Capital* and its categories, the second was especially connected with Lenin, specifically articulated in his writings on what were called the national and colonial questions. It was Johnson and Forest’s serious study of these writings by Lenin that led them to Lenin’s *Philosophic Notebooks* on Hegel, as it became clear to them that the importance Lenin placed on national liberation struggles in the age of imperialism had to be put in the context of the importance of his study of Hegel’s dialectic.

For both Dunayevskaya and James, Lenin’s politics were connected with what Dunayevskaya called Lenin’s philosophic reorganization at the beginning of World War I, as he undertook his study of Hegel as the ground for his dialectical understanding of imperialism and the national and colonial questions. In *Notes on Dialectics* (the 1948 “Nevada Document”), James remembered Dunayevskaya’s earlier translation of Lenin’s “Notebooks on Hegel” (perhaps late 1941 or 1942 when James was working with the striking sharecroppers in Missouri), which, according to Grace Lee Boggs, “inspired C.L.R.’s *Notes on Dialectics*” (1998: 59): “I remember on my journeys between Missouri and New York,” writes James, “stopping at Washington and Rae calling out an at-sight translation from Lenin’s Russian notes and my scribbling them down” (1980: 99). The JFT’s 1943 and 1944 political writings, and their references to Lenin and the dialectic, had an implicit philosophic dimension. In mimeographed form, James’s later *Notes on Dialectics*,

1947. It is also worth noting that Dunayevskaya was teaching and developing outlines for courses on Marx’s *Capital* (volumes 1 and 2) for the Workers Party in 1945 and 1946.

⁷ After this admission, she wrote later, there was no further need for detailed analysis of Russian state plans.

which was only read by few people at the time, encouraged Dunayevskaya to embark on a full translation of Lenin's "Abstract of Hegel's Science of Logic" resulting in an eighty-two-page typescript in 1949. She shared the translations with James and Grace Lee over a two-year-long philosophic correspondence of thirty-five letters beginning in Feb 1949.⁸ Just as JFT's theory of Russia as a state-capitalist society and the new revolts in the early 1940s, in the midst of World War II, helped James and Dunayevskaya's conception of Marx's Marxism, it was also mediated by Lenin's turn to Hegel in 1915, in the midst of World War I, as Marxist parties across Europe objectively supported the imperialist war. In contrast to the aristocracy of labor, which Lenin argued was built on imperialism's super-profits and essential to the composition of Social Democratic conservatism and national chauvinism, Lenin held out the possibility of new forms of revolt as "the bacillus of revolution." It was an idea that would become essential to the JFT.

In addition, Lenin's 1915 study, "Capitalism and Agriculture in the United States of America," was also invaluable for Dunayevskaya's and James's development of the "American roots of Marxism," which could also be considered another type of creolization. Lenin's study of the U.S. south, wrote Dunayevskaya, was "undertaken to illuminate the problems of the Russian serf [and] is still the finest study of the American freedman." And in her 1944 "Marxism and the Negro Problem," Dunayevskaya turned to it again, arguing:

Within the economic remains of slavery lie the economic roots of the Negro Question. Unfortunately, America is so barren of Marxist economists that here, too, a Russian has produced the most profound study. Lenin, seeking to clarify the situation and evolution of Russian agriculture, embarked on a study of "New Data on the Laws of Development of Capitalism in Agriculture," and found a "striking similarity between the economic position of the American Negro and that of the former serf of the central agricultural provinces in Russia."

"THE BLACK DIMENSION"

JFT's intellectual work and emphasis on dialectical contradictions were deeply connected with ongoing events (e.g., the 1943 Detroit and Harlem

⁸ The unevenness of the correspondence is staggering. Dunayevskaya wrote seventeen letters to James and James wrote four to Dunayevskaya. After translating Lenin's Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic* in 1949, she looked for a publisher for it, offering it without charge to Columbia University's Russian Department, among other outlets. None showed any interest. Dunayevskaya published them in 1958 in the first edition of *Marxism and Freedom*.

riots, rank-and-file struggles against the wartime no-strike pledge, and the miners' strikes, which included large numbers of black miners).⁹ The focus on these revolts put the JFT at odds with their own party's leadership, which began to criticize them as idealists and spontaneists.¹⁰ Though it was not until the end of the decade that they would break with the vanguard party form, the experience of the distance between the so-called vanguard and the ongoing elemental revolt was an essential element in their Marxian engagement with the black struggles that were ongoing in the United States during the war years.

Writing of these revolts, James (1943a) argued,

Events in states as far apart as Florida, California, Pennsylvania, Texas, Michigan and New York have shown that at any moment gangs of whites will begin to beat up and murder Negroes in the streets, and to wreck and burn down blocks of Negro homes . . . In Detroit of the twenty-four Negroes killed, twenty were killed directly by the shots of the police. So that the lives of the Negroes were in far more danger from the government's representatives than from the rioters . . . To depend on this government for protection is suicide.

The Workers Party, of which the Johnson–Forest Tendency was a part, had quite a different perspective and, in 1943, developed a majority resolution on “the Negro question,” written by David Coolidge (Ernest Rice McKinney), the closest black ally to Max Shachtman, the Workers Party leader. While Shachtman agreed in principle with self-determination, he argued that it did not apply in the United States, because black Americans were not a nation. He thus lumped any notion of independent black struggle together with the Communist Party's “Black Belt” thesis, which he ridiculed. Much of James's and Dunayevskaya's critique of Shachtman's formalism argued against considering national consciousness as formal nationalism, understanding it dialectically, historically, and phenomenologically. One example is their understanding of Marcus Garvey: dismissed by Shachtman as a reactionary and as a demagogue, Dunayevskaya's perspective from the bottom up emphasized the originality in the creation of Garvey's national organization (Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League) that claimed six million mostly proletarian people, disproving the myth that black people couldn't organize.

⁹ There were 3752 strikes in 1943 with 430 in coal mining and iron and steel. Over half of the strikes were in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois as well as West Virginia and Kentucky. While the coal strikes were union-led, the majority of strikes were spontaneous, unauthorized, and lasted less than a week. Industry-wide coal strikes that halted production led Congress to pass the War Labor Disputes act making any strike that interfered with production of war materials illegal.

¹⁰ See for example Irving Howe (1946).

Rather than simply conveying Luxemburg's conclusion that independent struggles for democratic rights were essentially bourgeois, David Coolidge emphasized the weakness and the backwardness of the 1943 struggles, arguing that "no matter how great their courage and determination, the Negroes are organizationally, financially and numerically weak in comparison with the white workers, and woefully and pitifully weak in the face of present-day capitalism" (Coolidge, 1945). The conclusion was typical, stating that "the white worker must take the lead and offensive in the struggle for the Negro's democratic rights," because "the white workers are strongly organized, they have had ages of experience and they are powerful" (Ibid).

Dunayevskaya's response to Coolidge was straightforward and highlights the JFT's dialectical approach. Coolidge, Dunayevskaya (1945) argues, seems to think that shouting about class struggle makes his position more conscientious of class consciousness, but a "true Marxist" would be able to see a special problem: The "dual oppression" of the black American as a worker of a different color, which makes both the fight for democratic rights and the struggle for socialism necessary to fully realize those freedoms.

"Coolidge," she continued, "conceives of the struggle for democratic rights not as a fight against the bourgeoisie but as an appeal to the trade union movement," with the integration into the trade union movement as "the solution of the Negro problem." Yet Dunayevskaya reminded Coolidge in Detroit in 1943:

[it was] where the Negroes are most integrated into the trade union movement [that] the riots occurred. Precisely because the significance of this escapes Com. Coolidge . . . he blames the Negro working class for its "delusion" and he appeals to the white proletariat "to wipe out the blot placed on labor's escutcheon by the shabby and shameful treatment labor has accorded the Negro since emancipation."¹¹ The greatness of the Bolshevik solution lies precisely in knowing how to meet the danger of the division in the labor movement. We go to meet it by class struggle, and by stimulating the independent mass movement of the Negroes and turning it against the bourgeoisie. There is no other way of avoiding a divided labor movement. Didn't the independent activity of the Negroes stimulate the UAW to fight for Negro housing in Detroit and have a united front with labor in the elections? Independent mass activity of the Negroes is the best instrument for educating both white and Negro workers and mobilizing the white workers in the fight for Negro emancipation. (Dunayevskaya, 1945)

¹¹ This was actually Gunnar Myrdal's position a year later in *An American Dilemma* (1944). Here Coolidge anticipates the next stage of bourgeois social engineering of U.S. race relations.

Dunayevskaya also stated in “Marxism and the Negro Question” (1944) that in the north “the proletarianization and trade unionization of the Negro did not raise him to the status of the white proletarian and did not dissolve his struggle for elementary democratic rights into the general class struggle.” Rather than posit slavery as a pre-capitalist economic formation, she theorized that it is very much internal to U.S. capitalism and its development “in the actual process of cotton production”:

Historians who state that the Negro problem is rooted in slavery and stop there fail to see the crux of the question. The ‘stigma’ of slavery could not have persisted so long if the economic remains of slavery had not persisted . . . [I]t should not be forgotten that with the development of the plantation economy of the South, with the invention of the cotton gin, there was a development and extension of the slave economy.

White supremacy in the U.S. south, she writes, arose from the actual process of cotton production and the survival of slavery after the civil war was manifested in the “crop lien system,” characterized more “by the mule than the tractor . . . indicate the powerful economic basis of oppression in the United States and the degree to which it is woven into the whole capitalist structure of the country.”

Written by James (1943c), the JFT’s “Resolution on the Negro Question” was submitted in December 1943 to the 1944 Workers Party convention. The resolution was based on Lenin’s report to the Second Congress of the Communist International, where he “singled out as examples of the national and colonial question, the Irish question and the question of the Negroes in America.”¹² The “Negro struggle in the United States and its relations to the social struggles of the revolutionary classes,” argued James, “show that the Leninist analysis of the Negro question as part of the national question is the correct method with which to approach this problem.” James quoted Lenin: “The dialectics of history is such that small nations, powerless as an *independent* factor in the struggle against imperialism, play a part as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the *real* power against imperialism to come on the scene, namely the *socialist proletariat*.” This idea of the dialectics of history in the United States, where the black struggle would play a vanguard role, remained essential to the Marxist politics and philosophy of Johnson and Forest. Here the “proletarian Negro,” Dunayevskaya writes in 1944, “knows the might of a cohesive group . . . and feels himself a potent factor.” In the south, the “boss and black” relation follows the black proletarian

¹² See Claude McKay’s report from the Soviet Union by the same name, edited by Alan L. McLeod (1979). On McKay and Dunayevskaya, see Lou Turner’s two-part (1987) article.

into the city, which, for her, made “the Negro Question become, in Marxian terminology, more of the National Question than ever.” In the section, “The Historical Development of the Negro in the United States,” James added,

[T]he whole history of the United States and the role of the Negroes in American economy and society are a constant proof and reminder of the fact that it is absolutely impossible for the Negroes to gain equality under American capitalism. Such is the development of American capitalist society and the role of Negroes in it that the Negroes’ struggle for democratic rights brings the Negroes almost immediately face to face with capital and the state . . . In the United States today this struggle is a direct part of the struggle for socialism.

This dialectic of nationalism and integration was summed up by James in a letter to Constance Webb about a conversation he had had with Richard Wright in 1944: the African American, he records Wright saying, “is nationalist to his heart and it perfectly right to be so [H]is nationalism [is a] necessary means of giving him strength, self-respect and organization *in order to fight for integration into American society.*” James then added: “It is a perfect example of dialectical contradiction” (1993: 189–90).

In their response to Coolidge, Dunayevskaya and James were thinking through and developing—in the U.S. context—the importance that Lenin had put on the independent struggles of minority groups as bacilli for the socialist proletariat as the measure of an American Marxist: “Does or does not Com. Coolidge think that the Negro struggles in America are just such bacilli”?

DUNAYEVSKAYA’S CRITIQUE OF LUXEMBURG IN 1946

Both James’s and Dunayevskaya’s analysis of state capitalism were based on serious engagements with Marx’s *Capital*. It was this that led them to criticize Luxemburg’s *Accumulation of Capital*, which James, in his article “Production for Production’s sake” (1943b), called “grievously wrong,” going so far as to dismiss her conception of economics as “essentially bourgeois.”¹³ James noted that Luxemburg agreed that Marx’s concept of capitalism, “production for the sake of production,” was correct but correct only as an abstraction. In reality, she argued, capitalist society was not like that. For James, in contrast,

¹³ In addition to Dunayevskaya’s writings, see for example James (1943b) and Dunayevskaya’s (1944) defense of James. Both James’s shorter piece and Dunayevskaya’s longer explication include a discussion of volume 2 of Marx’s *Capital* foregrounding Lenin’s critique of the Narodniki and Luxemburg’s *Accumulation of Capital* and respond to Carter’s “vulgar underconsumptionism.” While criticizing Luxemburg, they note that she is nowhere as crude.

under all imaginable conditions, *including a planned economy*, capitalist production remained production for the sake of production. In addition, with his frequent and precise references to Hegel, James wanted to show how “Marxian economic theory flows from dialectic,” noting that any “serious dialectic means the study of Hegel. If we do not do it ourselves, who will do it for us?” He added, “Each generation must itself recreate the fundamentals of its beliefs in its own image, in terms of its own problems. Otherwise it does not only not understand them, it often actively misunderstands them, and leaves open the door to the surrounding bourgeois swamp.” Here James resonated Lenin’s point on reading Hegel’s *Logic*, that the Marxists (including himself), having not studied Hegel, had not fully understood *Capital*. Additionally, for James and Dunayevskaya, Lenin’s critique of the Narodniki in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899) was essential to think through what they considered Luxemburg’s “error”¹⁴.

Dunayevskaya’s public work on Luxemburg began in 1943 with a critique of Reva Craine’s review of Paul Frölich’s biography of Luxemburg. Craine was a leader of the Workers Party and a columnist for *Labor Action*.¹⁵ Concerned only with Craine’s uncritical appreciation of Luxemburg’s *Accumulation of Capital*, which Craine said defended and extended Marx, Dunayevskaya introduced Lenin’s views, which were unavailable in English at the time:

It must be remembered that the dispute is a *theoretical one*, one which takes place within the framework of Marx’s *abstract* capitalism. The dispute revolves around Luxemburg’s argument that capitalist accumulation is theoretically impossible unless capitalism can find noncapitalist strata at home and abroad. This Lenin uncompromisingly denies. Lenin does not deny, as no sensible person could, the fact that capitalism seeks foreign markets. But Luxemburg thought that it *must* do so in order to *realize* surplus value. . . . That whole section of Luxemburg’s book (pp. 312–336) which describes capitalism’s pursuit

¹⁴ Dunayevskaya (1943) was translating Russian passages for James (who in “Reply to Carter” notes the lack of an English translation and the “low status of Marxian economic theory” in the U.S.) as she was translating part of chapter 1 of Lenin’s 1899 book *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, “The Theoretic Mistakes of the Narodniki,” published as “Origins of Capitalism in Russia,” in the party journal *New Internationalist* in October, November and December 1943. The importance of Lenin’s *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* is noteworthy both because of its importance to Dunayevskaya’s critique of Luxemburg’s *Accumulation of Capital* but also its afterlife in discussions about the “agrarian question” in “postcolonial” Africa.

¹⁵ After the end of World War II, she and other women in the leadership were replaced by men “returning to their posts.” Dunayevskaya criticized this “bourgeois nonsense” in “On Women in the Post-War World and Old Radicals.” The “woman question,” she insisted, was a social not personal problem; a point that became essential to women’s liberation. Women changed men’s attitudes, Dunayevskaya argued in this 1953 article (reprinted in 1985: 31–35), in the factories and also demanded new relations at home.

of foreign markets is punctuated by Lenin, thus: “Capitalism moves to backward lands not for the sake of the realization of surplus value but for the *conveniences* of exploitation, gratuitous labor, etc. The percentage is bigger! That is all. Pillaging of the lands (gifts), loan at 12–13 percent, etc., etc. – that is where the *root* is.” (Dunayevskaya, 1943)

Dunayevskaya’s two-part critique of Luxemburg’s *Accumulation of Capital* (subtitled “How it Differed with Marx and Lenin”) appeared in the April and May 1946 issues of *New Internationalist*.¹⁶ Her analysis (which she returns to later and reworks in the *Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution*) was tied to classes she was teaching on the first two volumes of *Capital*, as well as her analysis of the Russian economy. It turns on what she considers Luxemburg’s innovative departure from Marx’s accumulation of capital.¹⁷ Since the fundamental conflict in a capitalist society is between capital and labor, Dunayevskaya accepted Marx’s premise of expanded reproduction in volume II of *Capital*, which, for theoretical explication, is based on a model of a closed capitalist society dominated by the law of value. For Marx, the production of value and the value form is specific to capitalism. Thus, for argument’s sake, Marx posits a closed society to disprove that capital accumulation is based on individual consumption through the market. In other words, he is holding other factors such as a world market in abeyance. Let’s not forget that the *critique* of political economy in volume I of *Capital* takes political economy at its word: The point is not only to highlight liberal political economy’s assumptions about freedom and equality but also subject its logic to a critique, making it clear that the fetishism of commodities is not a product of the market exchange but the ethereal value form stamped in production and formed by alienated labor.

In volume II of *Capital*, Marx divides social production into two departments: department I (production of the means of production) and department II (production of the means of consumption). There is a class character to this. With expanded reproduction, department I dwarfs department II. That is to say, the production of the means of production, such as machines, computers, software, and so on, dwarfs production for consumption (which is itself based on machines, computers, and so on). Capitalist production, production for production’s sake, thus creates its own departments while surplus value

¹⁶ I am using the 1967 reprint of the articles printed as an appendix to Dunayevskaya’s pamphlet. In 1943 Luxemburg’s works *Accumulation of Capital, a Contribution to the Economic Explanation of Imperialism*, and her *Anticritique*, first published in 1919, and called *Accumulation of Capital, or What the Epigones Have Made of the Marxist Theory – An Anticritique* were untranslated. Dunayevskaya made her own translations from the Russian.

¹⁷ Innovative in part, because bourgeois economists hailed Luxemburg’s work as the “clearest formulation” of the question of “effective demand” until Keynes (1967: 41).

remains the overall goal. Of course, Marx does not deny that commodities need to be useful, but it does not subsume capital’s goal of surplus value: production for the sake of production.

Luxemburg disagrees, argues Dunayevskaya. Luxemburg insists that capitalists “are not fanatics” who produce for production’s sake and neither technological revolutions nor the “will” to accumulate are sufficient for expanded reproduction: “One other condition is necessary: the expansion of effective demand.” Dunayevskaya reminds us that capitalists, as capital personified, are indeed fanatical accumulators of capital. This is the pathology of capitalism. That the “‘consumed part of constant capital’ is not consumed personally, but *productively*, seems to have escape Luxemburg’s attention,” Dunayevskaya explains: “Capitalists do not ‘eat’ machines, neither their wear and tear, nor the newly-created ones. Both the consumed part of constant capital and the new investments in capital are *realized through production*. That precisely is the meaning of expanded reproduction, as Marx never wearied of telling” (1967: 50). The idea of a direct connection between production and effective demand is, in other words, a piece of bourgeois ideology. Products can be incorporated directly into further production. Most use values produced in a capitalist society are consumed not by human beings but directly by capital. In addition, the capitalist’s inability to sell is not simply the lack of markets. Dunayevskaya reminds us that the market is in fact the largest before a crisis—the “inability to sell.” But that “inability to sell manifests itself as *such because of the fundamental antecedent decline in the rate of profit, which has nothing whatever to do with the inability to sell*” (1967: 53).

For Dunayevskaya, Luxemburg’s disagreement with Marx’s “assumption” of a closed capitalist society is based on her positing reality for logic. It is entirely understandable faced with the new reality of imperialism, but it leads her to argue that expanded reproduction springs not from the logic of capitalist accumulation but from markets in non-capitalist societies. For Dunayevskaya and for Marx, the expropriation of non-capitalist societies and their continued neocolonial exploitation was essential to capitalist accumulation on a world scale. But her disagreement with Luxemburg was not about this. Rather, getting Marx’s argument in volume II of *Capital* right meant appreciating the importance of Marx’s concepts and his dialectical thought. Once Luxemburg had given up Marx’s basic premise of volume II, a closed capitalist society, “there was no place for her to go but to the sphere of exchange and consumption,” and thus the law of value is not specific to capitalist society but can be identified with “‘all pre-capitalist forms of production’ *as well as* ‘the future, socialist organization’” (1967: 48). One can imagine the meaning of this italicization as Dunayevskaya had just published her critique of the Stalinist revision of teaching Marx in Russia, which claimed that the law of value did operate under socialism.

At the same time, however, Dunayevskaya praises Luxemburg's descriptions of the brutal reality of the imperialist processes of accumulation but argues that this was not the problem Marx was addressing:

Some of the best writing in her *Accumulation* occurs in her description of the "real" process of accumulation through the conquest of Algeria, India, the Anglo-Boer war and the carving up of the African Empire; the opium wars against China, the extermination of the American Indian; the growing trade with non-capitalist societies, and an analysis of protective tariffs and militarism. Luxemburg had become so blinded by the powerful imperialist phenomena of her day that she failed to see that all this had nothing to do with the problem posed in Volume II of *Capital*, which is concerned with how surplus value is realized in an *ideal* capitalist world. (1967: 47)

This "ideal capitalist world" did not concern Luxemburg, and thus she drew her logical conclusion that accumulation was "inconceivable in any respect whatsoever" without these third groups. For Dunayevskaya, the historic necessity of the proletarian revolution collapses: "if accumulation is 'inconceivable' without this outside force, then it is this force, and not labor, which will bring about the downfall of capitalism" (1967: 55). In *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (which includes much of her 1946 analysis), Dunayevskaya added two crucial points:

And so does her own theory of the "impossibility" of accumulation without these non-capitalist lands, *once the live negative in her theory-the colonial masses-are seen nowhere as revolutionary.*

Put otherwise, the dialectic, both as movement of liberation and as methodology, is entirely missing. All these opposites coexist without ever getting jammed up against each other to produce a movement. What Hegel called "comes before consciousness without mutual contact," Lenin called "the essence of anti-dialectics." This, indeed, is the nub of Luxemburg's error. (1991: 45, my emphasis)

Dunayevskaya concluded in her 1946 analysis that Luxemburg, the revolutionist, who "feels the abysmal gap between her theory and her revolutionary activity . . . comes to the rescue of Luxemburg, the theorist" (1967: 55).

In her new thoughts on *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (written after a nationwide tour promoting the book in 1983), she added an important clarification to what she meant by Luxemburg's error, emphasizing that a "living Subject unites rather than divides theory and reality":

As against the phenomenology of imperialism being merely a reflection of new surfacings of oppression, new appearances surface as so profound a

philosophy of revolution as to disclose that what inheres in it is a living Subject that will resolve the great contradiction of its absolute opposites, imperialism and national oppression. It is this, which Marxist-Humanists call the new revolutionary forces as Reason. Therein is the nub of the Great Divide between *Phenomenology* and *Philosophy*—and because it is no abstraction, but a live Subject, *it unites rather than divides theory and reality* (1991: xxxiv–xxxv).

So, for Dunayevskaya, Marxist-Humanism is a philosophy grounded in Marx’s Marxism and open to new revolutionary forces *as reason*. Her Marxian critique of *Accumulation of Capital* was not subsumed by her new appreciation of Luxemburg’s revolutionary humanism.

To get a sense of what Dunayevskaya means by a live “Subject,” let us return to the pivotal year of 1947, when the Johnson–Forest Tendency left the Workers Party, and Dunayevskaya went on a mission to establish relations among European revolutionary leftists to present “the state capitalist position to the conference of the Fourth International.” What heralded a new beginning turned out not to be in these meetings but her meeting a Cameroonian revolutionary, which she argued marked the new epoch of anti-colonial revolutions in Africa that she later defined as “a totally new dimension in philosophy.” The idea of “self-movement,” which Lenin had underscored in his *Philosophical Notebooks*, was being practiced and acknowledged by Dunayevskaya.¹⁸ A letter sent to James (August 18, 1947) emphasized the beginnings of the anti-colonial African revolution, suggesting the importance, not only of the relationship of spontaneity to organization but also of a new stage of consciousness and organization among the Cameroonians where everyone “to a man” (she uses Lenin’s phrase) was active and didn’t need membership cards to be recognized:

Dear J.,

I love these Africans! When they do something they do “to a man,” so that I feel that Lenin would at this time embrace them very warmly. I have just heard of the most remarkable of all national resistance movements—the one that has occurred—and has not yet been squashed entirely—in Cameroon. It seems that during the war a movement for independence from France started there and so spontaneous and overwhelming was it that, without a party or any other form of political organization (their trade union is strong and has three million members), the people, literally en masse, turned out during an election campaign, disregarded entirely the established French colonial government, elected their

¹⁸ See Lenin (1914). Frank Rosengarten notes that for James “the idea of ‘development through self-movement,’ [was] a key element of Hegelian thought that he saw as applicable to modern conditions” (2008: 127).

people, enacted their laws, everybody seems to belong to this movement; there seems to be no such thing as membership cards; it is just taken for granted that all are members because all are. Until six months ago it was truly a state within a state; now the French government has started pressures from sending swarms of airplanes to following the leaders, etc. etc. I met this Cameroonian comrade [and] . . . I gave him one of our Negro Resolutions, and what with the contacts we have in West Africa and Nigeria, etc. it seems to me we can really soon start an African Bureau. (quoted in Rosengarten, 2008: 82–83)

This idea of starting an African Bureau was part of the discussion that prefigured one of the most important political resolutions of the JFT after they left the Workers Party: C.L.R. James's 1948 "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in U.S."

The JFT of this period represented a moment of intense critical-revolutionary-intellectual creativity that combined a serious discussion of Marxian political economics with questions of new forms of revolt. Lenin was a crucial foundation, for, alongside his analysis of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism, he had argued that anti-imperialist revolt could play an independent role in the revolutionary struggle. The question for the JFT theorists was to think this through from the understanding that state capitalism was the new stage of capitalist production. In a letter to James on October 14, 1948, Dunayevskaya again returned to Luxemburg as she was thinking about new forms of organization and consciousness after her discussions in France with the Cameroonian revolutionary and took up an important political philosophical distinction between representation and being in Luxemburg's *Russian Revolution* (written while she was in jail in September 1918). Dunayevskaya noted that while Luxemburg had hailed Lenin and Trotsky for "storming the heavens" in 1917 "she did not grasp [or] recognize the new organization the proletariat had formed":

For her 1905 meant general strike—economic action—not Soviet—political action: *the organization of the proletariat as rulers outside the realm of the party*. For Russia in 1918 she says: "In place of the representative bodies, created by general popular elections, Lenin and Trotsky have laid down soviets as the only true representative of the laboring masses."¹⁹

Dunayevskaya continued, critical of Luxemburg's formalism, making a sharp distinction between "representative bodies," and the "masses wish, in burst of revolution not to be represented but to be":

¹⁹ Raya Dunayevskaya to C.L.R. James, October 14, 1948. Raya Dunayevskaya Collection (RDC 1329), <https://rayadunayevskaya.org/> my emphasis.

Evidently to Luxemburg, “representative bodies” should represent, not *be* the masses. If the masses are to be “represented,” then they must submit to elections and so at specific places and specified times: *when masses wish, in burst of revolution not to be represented but to be, creating the unheard of organization—well that does not conform to form.*

One of the important philosophical categories that Dunayevskaya developed out of her Hegel studies in the early 1950s, extending the notion of self-movement and the idea of spontaneity and organization beyond restrictive binaries, was to articulate movements from practice, being both a force and a reason for revolution. When new movements erupt, they challenge ways of doing and thinking that have been taken for granted. They challenge theory. But for her, importantly, rather than “liberating” the theoretician from theoretical work, the theoretician’s work was to both hear the new voices and impulses in the struggles for liberation and also think with them. This was exactly what she envisioned when she asked that workers be involved in discussing drafts in 1950 of what would become *Marxism and Freedom*. It then became an important principle.²⁰ As she argued in 1955 when publishing “Philosophic Notes”:

These Notebooks mark the great divide in Marxism. They were Lenin’s preparation for his writings on *Imperialism* and *State and Revolution*, as well as actual Russian Revolution in November 1917. This is the first English translation of the remarks, which Lenin made to himself as he studied Hegel’s *Science of Logic* and *History of Philosophy*. I made the rough translation of Lenin’s *Notebooks* in 1948 . . . In 1950, under the impact of the miners’ strike sparked by automation (the continuous miner), I returned actively to the writing of a book on Marxism which I now called “the Lenin book” because I conceived Lenin’s *Notebooks* as central to the work. I wanted a worker present at the oral presentation of the thesis because the whole point was that unless the most profound ideas of Marx

²⁰ In a discussion of the Lenin book (which became *Marxism and Freedom*) in 1950, between Dunayevskaya, James, Grace Lee and Johnny Zupan (a Detroit auto worker and editor of the Tendency’s newspaper, *Correspondence*, in 1953), Dunayevskaya notes the intimacy of chattel slavery to American capitalism and the relation between the plantation economy and the money economy. In meeting notes she argues that, by the early 1860s, Marx became sure that the north would win in the U.S. Civil War but that, as a “bourgeois war,” it would be incomplete (1861-2) and that he wrote the chapter on the working day in *Capital* concerned about how the introduction of machinery would kill off the proletariat. It is only with the French edition of *Capital* after the Paris Commune that Marx rewrites the question of form in the section on the fetish. She argues, “Form, finally, then emerges as: Formally free but actually enslaved. Formally individual labor, but actually socialized (by the time they are made into cooperators, their labor power no longer belongs to them). Form of value equals fetishism of commodities. Only FREELY associated labor can strip off this mystical veil. Form of value—new universal by which mastery of machine over man is established.” The notes are available here: <https://rayadunayevskaya.org/ArchivePDFs/1585.pdf>.

ware expressed so simply and directly that the average worker would understand, it had no meaning at all . . . Where Lenin, in 1915, could keep his philosophic discoveries in private notebooks, we could not do so in the 1950s . . . Our age has so matured that we must begin with the workers themselves participating in the working out of the philosophic, that is to say total outlook. (1955: 2)

RAYA AND ROSA: NEW APPRECIATIONS OF LUXEMBURG

Dunayevskaya's new appreciation of Luxemburg as a feminist, represented by *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*, was tied up with Luxemburg as an anti-imperialist in the context of the emergence of the "Third World," emphasizing her "flash of genius" about imperialism in 1899 and her critique of German militarism and the Social Democratic party's acquiescence, which led to her break with Kautsky four years before Lenin broke with him. "Her hatred of imperialism, her great feeling for all the peoples of the world whom capitalism was oppressing, of the truly human warmth in the cries of the women and children that she kept hearing in the Kalahari desert as if they were around the corner from her home" was absolutely essential to who she was, Dunayevskaya argued in a letter to Women's Liberationists in 1978 (1985: 237). Luxemburg was ahead of her time after breaking with Kautsky in 1910. But was she in ahead of Lenin? Yes and no. Having not worked out her break with Kautsky "philosophically and organizationally," Dunayevskaya writes, "I couldn't possibly conclude that she was 'in advance' of Lenin." Not in advance but at least perhaps side by side?

Luxemburg became publicly known in 1899 as she took on, and not for the last time, one of the German Social Democratic Party's (SPD) leading theoreticians of parliamentarianism, Eduard Bernstein, in her pamphlet "Reform or Revolution." It was revolution and the wish "to become one with the proletariat in *making history*" during the 1905 Russian revolution that heralded the end of her "German period," argues Dunayevskaya, as she was "speaking Russian" and identifying with mass activity (1991: 6). For her, the transformation of the small underground party into a mass organization proved it was the "masses themselves, in motion," not the leaders, who taught workers class consciousness: Revolutions, argued Luxemburg, "do not allow anyone to play the schoolmaster with them." With the Russian revolution dominating her thinking and activity, she wrote to Emmanuel and Mathilde Wurm in 1906 summing up her political philosophy: "The revolution is magnificent. All else is bilge" (Dunayevskaya, 1991: 7).

Significantly, at the 1907 conference of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in London, where all tendencies of Russian Marxism were in

attendance, she recognized the peasantry was "an independent ferment for revolution" (quoted in Dunayevskaya, 1991: 12). It was the dialectic of revolution that unleashed the political power of the peasantry. In other words, it was not only the peasant spontaneous mass activity but Luxemburg's *experience* of it that allowed her to recognize other forces outside of the working class. The same year, Luxemburg attended the International Congress in Stuttgart and, with Lenin, presented an anti-war amendment that prefigured Lenin's later revolutionary defeatism, arguing that, in the event of war, their aim was not to end "the war but [use] the war to hasten the general collapse of class rule" (quoted in Dunayevskaya, 1991: 13). At both conferences, often the only woman in the room, Luxemburg was subject to snide, sexist remarks by the male leaders. What Dunayevskaya sees in Luxemburg's "unknown feminist dimension" is not only an intersection of socialism and feminism with a focus on working women but also, importantly, the mediation of this relationship by the idea of revolution as totally liberatory. "Far from Luxemburg having no interest in the so-called 'Woman Question,'" Dunayevskaya argues, she along with Zetkin, Kollontai, Balabanoff, and Roland-Holst "were determined to build a women's liberation movement that concentrated not only on organizing women workers but on having them develop as leaders, as decision-makers and as independent Marxist revolutionaries" (Dunayevskaya, 1991: 13). "Are you coming to the women's conference?" Luxemburg asked Luise Kautsky in 1911, "Just imagine, I have become a feminist!" (quoted in Dunayevskaya, 1991: 95) Thus, when Luxemburg writes of revolution that it is magnificent and all else is bilge, it doesn't mean she's downplaying her personality in Dunayevskaya's view. Rather, it is the totality of her personality aspiring for the "future." No doubt, Dunayevskaya argues, "some of today's women theorists who refuse to grapple with Rosa's theories on the ground that she didn't write on Women's Liberation are using that magnificent quotation as 'proof' of her playing down women's uniqueness, as if revolution and women were opposites!" (Dunayevskaya, 1985: 227)

How does this relate to Luxemburg's critique of national liberation that she continued to view as bourgeois? Here, Dunayevskaya emphasized Luxemburg's view of revolution as total, as "the way, the only way, of uprooting exploitative, racist, sexist society." And yet at the same time, Luxemburg was unable to discern new subjects of revolt emerging from the colonial revolt. Remember in her 1946 critique where Dunayevskaya argued that Luxemburg the revolutionist "comes to the rescue of Luxemburg, the theorist." It is expressed in Luxemburg's passionate declaration quoted earlier of the revolution being everything and all else bilge. The contradiction between Luxemburg's passionate anti-imperialism, her international humanism in describing the cries of imperialism's victims, and the enormity of

capitalist genocide as well as her indifference to national self-determination also needs to be put in context. Given that thinkers like Du Bois, Césaire, and Fanon²¹ saw imperialism's lead up to World War I as the genocidal precursor to fascism in the heart of Europe, Luxemburg's might be forgiven some for not seeing the kind of revolutionary subject that would irrupt in the post-World War II Third World that so shaped Dunayevskaya's thinking. While Luxemburg never wavered from her critique of "the national question" as bourgeois, Fanon, of course, wrote profoundly about this in the "Pitfalls of National Consciousness" in *The Wretched of the Earth*. However, because Luxemburg had a blanket dismissal of movements against colonialism, she wasn't able to capture the dialectic of revolution and counter-revolution that Fanon captured.

For Dunayevskaya, Luxemburg's desire for revolution helped Dunayevskaya connect with what she calls the "new moments" of Marx in his final decade. The decade after the Paris Commune, Marx, the revolutionist, was investigating new pathways, what Dunayevskaya called "new forces and reason" for revolutionary transformation. For Dunayevskaya, it is the rise of the Third World that "disclosed a totally new dimension in philosophy," which at the same time compels a reconnection with Luxemburg as a revolutionary, as an anti-imperialist and as an "unknown feminist," even if she didn't write on Women's Liberation or recognize the subjectivity of anti-colonial revolt.

Dunayevskaya appreciated Rosa Luxemburg was an "original character" who both achieved great revolutionary success and whose passion for revolution and "staying human" characterized her vision of a new society. It is this originality, which is manifested in her critical activity in revolution and in her refusal to be "pigeon-holed" as a woman, that remains of upmost importance. For Dunayevskaya, she brooked "no limits to the range of interests . . . or concentration on *any* single issue—it was the totality of the revolutionary goal that characterized the totality that was Rosa Luxemburg" (1991: 2–3). Having fully broken with the leading SPD theoretician, Karl Kautsky, in 1910 over imperialism, and after becoming increasingly marginalized from the Marxist SPD, Luxemburg wrote what Dunayevskaya calls "her greatest theoretical work," *Accumulation of Capital*.

Luxemburg viewed *Accumulation of Capital* as her contribution to complete Marx's analysis of accumulation in volume II of *Capital*. In this creolization of *Capital*, she addressed the problem of under-consumption and the redirection of attention to "noncapitalist" lands where surplus value could be

²¹ See Césaire (2000). Du Bois's 1915 essay "the African Roots of the War" should be read in relation to Luxemburg and Lenin's discussion as well as it being critically read given his following of the League of Nations policy of bringing the former German African colonies under trusteeship, in contrast to Garvey's radical romanticist "Africa for the Africans" position.

“realized.” Her “flash of genius” about the rise of Imperialism in 1899, her spotlight on the violence of imperialism seen in her 1902 article on the volcanic eruption in Martinique—which shined a light on how French, British, Russian, German, Italian, and U.S. imperialism were united in “mutual murder and the torch,” which is reflective of capitalism’s response to natural disasters today—her “uncompromising anti-imperialism” over the 1905 “Morocco Incident” and her “revolutionary opposition to German imperialism’s barbarism against the Hereros” (Dunayevskaya, 1991: 38) led her to break with Kautsky. The man who had been the leading Marxist theoretician and Marx’s literary executor was now praising “Prussian glory”. “To construe his ‘century’ of Prussian glory,” Luxemburg wrote, “Comrade Kautsky has apparently added in the Battle of Jena—as well as the Hunn Campaign in China led by our Count Walderssee, and Trotha’s victory over the Hottentot women and children in the Kalahari” (Luxemburg, 1980).²²

Luxemburg’s break with Kautsky was total and unique. Four years before Lenin, she not only sensed Kautsky’s opportunism but also the conservatism and national chauvinism of the Marxist leadership. On the heels of this break with Kautsky and her subsequent isolation in the party, Luxemburg put her energy into *Accumulation of Capital*, a 450-page book that was finished in four months. Dunayevskaya continued to find Luxemburg’s descriptions of the real process of accumulation and her vigilante anti-imperialism compelling, identifying with Luxemburg, who just before the largest Marxist party in Europe voted for, to support an imperialist war took on the task of fulfilling what she said Marx had left “unfinished” in the second volume of *Capital*. Similarly, under the impact of women’s liberation and the rise of the “Third World,” Dunayevskaya was moved to focus on newly “discovered” writings of the late Marx—the ones about the possibility of revolutionary impulses from noncapitalist lands. In a sense, Dunayevskaya wanted to show that Marx’s Marxism is already creolized, though she didn’t use that term. In his response to Vera Zasulich, Marx dismissed the idea that *Capital* suggested “‘historical inevitability’ . . . to countries outside of Western Europe” and focused instead on the possibility of Russian commune not going through capitalism but being regenerated by a revolutionary movement. Dunayevskaya connected these writings with his notes in *The Ethnological Notebooks* about how Iroquois women were actively involved in “tribal affairs,” emphasizing how “every adult male and female member had a voice upon all questions” in the “democratic assembly” (Marx, 1972: 150). In Dunayevskaya’s mind, Marx’s last decade was a period in his “never-ending search for new paths for revolution” (1991: 186), where

²² “Prussian Glory” was the name of a military march written in 1871 after the Kingdom of Prussia’s victory in the Franco-Prussian War.

the “idea of revolution was becoming even more comprehensive” (Rich in Dunayevskaya, 1991: xviii). Part of this pursuit was Marx’s consideration of other forms of organization and social relations not dominated by the value form. But rather than idealizing communal society, Marx, according to Dunayevskaya, showed how long before its dissolution elements of oppression, in general, and of woman, in particular, were emerging within through the development of ranks: “It was the beginning of a transformation into opposite-gens into caste. That is to say, within the egalitarian communal form arose the elements of its opposite-caste, aristocracy, and different material interests” (1991: 181). The question for Marx in 1881, however, was not simply a memory of communal society but the possibility of its radical reconstitution through revolution.

In her unfinished *Introduction to Political Economy*, Luxemburg also showed an interest in non-capitalist, “self-sufficient” communal peasant economies of her day, such as those in “the Scottish Highlands or Russia, Bosnia or Serbia,” where “we work to get by, to eat our fill, to put clothes on our back and have a roof over our head. As to what we produce, ‘what orientation’ we give our labor, that’s another foolish question! We produce what we need” (Luxemburg, 2013: 333). Here we can notice a resonance with Marx’s interest in communal property forms and freedoms in contrast to the so-called capitalist freedom and to the production of surplus value that interested him over his last decade. And we can assume that Luxemburg’s analysis of communal peasant economies from a “socialist viewpoint” would, as she said of Marx, help denaturalize capitalism and deconstruct “the hieroglyphics of capitalist economy” (Luxemburg, 2004: 151). But Luxemburg’s interest in these communal forms did not connect to the possibility of new revolutionary subjectivities. What “must be repeated and stressed,” writes Dunayevskaya, is Luxemburg’s failure to recognize that there were any new revolutionary forces in the noncapitalist lands . . . In a word, imperialism becomes simply an “epiphenomenon.” All her magnificent descriptions of imperialist oppression have *no live Subject* arise to oppose it; they remain just suffering masses, not gravediggers of imperialism (Dunayevskaya, 1991: 47).

Dunayevskaya, then, insists on the connection with Marx’s General Law of Capitalist Accumulation and its internal logic. It was capitalism’s production of the unemployed army and its connection to the emergence of “new forces and new passions” where Marx, she writes, left “pure economics”—roots and all—far behind as he searched for its absolute opposite and found that, whereas that law of capitalism was the creation of an unemployed army, *that unemployed army is capitalism’s ‘gravediggers.’*” What Marx was tracing in the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation was what resulted from the disintegration of capitalism: “From that moment new forces and new passions spring up in the bosom of society” (1991: 47).

THE PROBLEM OF TRANSLATION AND THE BAD BREAK BETWEEN THE GENERATIONS

It is worth stopping for a moment and noting Dunayevskaya’s work as a translator of Marx, Lenin, and Luxemburg. Often translating from Russian, she was also conscious of her fidelity to these revolutionary thinkers. In *Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution*, she translates Luxemburg’s speech to the 1907 Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party in London. This was the congress of Marxist revolutionaries discussing the ongoing Russian revolution. Dunayevskaya was shocked that “to this date, seventy-four years after the event, we are yet to have an English translation of the Minutes. Why such a total disregard for so revealing a congress” (1991: 8)?²³ For Dunayevskaya, the question of translation becomes part of her critique of the post-Marx era, beginning with Engels. She questioned what had been done with Marx’s last writings, *The Ethnological Notebooks*, as well as archivists and biographers of Marx, such as Franz Mehring, who declared Marx’s last decade to be a slow death. This was the decade when Marx wrote the *Critique of the Gotha Program* and the French edition of *Capital*, with its new sections on the fetish of commodities and so-called Primitive Accumulation. Dunayevskaya notes that we still don’t have a full translation of this French edition, which would be especially relevant since the newest English translation of *Capital* uncritically follows Engels’ structure, separating the chapters on “So-called Primitive Accumulation” into a separate Part 8 rather than including them in Part 7 as Marx had done in the French edition. Marx, she writes, “held that the real logic of ‘so-called Primitive Accumulation’ was that it was not merely the historic origin, but ongoing and *the logical continuation of the process of capitalist accumulation* which is why he left no doubt in anyone’s mind that Part 8 was integral to Part 7” (1991: 139, my emphasis).

The development of Marxist-Humanism from the 1950s on was, for Dunayevskaya, a constant return to Marx mediated by new revolts—from the black revolts in the United States to the “Afro-Asian revolutions” and the rise of new “Third World” across the globe, as well as the development of women’s liberation from an idea to a movement—helping disclose new dimensions in Marx’s philosophy of revolution. These movements also suggest the context for Dunayevskaya’s new outlook on Rosa Luxemburg, in

²³ Dunayevskaya oversaw the translation of some of Luxemburg’s writings that remained untranslated in the 1970s. Published by News & Letters, these translations included Luxemburg’s article “Martinique” (after the volcanic eruption in May 1902), her 1910 polemic against Kautsky’s theory of the Mass Strike titled “Theory and Practice,” and her 1910 article against Kautsky’s parliamentary tactics, which was published as “Attrition or Collision.”

addition to her disappointment that Luxemburg was being ignored and her feminist dimension dismissed by women liberationists.²⁴

Speaking of the “bad break between the generation,” in a letter to Dunayevskaya in 1977, the psychoanalyst and humanistic philosopher Erich Fromm, who had corresponded with Dunayevskaya since the early 1960s, noted how Luxemburg’s influence was never realized because she was a woman:

I feel that the male Social Democrats never could understand Rosa Luxemburg, nor could she acquire the influence for which she had the potential because she was a woman; and the men could not become full revolutionaries because they did not emancipate themselves from their male, patriarchal, and hence dominating, character structure. After all, the original exploitation is that of women by men and there is no social liberation so long as there is no revolution in the sex war ending in full equality . . . Unfortunately I have known nobody who still knows her personally. What a bad break between the generations. (Dunayevskaya, 1980)

BY WAY OF A CONCLUSION: STAYING HUMAN

For Dunayevskaya, philosophy was the making of history, of catching the moment when freedom and philosophy became a unified force that reached for the future. “What does it look like when, as a part of a movement,” writes Adrienne Rich in a wonderful forward to Dunayevskaya’s Rosa Luxemburg book, “we try to think along with the human forces newly pushing forth . . . both as ‘spontaneous activity’ and as the embodiment of new ideas—not yet written down . . . ? How do we extract new kinds of ‘reason’ or ‘idea’ from the activities of ‘new passions and new forces’?” (1991: xii)? As Dunayevskaya sought to develop a form of Marxism relevant for her time, what she called Marxist-Humanism, it was the Women’s Liberation Movement of the 1970s that would help bring back into focus her unfinished engagement with Rosa Luxemburg, as an anti-imperialist, as a feminist, and as a revolutionary humanist. In other words, a movement from practice as a form of theory, the Women’s Liberation Movement broke apart preconceived notions and

²⁴ For example, Dunayevskaya was critical of Mary-Alice Waters, who contended that Luxemburg “dismissed the insults directed against her because she was a woman as simply part of the overhead of political battle.” “No wonder so many women shy away if male-chauvinism is dismissed as ‘overhead political battle,’” argues Dunayevskaya who questions Waters biographical note that Luxemburg died a year after the October Russian revolution. Dunayevskaya asks, “Wasn’t that the year of the German Revolution? Wasn’t Luxemburg a leader of that revolution?” (Dunayevskaya, 1985: 243–244).

attitudes. It provided Dunayevskaya a “shock of recognition” with what she had taken as “personal” or “domestic,” taking on a new political significance.

Like Luxemburg, Dunayevskaya had continued to experience sexism and chauvinism in the revolutionary movement, often feeling like a “non-person,” known only as Trotsky’s Russian secretary or C.L.R. James’s collaborator. She too refused to be pigeonholed, and, like Luxemburg, “learned to live with . . . male chauvinism” (1991: 27). Women’s liberation challenged this by politicizing what was considered personal. And in this context, Luxemburg’s letters from jail to her women friends and comrades took on a new significance for Dunayevskaya. In prison, Luxemburg continued her leadership against the imperialist war, produced a “minor masterpiece of literary criticism of Koroleno” and a “constant flow of magnificent ‘personal letters’ alongside the phenomenal *Anti-Critique* directed against the critics of her greatest theoretical work, *Accumulation of Capital*.” None of this, Dunayevskaya continues, “diverted in any way from what dominated her whole life, in theory or in practice, in or out of prison: REVOLUTION” (Dunayevskaya, 1979: 7). The caps are hers. And, moreover, notwithstanding her criticism, Luxemburg absolutely supported the Russian revolution. It was in this context that Dunayevskaya became particularly taken with Luxemburg, who, “out of the blue,” was writing about Penthesilea to Mathilde Wurm.²⁵ From her jail cell, Luxemburg implored Wurm to “stay human.” What is it to be human, Luxemburg asked? Her answer: “Joyfully throwing your whole life ‘on the scales of destiny’ when need be, but all the while rejoicing in every sunny day and every beautiful cloud.” Realizing that this did not entirely capture what she meant, Luxemburg adds “Ach, I know of no formula to write you for being human” (quoted in Dunayevskaya, 1991: 83). Luxemburg was no abstract humanist, and for her staying human was always connected to the necessity of uprooting the anti-human imperialist-capitalist society. In the same letter, she writes:

I’m telling you that as soon as I can stick my nose out again I will hunt and harry your society of frogs with trumpet blasts, whip crackings, and bloodhounds-like Penthesilea I wanted to say, but by God, you people are no Achilles. Have you had enough of a New Year’s greeting now? Then see to it that you stay human.

For Dunayevskaya, Luxemburg’s letters to her women friends, many of which were only first translated in the 1970s, reveal Luxemburg’s internationalism

²⁵ Mathilde Wurm wrote for the SPD’s woman’s paper, *Die Gleitheit*, which was edited by Clara Zetkin, a founding member of the Spartacus League. Both Wurm and Luise Kautsky were Jewish, though not religious, and Wurm was active in the Jewish Bund. Both fled Germany in 1933. Luise Kautsky went to Prague and died in Auschwitz in 1944.

in a new light. Dunayevskaya argues that Luxemburg's "deep though mechanistic internationalism" is expressed in Luxemburg's deeply personal and emotional response to Mathilde Wurm, who had written of Jewish suffering:

What do you want with this particular suffering of the Jews? The poor victims on the rubber plantations in Putumayo, the Africans with whose bodies the Europeans play a game of catch, are just as near to me. Do you remember the words written on the work of the Great General Staff about Trotha's campaign in the Kalahari desert? "And the death-rattles, the mad cries of those dying of thirst, faded away into the sublime silence of eternity." Oh, this "sublime silence of eternity" in which so many screams have faded away unheard. It rings within me so strongly that I have no special corner of my heart reserved for the ghetto: I am at home wherever in the world there are clouds, birds and human tears." (February 16, 1917, quoted in 1991: 63, slightly adjusted)

Staying human—throwing one's life on the scales of destiny—and this unyielding passion for revolution, "characterized the whole of her vision for a new society. It put the stamp on all she did and ever hoped to make real." For Dunayevskaya, the idea of staying human opened new ground for our age to understand Luxemburg's vision "fully—in a great measure more fully than she, herself, was conscious of" (1991: 83–84). And the letters from prison—full of life, of poems, of birds, of flowers, and even the mice, of suffering and love, written in the apocalyptic moment of World War I—provide special insight into her humanism. In one letter to Sophie Liebknecht in December 1917, who Luxemburg calls "my little bird," she writes of the treatment of the water buffaloes as "brothers in suffering":

Oh, Sonyichka, I've lived through something sharply, terribly painful here. Into the courtyard where I take my walks there often come military supply wagons, filled with sacks or old army coats and shirts, often with bloodstains on them . . . They're unloaded here [in the courtyard] and distributed to the prison cells, [where they are] patched or mended, then loaded up and turned over to the military again. Recently one of these wagons arrived with water buffaloes harnessed to it instead of horses. This was the first time I had seen these animals up close. They have a stronger, broader build than our cattle, with flat heads and horns that curve back flatly, the shape of the head being similar to that of our sheep, [and they're] completely black, with large, soft, black eyes. They come from Romania, the spoils of war . . . The soldiers who serve as drivers of these supply wagons tell the story that it was a lot of trouble to catch these wild animals and even more difficult to put them to work as draft animals, because they were accustomed to their freedom. They had to be beaten terribly before they

grasped the concept that they had lost the war and that the motto now applying to them was ‘woe unto the vanquished’ . . . The load was piled so high that the buffaloes couldn’t pull the wagon over the threshold at the entrance gate. The soldier accompanying the wagon, a brutal fellow, began flailing at the animals so fiercely with the blunt end of his whip handle that the attendant on duty indignantly took him to task, asking him: Had he no pity for the animals? ‘No one has pity for us humans,’ he answered with an evil smile, and started in again, beating them harder than ever . . . During the unloading, all the animals stood there, quite still, exhausted, and the one that was bleeding kept staring into the empty space in front of him with an expression on his black face and in his soft, black eyes like an abused child. It was precisely the expression of a child that has been punished and doesn’t know why or what for, doesn’t know how to get away from this torment and raw violence . . . I stood before it, and the beast looked at me; tears were running down my face—they were his tears. No one can flinch more painfully on behalf of a beloved brother than I flinched in my helplessness over this mute suffering. (Luxemburg, 2013: 817–819)

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Chapter 18

Claudia Jones, Political Economy, and the Creolizing of Rosa Luxemburg¹

Paget Henry

Molecules long hidden lay

—Claudia Jones

Rosa Luxemburg was a Polish woman of Jewish ancestry who, after completing her doctorate in economics and law from the University of Zurich, settled in Germany in 1898 and became deeply involved in the theoretical and practical life of the German Social Democratic Party. She challenged very openly the reformist parliamentary socialism of its well-known leaders, such as Edward Bernstein and Karl Kautsky. Furthermore, Luxemburg also engaged very directly with Lenin and other leaders of the Russian Revolution over their conservative position on women's rights. Claudia Jones was an Afro-Trinidadian woman who migrated to the United States in 1924, graduated from Wadleigh High School in Harlem in 1935, went to work in a laundry, joined the American Communist Party in 1936, and became very active in the theoretical and practical life of that party. She challenged very consistently the party's position on issues of race and particularly its position on black women. Both Jones and Luxemburg were passionately committed to a socialist and revolutionary liberation of the working classes of the world and suffered greatly for this cause, including many arrests. In the case of Luxemburg, it cost this very engaging and determined woman her life.

¹ I would like to thank Professors Jane Gordon and Drucilla Cornell for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

Today, Jones is remembered for her bold re-articulating of the dialectic between class, race, and gender within the daily life of the American Communist Party and for her making of culture into a site of resistance, particularly after her deportation from the United States to England. This dialectical approach to culture is already evident in her classic essay, which we will discuss, “On the Right to Self-Determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt,” and was the basis on which she organized the Notting Hill Caribbean Carnival in England. We get a good glimpse of this approach to culture and her setting up of this carnival from her short 1959 essay, “A People’s Art is the Genesis of their Freedom.” This dialectical treatment of culture predated and influenced the work Stuart Hall, and thus of Paul Gilroy and Hazel Carby.

Luxemburg is today well-known for her rethinking of Marx’s theory of capital accumulation, her highly nuanced formulation of the dialectic between spontaneity and organization, and for her linking of these innovations to the struggle for women’s liberation. Important in this regard was Luxemburg’s friendship and revolutionary solidarity with Clara Zetkin, which was forged initially around their opposition to the reformist parliamentary socialism that was taking over the German Social Democratic Party. In 1902, Luxemburg wrote an article for the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* on women’s emancipation and its significance for the party. Furthermore, she continued to write columns on “the Woman Question” for the feminist paper, *Gleichheit*, which was edited by Zetkin, and remained deeply involved in the women’s conferences organized by Zetkin (Dunayevskaya, 1982: 90–95).

In spite of their strong commitments to the proletarian cause, these two women never actually met, as Luxemburg was murdered in 1919. There is no evidence to suggest that Jones ever read the works of Luxemburg. We know that she read some of Clara Zetkin’s work (Davies, 2008: 57) and should at least have been aware of Luxemburg’s contributions to socialist feminism. Although we have no direct evidence of contact with Raya Dunayevskaya, she must also have been aware of her socialist feminism. Forty years Luxemburg’s junior, Dunayevskaya emerged as the second woman to gain major recognition in the world of Marxist theorizing. She migrated to the United States from Russia at the age of 12 and joined the Communist Youth Movement in Chicago. Later she became Trotsky’s secretary, and still later C.L.R. James’s collaborator in the small Marxist group known as the Johnson/Forest Tendency. Thus, all three—Luxemburg, Dunayevskaya, and Jones—joined socialist revolutionary movements at very young ages.

Furthermore, all three along with James inherited from Marx the scholarly practice of seeing in the insurrectionary and revolutionary upsurges of workers dramatic expressions of organizational and transformative creativity that equaled and at times surpassed the creativity of single persons, including

trade union and party leaders. Each would take this base of proletarian self-organizing activity in different directions leading to different positions on such crucial issues as the role of this spontaneous self-activity of workers, vanguard parties, the nature of the Stalinist state, and the relation of nationalist, racial and gender struggles to the worker's struggles. It was the specific combination of positions taken by Luxemburg on these and other issues that produced her distinct Marxist feminism, and thus its similarities and differences with those of Jones and Dunayevskaya.

Thus, in spite of the fact that Jones and Luxemburg never met, I will argue in this chapter that when we juxtapose the contributions of these two women to the Marxist feminist tradition, it is possible to read Jones's works as a creolizing of Luxemburg. This is possible because Jones falls within a larger Africana tradition of creolizing Marx—a tradition that includes Hubert Harrison, George Padmore, C.L.R. James, Frantz Fanon, René Ménéil, Sylvia Wynter, Samir Amin, and many others.

THE CARIBBEAN CREOLIZING TRADITION

One of the major discourses through which Caribbean people have understood ourselves, our culture, and the surrounding world is that of a creole or mixed tradition of thought. This tradition of thought has its roots in the asymmetrical patterns of forced mixing that occurred during the period of European colonization. Furthermore, this mixing or cultural hybridization took place across the major sectors (language, religion, ideology, art, etc.) of the dominated cultural systems. This hybridization occurred first within the cultural systems of the Amerindian population, second, within the cultural systems of the imported and enslaved African population, and third within the cultural systems of the imported and indentured Indian population. The major results of these asymmetrical processes of cultural mixing have been new cultural formations, like calypso, merengue, or creole languages, and the emergence of new identities in which the European elements have been accorded a higher status, and as a result have tended to be dominant.

Consequently, built into these mixed identities and bicultural formations were basic inequalities of a racial, class, political, and cultural nature. These objective and subjective inequalities very quickly became the bases for practical and theoretical resistance to European hegemony, thus giving the Caribbean creole tradition its potentiated dynamics, its critical interests, and its oppositional capabilities. As Édouard Glissant has noted, "in order to have real creolization the necessary heterogeneous elements must be lived as if they were all of the same value" (2001: 3). Thus, one of the distinctive dynamics of this tradition is the dialectical one of unmaking European

canonical traditions and remaking them in the image and categories of the creolized subject.

Yet another distinguishing feature of the Caribbean creole tradition is the distinct underlying metaphysics upon which it rests. I have called this metaphysics *creative realism*. At the heart of creative realism are four foundational claims. First, that the violence of European colonization shattered the integrated nature of all four cultural traditions it forced to mix with each other within the Caribbean context. Second, that with this splintering or fragmenting of these traditions, the members of these dominated and imploded cultures no longer inherited culturally established definitions of themselves such as Akan, Yoruba, Hindu, or Islamic. Along with the fragments of these earlier identities, they now experienced more directly the inherent creativity of the human self by which those more holistic identities were produced. Third, that the implosions produced by this forced mixing released seismic shock waves that severely rocked the founding centers of these cultural systems. These founding centers rested on varying notions of spirit, which were seen as the ultimate creative sources, and thus the highest of realities. This central position of spirit became much more open to contestation in the course of these forced mixings. Fourth and finally, the inherent creativity exposed by these mixings, although very energetic, was capable only of provisional solutions to crucial existential problems, or what Wilson Harris called “rehearsals” (1993). In short, creative realism rested and continues to rest on a de-centered metaphysics that permits competing perspectives to provisionally occupy the center, but never in a genuinely final sense. It is a metaphysics that described and continues to describe the new existential address of the Caribbean subject, somewhere between pre-colonial classical traditions and the imperatives of European modernity brought on by the experience of colonization.

This mixed or bicultural subjective identity, with its distinct metaphysical grounding and its critical and oppositional capabilities, has provided the key discursive resources that Caribbean scholars like James, Jones, Aimé Césaire, Wynter, Fanon, and Lewis Gordon have brought to their engagements with major European thinkers like Hegel, Marx, Sartre, or Foucault. They have consistently brought to these engagements this bicultural or creolized self that has lived through the negations and devaluations inherent in the social inequalities and power differentials between the cultures that were forced to mix on Eurocentric terms during the colonial period.

As racialized and devalued subjects, Afro- and Indo-Caribbean scholars have seldom found in Western discourses constructions of the knowing or epistemic subject that reflect or are able to accommodate who they are or their specific epistemic interests. Thus among some of the major changes that have come with creolizing the works of influential Western figures are changes in the construction of the knowing subject. With these have come related

changes in the set of *a priori* categories, hierarchies, and concepts that have supported the thinking and writing of the bicultural or creolized Caribbean subject. In short, these are the kinds of critical, transcendental, political, or theoretical changes that have been produced by the potentiated dynamics of the Caribbean creolizing tradition of thought.

MARX AND THE CARIBBEAN CREOLIZING TRADITION

Among the many Western thinkers that Caribbean scholars have engaged in this creolizing fashion, Marx, along with Shakespeare, has certainly been an important one, and also many of his followers like Luxemburg, Dunayevskaya, Ernst Mandel, or Emanuel Arrighi. These engagements with Marx and Marxists by Caribbean scholars such as George Padmore, Oliver Cox, Clive Thomas, and C.L.R. James are well known (Henry, 2009, 2017). Each brought to their encounter with the Marxist tradition their racialized and devalued subjectivity, which resulted in what Fanon called the stretching of Marx. In the two papers just referenced, I developed in detail James's creolizing of Marx, showing the ways in which he created a hybrid out of his concept of the inherent creativity of the masses and Marx's concept of the revolutionary self-activity of workers. In this chapter, I will use the lesser-known case of Sylvia Wynter's stretching of Marx before turning more directly to the case of Claudia Jones and Rosa Luxemburg.

SYLVIA WYNTER, LABOR COMMODIFICATION, AND THE CREOLIZING OF MARX

The thought of Sylvia Wynter passed through many stages in its development, crossing many genres, disciplines, and engaging many thinkers before arriving at its mature syntheses. The 2018 conference at her alma mater, Kings College in London, succeeded in making much more visible the earlier phases of her life, particularly the period between 1958 and 1962. Digging in the archives there, scholars have recovered copies and recordings of plays that Wynter did for broadcast over BBC radio and lots of amazing pictures. These archival discoveries have been vital for fully grasping Wynter the dancer, playwright, and novelist. For our purposes here, they reveal that at this early phase in her development, Wynter's creative work displayed all of major marks of the Caribbean creolizing tradition that we outlined above.

A few years earlier, the surfacing in the archives of the Institute of the black World of Wynter's unpublished 900 page manuscript, *Black Metamorphosis*,

gave us a major window into her middle period in which we can see the turning toward theory from fiction, a shift that calls to mind a similar transition in James (2005: 197). The importance of *Black Metamorphosis* for us is that, among other things, it contains a sustained creolizing engagement with Marx. Wynter's point of departure is the "stretching" of Marx's discourse on the commodification of labor to accommodate "the negroeization" of African identities and their reduction to black labor power on the trans-Atlantic slave ships and on the plantations of the New World.

In *Black Metamorphosis*, the direct focus on the racialization of Africans and their transformation into negroes, as integral aspects of their commodification and incorporation into the European capitalist world economy as black labor power, produced the displacing of white European labor power from the central position that it occupied in Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. This centering of the production of black labor power profoundly globalized the theorizing of labor's transformation into a commodity by incorporating on an equal footing the experiences of labor in the center and in the colonial and peripheral areas of the capitalist world economy. By explicitly incorporating the labor experiences of peripheral areas, such as the Caribbean, Africa, Native America, and Black America, Wynter was able to integrate much more systematically the factors of race and culture into her discourse of the commodification of labor and how these factors affected the extraction of surplus value.

For Wynter, the first major difference that separates the process of commodifying labor in the centers and peripheries of the capitalist world economy is that in the latter cases, in addition to being negatively racialized, "the injun," "the coolie," or "the negro" had also to be converted into "native labor." In other words, an additional layer of signification was necessary in the case of commodifying peripheral labor power. Native labor power had to be lower in value than "white settler labor power." In this more global approach to the commodification of labor power, African slavery marked the point of widest divergence between these categories of native and white settler labor power. Thus in the case of Black America, Wynter sees the post-slavery racist Jim Crow laws as being "central to the relations of production which maintained as devalued, i.e. native, labor within the national boundaries of the United States" (154). Similarly, in "the USA's ventures into colonialism, forays into Cuba, and Puerto Rico, affirmed its sense of manifest destiny and provided it with external reservoirs of native labor" (154).

In short, the addition of these layers of racialization and nativization are vital adaptations that Wynter insisted upon if Marx's theory of the commodification of labor was to accommodate the experiences of Caribbean and other workers from the periphery. For Wynter, "the settler/native dichotomy is important. Colonial-labor in Algeria and settler-labor in South Africa and

in the U.S. South, show that the super-exploitation of native labor transforms the white proletariat into a settler proletariat” (165-6).

This clear shift to a more direct focus on the experiences of labor incorporation and exploitation in the periphery also led Wynter to make some creolizing adjustments to Marx’s labor theory of value. This theory asserted that the value of a commodity was the amount of socially necessary labor time that was expended in its production. However, Wynter attempts to show that in the case of black slave labor power, things were a little more complicated. First, the value of black labor power had to be determined in relation to the market or exchange value of white labor power. Second, along with that firm condition, there was also “the pieza” or piece system that also entered into the determination of the market value of African slave labor. The pieza was the normative measure of black slave labor power—what Marx might have called the general equivalent of black slave labor value.

The pieza or piece was a male, 30 to 35 years, above average height, in good health, and was supposed to give the most labor to his buyer. He was the standard against which the value of the labor of all other slaves would be calculated, priced, and exchanged. Thus, the value of the labor power of three male or female slaves, between the ages of 8 and 15, was estimated to be equal to that of two pieces. This pieza system of value was also used to exchange African slaves for industrial goods. Thus, in this system, it was not just the socially necessary labor time expended in getting African slaves to the market that determined their value but also a careful estimate of the amount of labor that the buyer would get out of this particular unit of native labor.

Finally for Wynter, these three sets of changes required one other major conceptual shift in classical Marxist theory: a corresponding diversifying, widening, and globalizing of the revolutionary subjects with a drive for the socialist transformation of the capitalist world economy. Most importantly, this new conception of the revolutionary subjects of socialist transformation must include native labor, settler labor, and women, along with the recognition of the very real difficulties that inherited patterns of racial, economic, and gendered inequalities put in the way of cooperation between these groups that are being exploited and super-exploited by the same dominant bourgeois classes. The significance of this shift in the conception of the revolutionary subject is clear from the following statement by Wynter: “Russia and China may have had communist revolutions. But the label only obscures the fact that the real revolution was the revolution of native labor and not the classic proletariat” (165).

Thus from *Black Metamorphosis*, we can conclude that Wynter did not see the unequal exchange between capital and labor in the centers of the capitalist world system as the central contradiction of that economic system. Rather, for her, the racialized and nativized unequal exchanges between

central capital and labor in the periphery “is today the central contradiction in the capitalist system” (35). In support of this radical shift in the center of gravity of exploitation and resistance, Wynter calls on Luxemburg: “Rosa Luxemburg pointed out that in order to realize its surplus value, the capitalist system needs purchasers outside the market economy, purchasers who inhabit the non-capitalist sectors of the world. Capitalism, she pointed out, needed to cannibalize other non-capitalist economies, needed ‘Third Persons’” (34).

In the even more theoretical phase that followed the writing of *Black Metamorphosis*, Wynter continued this creolizing of Marx as a major theme in her changing outlook. In this phase, which we can bookend between her 1984 essay, “The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism,” and her 2015 essay, “The Ceremony Found,” it was not the commodification of labor power or the labor theory of value that had to be stretched. Rather, it was the expanding of the concept of modes of domination with revolutionary potential beyond that of economic exploitation and super-exploitation. Revising and expanding this concept would lead Wynter to her own concept of liminality as a common ground capable of supporting multiple modes of domination with revolutionary potential. This introduction of the notion of liminality led to the decentering of Marx’s notion of the primacy of the mode of economic production, its replacement by the mode of producing the human and to Wynter’s liminal critique of Soviet communism (Henry, 2016a: 100–111). This is the innovation for which Wynter is best known today. A brief, but very clear, statement by Wynter on her relationship to Marx is contained in her interview with Katherine McKittrick (2015: 39–43).

This audacious and creative reworking of Marx is an excellent example of the power and work of the Caribbean creolizing tradition of thought. It displayed all of the major features of this intellectual tradition and can be usefully compared to engagements with Marx by Césaire, James, or Fanon. Yet today, this dynamic tradition of thought finds itself in an embarrassing state of external capture, which is reminiscent of periods of colonial mixing in which the asymmetrical relations favored Western discourses. In particular, the Caribbean creolizing tradition has been captured, to some extent re-colonized by two dominant Western discourses: post-structuralism and neoliberalism. We will return later to this crisis of the Caribbean creole tradition. But now, it is time to focus on Rosa Luxemburg and Claudia Jones.

ROSA LUXEMBURG, CAPITAL ACCUMULATION, AND THE CRITIQUE OF MARX

If the primary focus of Wynter’s creolizing engagement with Marx was the theory of the commodification of labor, then the aim of Luxemburg’s critical

engagement was his theory of capital accumulation. We will see that one of the major outcomes of Luxemburg's engagement is a significant convergence with Wynter's in calling for a greater recognition of the importance of the peripheral areas to the overall functioning of the capitalist world economy. Thus, after examining the outcomes of Luxemburg's critique, I will explain why I have called it a critical engagement with Marx and not a creolizing one.

Luxemburg opens her classic work *The Accumulation of Capital* with a comparative focus on the process of social reproduction in pre-capitalist and capitalist societies. By reproduction, she is referring to the historical continuation of previous cycles of economic production and consumption by which people of a given society have been fed, clothed, and housed. In particular, Luxemburg focused on differences in the patterns of interruption that occurred in the reproductive cycles of these two types of societies. In the pre-capitalist societies, interruptions in the reproductive process were usually the result of external factors such as storms, droughts, or wars. In capitalist societies, interruptions occur when there are no storms, wars, or droughts. Even more paradoxical, they occur in capitalist societies when "all the ingredients of reproduction may be available, both labor and means of production" (1951: 33). This distinct type of interruption in the reproductive cycles of capitalist societies both Marx and Luxemburg attributed to imperatives of capital accumulation that were absent in pre-capitalist societies.

In these earlier societies, economic production was primarily the production of goods for the sake of satisfying social requirements—what Marx called *use values*. In capitalist societies, the production of use values is further inscribed in the discourse of commodity production, which redefines all use values in terms of their exchange value. This exchange value must yield a profit to the seller, thus contributing to capital formation. What exactly is the source of this profit that these types of exchanges must yield within capitalist contexts? Luxemburg's answer to this question was Marx's theory of extraction of surplus value from commodified labor power through the manipulation of the working day. That is, the reserving of a portion of the working day beyond the exchange value of the labor received gave rise to additional value, which materialized when the products of this unpaid labor were appropriated. Thus, Luxemburg asserted that "a producer who produces not only commodities but also capital must above all create surplus value" (1951: 37). In other words, "the capitalist producer's final goal, his main incentive is the production of surplus value" (1951: 37). This constitutes the major difference between pre-capitalist and capitalist producers.

However, the differences between the two types of societies do not stop here with the production and appropriation of surplus value from a particular exchange or set of exchanges. Luxemburg tells us that the aim and incentive of capitalist production is not surplus value pure and simple to be

appropriated in any desired quantity but a surplus value ever growing into larger quantities, “surplus value *ad infinitum*” (1951: 39). This is the real difference between production in capitalist and pre-capitalist societies, the ever-increasing appropriation of surplus value from unpaid labor within the process of manufacturing commodities.

Having looked at production in these two types of societies, we can now return to our original issue of differences in patterns of interruption in their reproductive cycles. We can now see quite clearly that surplus value *ad infinitum* became the dominant motivating force not just for production but also for reproduction. Luxemburg notes that with this development, “quite a new incentive is given to constantly renewed production, to the process of reproduction as a regular phenomenon in capitalist society, an incentive unknown in any other system of production” (1951: 39). In other words, reproduction can be interrupted because conditions for producing and appropriating surplus value are not good, even though they may be excellent for the production of social necessities. Given the existence of such disruptive crises, capitalist reproduction can only be “resumed when the products of the previous period, the commodities, have been realized; that is converted into money; for capital in the form of money, in the form of pure value, must always be the starting point of reproduction in a capitalist system” (Ibid).

Up to this point in her analysis, Luxemburg is very much on the same page with Marx. The major divergence between the two occurs in her account of how capitalism has been able to overcome the reproductive interruptions produced by the imperatives of its drive for surplus value *ad infinitum*. Marx’s response was an extended search for an internally closed system of surplus value production and consumption that could explain the continuing cycles of capitalist accumulation. Very roughly, for Marx this closed system included the requirement that the total quantity of producer goods (machines that make consumer goods) be equal in value to the total income of the employed workers and the capitalists. With this equation, all the commodities produced in this particular cycle should be able to find buyers, generate the desired surplus value, and thus the conditions for the next round of social reproduction.

Luxemburg objected to this solution to the problem of interruptions produced by the demands of surplus value extraction on two grounds. First, she argued, it did not adequately account for the fixed capital that was consumed in Marx’s model of economic self-reproduction. Second, she insisted that even “Marx’s diagram of enlarged reproduction cannot explain the actual and historical process of accumulation” (1951: 348). Given the specific interests of this chapter, it will suffice to engage only the latter of these two objections.

For Luxemburg, the primary problem with Marx’s solution to the problem of interruptions in the accumulative process is its assumption that “the capitalists and workers are the sole agents of capitalist consumption” (Ibid). This

problematic assumption Luxemburg linked to another equally problematic one: that there were societies in which the capitalist mode of production had achieved universal and exclusive domination. She boldly challenged this assumption, asserting that “real life has never known a self-sufficient capitalist society under the exclusive dominance of the capitalist mode of production” (Ibid). In other words, real life has not known a capitalist society that achieved the above equation required by Marx’s theory of the accumulative process. The failure to achieve this equation in turn led Luxemburg to what she called the central problem of capital accumulation: if the equation between the output of producer goods and the capacity of workers and capitalist to consume it is not achieved in real life, who is consuming the increases in production from surplus investments generated by the previous production cycle? It is here that Luxemburg asserted that the establishing of Marx’s accumulative equation required the contributions of “third persons,” that is, consumers beyond the capitalists and workers of a specific European society.

Luxemburg’s third persons are drawn primarily from two groups: the middle classes of the capitalist societies and the consuming classes and groups in the colonies and peripheral areas. Here, again, only the latter will concern us. Luxemburg’s notion of third persons is a game changer for Marx’s theory of the accumulative process. It points to “the decisive fact that surplus value cannot be realized by sale either to workers or capitalist, but only if it is sold to such organizations or strata whose own mode of production is not capitalistic” (1951: 351). Luxemburg then illustrates this need for external buyers with examples from across the globe. In short, the failure in real life of capitalist societies to realize the equation posited by Marx makes buyers or third persons outside of the capitalist economy a prime condition for the ongoing realization of the desired surplus value.

Luxemburg’s revisions to Marx’s theory of capital accumulation are as bold and innovative as Wynter’s revisions to his theory of the commodification of labor. Furthermore, like Wynter’s revisions, Luxemburg’s also resulted in a significant increase in the importance of the periphery in the reproduction of the capitalist system. This was a shift that converged very nicely with the theories of several political economists from the Global South. The works of C.L.R. James, Eric Williams, Walter Rodney and the center/periphery model of Caribbean, Latin American, and African dependency theory are probably the best-known examples of a similar shift in the importance of the peripheral areas of the world economy. Thus, when Luxemburg writes that European capitalist production “can no more confine itself to the natural resources and productive forces of the temperate zone than it can manage with white labor alone” (1951: 362), she continues to produce powerful echoes in the works of scholars from the Global South.

ROSA LUXEMBURG: CRITICAL OR CREOLE THINKER?

Given these convergences with Wynter and other creole thinkers, it would seem that a case could be made for Luxemburg as a creole thinker. However, I did not make that case. I treated her as a critical thinker. In this regard, she shares with Wynter, Fanon, or James the making of significant changes in the categoric structures of classical Marxism. In other words, there are definite critical elements in the contributions of both Wynter and James that are similar in nature and scope to Luxemburg's. James's critique of the theory of the vanguard party would be a case in point. So why are they not just critical theorists in the same way as Luxemburg? The difference I see is the manner in which the proposed categoric changes in classical Marxism are motivated by the lived experience of a bicultural subjectivity in which the European parts were overvalued and the African parts undervalued. The impulses to adjust this imbalance through strategies of de-negrification and reclaiming and revalorizing the African heritage are features of the creolizing thrust driving the revisionary works of Wynter, Fanon, and James that are absent in the case of Luxemburg. If she had mobilized her Jewish heritage in a similar manner, the case for a creolizing aspect would be stronger. Thus, the shared concerns about working-class self-activity and liberation have very different cultural framings. In the cases of Wynter and James, the need to address the inherited racial, political, economic, and gender inequalities of the bicultural situation out of which they must write is what makes them also creole thinkers. Although a strong advocate of gender equality, Luxemburg would have had to mobilize her Jewish heritage or her gender in a similar manner, for a creolizing aspect to be made in her case. The difference that I am getting at can be seen in the differences between James's contributions to Marxism and those of Trotsky, E.P. Thompson, or Ernest Mandel. On the gender dimension, this difference in emphasis can be seen when we compare Luxemburg's socialist feminism with Dunayevskaya's. However, this lack of a creole dimension does not take anything away from the sharpness and brilliance of Luxemburg's critical engagement with Marx's theory of capital accumulation.

CLAUDIA JONES BLACK POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE CREOLIZING OF MARXISM-LENINISM

Like Luxemburg, Claudia Jones was a woman of exceptional courage, which was born of her early commitment to the proletarian socialist cause. This courage in the face of major obstacles to her cause was clearly evident in her 1953 address to Judge Dimock, who was about to sentence her and twelve

colleagues to jail for being communists. Jones began her address with a series of biting questions:

Your Honor, . . . how can you decide to mete out justice for the only act to which I proudly plead guilty, . . . that of holding communist ideas, of being a member and officer of the Communist Party of the United States . . . Will you measure, for example, as worth of one year's sentence my passionate adherence to the idea of fighting for full unequivocal equality for my people, the Negro people? . . . Another year for my belief that only under socialism will the exploitation of man by man be finally abolished and the great human and industrial resources of the nation be harnessed for the well-being of the people? (2011a: 6)

These bold and probing questions revealed Jones in one of her finest moments, showing us all the meaning of being courageous. Indeed, they call to mind instances of courage in Luxemburg as she fought against reformist tendencies that created such a crisis within the German Social Democratic Party.

What were the roots of Jones's impressive and inspiring courage? How are we to grasp this powerful transformation from the child immigrant and high school graduate, with which we began, to this model of black female courage? We can only do so by taking a brief look at her life after high school. Thus, before turning directly to her creolizing contributions, we will take a quick look at some of the experiences that produced this remarkable growth.

Jones tells us that her land-owning parents migrated from Trinidad to the United States in 1922 after being ruined by a major "drop in the cocoa trade on the world market" (2011a: 11). Her mother was an independent Christian, who broke with Catholic Church, and her father was a Pan Africanist—ideal conditions for developing a metaphysical outlook of creative realism. Reinforced by the great depression that followed the collapse of the cocoa trade, Jones and her family lost their middle-class status, experienced downward social mobility, and were forced to live the pangs of hunger and want that were basic to working-class life. Jones tells the story of not being able to attend her junior high school graduation, at which she was to receive a major award, because they could not afford a graduation dress. Rather than ask "friendly teachers" for assistance, she chose to "instead stay away, sending them some lame excuse while I bawled my eyes out in humiliation and self pity" (2011a: 12). In other words, Jones experienced very personally one of those major interruptions in the capitalist reproductive process that Luxemburg theorized so carefully. The formative nature of these experiences of poverty and racism that the young Jones was subjected to while living among the black working class in Harlem are constantly referenced throughout her writings.

After finishing high school, Jones did not go to university but entered the workforce, taking a job in a laundry. However, her acumen and unusual sensibilities soon turned her early working experiences into what we can call her University of Working Class Employment. In addition to doing her work, Jones was also a keen observer of the work environment, the social relations of production, and their impact on the health and well-being of the workers. Thus from observing the impact of speed-up, overwork, and heat in the laundry, Jones knew that she had to leave. Her next job was in a factory “setting nail heads” (2011a: 13). Boredom forced her to quit. Next, she worked as a salesgirl in a Harlem lingerie shop. That lasted for two years before she had to find something more engaging. For Jones, these mindless jobs were also “courses” in the life and job experiences of working-class men and women. Amidst all of this searching, Jones tells us that she “spent a lot of time coming from work listening also to the street corner meetings of the various political parties and movements in Harlem” (2011a: 13).

While still working as a salesgirl, Jones eagerly embraced the opportunity to write a weekly column, “Claudia’s Comments,” for a “Negro National Newspaper,” and began with pieces on the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. This was the work that engaged her mind and heart, and also her growing interests in the economic and political forces oppressing black communities. One can feel her mind spontaneously creating images and accounts of the life around her, and also her growing sense of herself as a writer.

However, the event that crystalized and gave unity to her budding political persona was the infamous Scottsboro case. It changed Jones. The still fragmented and implicit pieces of her interest in the social forces behind the oppressed and ghettoized black condition gained new levels of coherence and development. Jones writes:

I was . . . stirred by this heinous frame up. I was impressed by the Communist speakers, who explained the reasons for this brutal crime against Negro boys; and who related the Scottsboro case to the struggles of the Ethiopian people against fascism and Mussolini’s invasion. Friends of mine, who were Communists, although I did not know then, seeing my interest, began to have frequent discussions with me. I joined the Party in February 1936 and was assigned to work in the YCL [Young Communist League] shortly after. (2011a: 14)

This event marked the end of Jones’s “undergraduate” years. Graduate school for her was indeed the Communist Party. Taking on a number of editorial positions, Jones moved up the ranks of the YCL, which contributed to the maturing of her thinking. Furthermore, Jones noted what she called her “‘graduation’ from the Youth Movement to be Executive Secretary, National Negro Commission (CPUSA)” (2011a: 14). Thus, we can now understand

the courageous black woman standing before the court of Judge Dimock and saying: “now, there flashes in my mind’s eye those young Negro women I have seen at the Women’s House of Detention, almost children, of whom, but for my early discovery of Marxism-Leninism, I might have had to say now, ‘There might I have been’” (2011a: 9).

By the time Jones joined the Party, she was no longer simply an immigrant from Trinidad with middle-class expectations. That identity had now been incorporated into the larger one of “my people, the Negro people.” She had experienced their Jim Crow negrification, their conversion into Wynter’s “native labor,” and she kept note of the over 5,000 “unpunished lynchings” they had suffered, their denials of land, and their segregation, “even in the nation’s cemeteries” (2011a: 8). In her developing social vision, Jones saw these various aspects of black subordination in the United States as stemming from “the existence of an *oppressed nation* in the heart of the South, the Black Belt” (2011b: 62) (emphasis in the original). Their cause of black national liberation was now her cause, and it was this cause that produced her brilliant reframing of her party’s political economy.

Jones’s 1946 essay, “On the Right of Self-determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt,” is one of her great contributions to the theoretical and political life of her party. The occasion for its writing was indeed a discussion of “the Negro question” within the party and Jones’s resistance to the alternative of legal reformism proposed by Earl Browder and others. Consequently, this essay could be compared to Luxemburg’s *Reform or Revolution*, which was her now historic response to the reformism of Edward Bernstein and others. Jones’s focus was the Black Belt, which she saw as the primary site from which black oppression in White America radiated across the country. Clearly visible there, in concentrated form, was the white oppression of Blacks that had its roots in slavery: “scarcely less than before the Civil War, is the Black Belt a prison-house of the Negroes, the chains which hold them now are the invisible chains of poverty, the legal chains of debt-slavery, and when the landlords deem it necessary, the iron shackles of the chain gang” (2011b: 63). Jones argued that this condition of extreme domination could only be adequately accounted for by the continued existence of an oppressed Negro nation in the U.S. south.

Drawing on Lenin, Jones argued that the liberation of this nation had to be approached under the principle of the right to self-determination of oppressed nations and peoples. Framed in this way, black national liberation was her answer to “the Negro question” and was the primary focus of her theorizing and activism. In taking this stand, Jones made it clear to opponents of her position that self-determination did not automatically mean black separation. Rather, one had to let the spontaneous creativity of the black masses determine the content and form of their liberation. To explain the existence of this

oppressed black nation inside the American nation, Jones went back to the compromise of 1876 that ended the Reconstruction period. She wrote: “the Civil War might have broken the bars of the Black Belt, it did not, for the Northern capitalists, who had gained a united market and field of exploitation throughout the nation as a result of the Civil War, were terrified by the simultaneous rise of Southern democracy, the Northern Labor Movement, and radical agrarian organizations. They betrayed the Negro People and the Southern White masses, and turned the South back to semi-slavery” (2011b: 63). As in the case of Du Bois, the nature of the compromise that ended the north’s occupation of the south is extremely important for her claim of an oppressed black nation in the heart of the south.

Jones then goes on to describe the major features of the Black Belt that made it an oppressed nation, such as its violent containment, its black majority, its culture, and its economic structure. For the economy of the Black Belt to function productively and generate good incomes for its members, “a Negro must be able to hire a Negro, buy from a Negro, sell to a Negro, and service a Negro” (2011b: 64). But these were the crucial economic relations that were prohibited by continued white domination of the Black Belt economy. This domination was exercised through the near-monopoly that the cotton planters and ex-slave owners had on the agricultural lands of the region. This land squeeze severely constrained the entrepreneurial and growth impulses of the ex-slaves, forcing the majority into sharecropping, which meant the selling of devalued black labor to white plantation owners in forms of unequal exchange describe by Marx, Luxemburg, and Wynter. The minimal rewards to labor from these unequal exchanges meant lives lived in poverty, debt slavery, and chain gangs. Thus, for Jones, the lot of the sharecropping workers of the Black Belt was one of neo-slavery that kept the Black Belt economy in poverty while generating wealth for the white economy.

Jones then proceeded to describe the bourgeois class of the Black Belt, pointing out its constrained and oppressed condition. Even more than in the case of workers, the inability to engage normal relations of commodity exchange constrained both the growth and the capital that the bourgeois class of the Black Belt could accumulate. If Jones had been the economist that Luxemburg was, she would have turned these insights into a work on black accumulation or dis-accumulation of capital. However, she did go on to tell us that this class was “not a big bourgeoisie” as its “market was founded upon Jim Crowism,” which restricted its activities to “life insurance, banking and real estate” (2011b: 64).

To this lucid discussion of the Black Belt economy, Jones added her discussion of the political and cultural institutions of the Black Belt that helped to make it a nation within a nation. With regard to its political institutions, she discussed practices such as gerrymandering and other abuses of the law

that rendered these institutions dysfunctional, which resulted in the denial of black political rights. Finally, Jones discussed the language and culture of the Back Belt—the work songs, spirituals, art, literature, and dance—that gave the region distinctness and coherence, and hence the potential for being a nation. However, this cultural heritage also wore all the marks of an oppressed nation as it was severely devalued, ignored, and subordinated to the culture of dominant white economic and political elites.

This is a powerful description of the Black Belt as an oppressed nation within the White American nation. It is an attempt at a comprehensive account of all the various aspects of subordination, exclusion, and containment experienced by “my people, the Negro people.” As such, it is similar to but significantly different from the internal colonization thesis. It also differed sharply from standard immigrant-based theories of race/ethnic domination, and certainly broke with class-based theories of black oppression. In short, Jones’s right to self-determination approach was a bold and highly original application of the discourse of nationhood to the oppressed conditions of Blacks in White America.

JONES’S BLACK SOCIALIST FEMINISM

This nationalist reading of the “Negro question” by no means exhausted Jones’s contribution to the Marxist theory of her party. Indeed, after making the above case for the “Negro question” as a special question within Marxism, Jones proceeded to do the same for the “woman question.” With regard to the black woman question, it had to be a triply special question for Marxism. In making this case, the national model of black oppression moves into the background and plays a supporting role to models of racial negrification, female secundarization, and class exploitation.

In another of her important essays, “An End to the Neglect of the Problems of Negro Women,” Jones opens with a portrait of the growing “militant participation of Negro women” in the larger struggle for black self-determination. To understand this new militancy is to grasp the fact that the time had arrived for overcoming “the gross neglect of the special problems of Negro women” (2011c: 74). Very directly for Jones, it was not the white or general proletariat but “Negro women—as workers, as Negroes, and as women—[that] are the most oppressed stratum of the population” (2011c: 75). She continued: they are “still generally confined to the lowest paying jobs,” where their commodification as black female labor power results in their super-exploitation (2011c: 75). This “super-exploitation of the Negro woman worker is thus revealed not only in that she receives, as a woman, less than equal pay for equal work with men, but also in that

the majority of Negro women get less than half the pay of white women” (2011c: 76).

Like Du Bois (1996: 102–104), Jones argued that this extreme level of super-exploitation and oppression was institutionalized through the near complete exclusion of “Negro women from all fields of work except the most menial and underpaid, namely domestic service” (2011c: 76). This association of the “Negro woman” with domestic service became a deeply entrenched “white chauvinist stereotype as to where her place should be” (2011c: 77). Jones also notes the intense efforts that were being made to force black women back into the role of domestic servants after the end of World War II. On a more personal note, Jones wrote about encountering this stereotype in high school: “teachers with audacity would hold Negro students after school, asking if we wanted to make an extra dollar by doing some domestic work for them” (2011a: 12).

For Jones, the measure of the oppression of black women was that they were so much more than domestic servants. Historically,

the Negro woman has been the guardian, and protector of the Negro family. From the days of the slave traders down to the present, the Negro woman has had the responsibility of caring for the needs of the family, of militantly shielding it from the blows of Jim Crow insults, rearing children in an atmosphere of lynch terror, segregation and police brutality, and fighting for an education for their children. (2011c: 74)

Ending the neglect of the special problems of “Negro women” meant addressing head-on this wide gendered, classed, and racialized gap between who these women really were and the postwar pressure to confine them to their commodified and super-exploited roles as domestic servants. Putting together Jones’s answers to “the Negro Question” and to the “Negro Woman question,” we can now get a more comprehensive, though not complete, view of her contributions to Marxist theory.

CLAUDIA JONES AS A CREOLIZING THINKER

Jones’s comprehensive rethinking of race and gender within the class-oriented political economy of her party was clearly another brilliant and fascinating work of the Caribbean creolizing tradition of thought. It displayed all of the major characteristics of this tradition. Jones’ work advanced its critical interests and oppositional strategies as she engaged directly the Jim Crow hierarchies and cultural devaluations that facilitated the subordination of Black Americans. The power and sharpness of her critiques grew out of

the potentiated second sight (Henry, 2016b: 34–41) of a female subject passionately resisting her negrification and gender secundarization. Furthermore, Jones brought the resources of a creolized Caribbean subject to her rethinking of the Marxism-Leninism of the 1940s and 1950s. The Western part of her bicultural sensibility was the independent Christianity of her mother, and most definitely her Marxism-Leninism. However, like James, Fanon, and Wynter, even though the Marxist-Leninist project spoke to the oppression she experienced and saw around her, she was unable to find herself adequately represented in the positions of the knowing or revolutionary subject of this Western anti-capitalist discourse. Hence, we arrive at her need to unmake and remake—that is, creolize—this discourse, so that people like Jones would be able to see themselves in the positions of its epistemic and revolutionary subjects.

Just as James, Fanon and Wynter changed the revolutionary subject of Marxism, so too did Jones. Her singling out of the black domestic worker was a distinct and original move. In doing this, she also had to surpass the whiteness, racism, and class centeredness of the Marxist-Leninist tradition without rejecting its powerful insights into the exploitative nature of capitalism. This writing of her bicultural self into the conceptual infrastructure of a reworked Marxism-Leninism is another of the major factors that made Jones into an excellent example of a Caribbean creole thinker. Also important in this regard was the consummate ease with which she moved between her poeticism and historicism. This further indicated where she was philosophically located and her relation to the linking metaphysics of creative realism. Finally, her ability to decenter her Trinidadian identity so fluidly with a “Negro” one, with the class-theoretic discourse of her party, with a Black nationalist identity, to decenter the latter with a black feminist one, and finally to return to Trinidadian identity while holding all of these together in a complex pluri-centered dialectic is yet another mark of the Caribbean creolizing tradition in creative motion—and at its best.

At the juncture in her national reading of “the Negro question” in which she is arguing for special considerations beyond those of the working class, it is difficult to avoid thinking of James’s essay, “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Question” (1994: 179–187). The parallels are indeed quite striking. Like James, Jones succeeded in establishing powerful, dialectically de-centering relations between the special demands of the black struggle and those of the working class. These dialectical linkages were the first threads, in that pluri-centered conceptual framework which anticipated much of today’s intersectional theory. While we are speaking of anticipations, let us note here the way in which Jones’s oppressed nation theory anticipated the role that the south would play in the Civil Rights Movement, which was just a decade away. Of course, the abiding difference between James and Jones

was the latter's failure to acknowledge the crisis that Stalinism posed for her firm belief in a socialist future. The purges, factional murders, and economic super-exploitation of peasants and others in labor camps, which led James and Padmore to break very openly with Soviet communism, did not produce a similar response in Jones.

CLAUDIA JONES AND THE CREOLIZING OF ROSA LUXEMBURG

To speak of the creolizing of Rosa Luxemburg is possible for three basic reasons. First, there is this substantial tradition of writing from the Caribbean and other areas of the periphery that have engaged the Marxist tradition in a creolizing fashion; second, Luxemburg is a part of this Marxist tradition; and third, Claudia Jones is a part of the creolizing of Marxist tradition, to which she has made her own unique contributions. Thus, on the basis of Jones' distinct contributions to this project of indigenizing Marx, we can engage Luxemburg's Marxism in a similar creolizing fashion.

The key point at which to begin this creolized reading is clearly that of Luxemburg's call for "third persons" as being vital for the ongoing reproduction of the global capitalist system. As we have seen, this point has attracted many scholars from the Global South to Luxemburg's work, including scholars as diverse as Raul Prebisch, Samir Amin, and Sylvia Wynter. The particular attraction here is of course the more accurate representation of the role and importance of the periphery in the process of global capital accumulation than in the models of classical Marxism. Luxemburg's "third persons" amounted to a major shift in the geography of Marxist theory and the significance of this shift for ongoing practices of capitalist production. It is important to note here that in the mid-1990s a similar shift occurred in the field of Caribbean philosophy, as "shifting the geography of reason" would become the central theme of the Caribbean Philosophical Association.

In the case of Jones, we get both the theoretical expansion and the creolizing of Luxemburg's notion in her Black Nationalist reading of the Black Belt as a definite site of third persons needed by the productive, reproductive, and surplus value requirements of Western capitalism. To these creolizing expansions of Luxemburg's Marxism, we can imagine Jones stretching its categories to make more epistemic space for the distinct forms of self-activity that have spontaneously erupted in the midst of feminist, nationalist, and anti-racist struggles.

However, it is in the work of someone like Samir Amin that we can see one of the most systematic attempts at developing and creolizing the potent seeds in Luxemburg's notion of third persons. His work, particularly,

Capital Accumulation on a World Scale, is one of the most careful attempts at describing exactly what capitalist imperialism does in its peripheral areas in order to keep the process of capital accumulation going. Acknowledging Luxemburg's contribution, Amin notes: "it was Rosa Luxemburg's great merit to have seen that relations between the center and the periphery depend on mechanisms of primitive accumulation" (1974: 61). Carrying this argument forward in *Unequal Development*, Amin suggests: "Rosa Luxemburg's mistake was that she did not take account of the role played by money as a means of restoring dynamic equilibrium" (1976: 85). Putting all of this together, Amin goes on to show that capitalist imperialism re-organizes local economies to meet its demands, and in doing so creates new, but stunted, political economies that call to mind Jones's description of the economy of the Black Belt with its "not a big bourgeoisie." Both of these conceptions call to mind Fanon's portrayal of the postcolonial bourgeoisie in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Given these blocked peripheral capitalist formations, Amin argues that today the central contradiction in this global system of capital accumulation is the unequal exchange (super-exploitation) between Jim Crowed and other forms of native labor and central capital. As a result, Amin's theory of peripheral capitalism really advances the shift in the geography of Marxist theory begun by Rosa Luxemburg's notion of third persons.

Along with this shift in the geography of Marxist theory, a creolizing of Luxemburg's Marxism would require the ability of her discourse to open itself to further decentering. That is, she would have to allow its proletarian center to share that privileged location more fluidly and equitably with struggles for racial and gender liberation. The very specific manner in which the proletarian struggle occupied the center of her Marxism left significantly smaller spaces for issues of nation, race, and gender than in the case of Jones. In this regard, Luxemburg was more like Wynter. Thus, we have the debates around the latter's "reluctant" feminism, which places the factors of race and class ahead of gender (Barnes 1999: 34–47; Toland-Dix, 2008: 70–72; Forbes, 2005: 48–49). There was a very strong tendency in Luxemburg to think that these issues would be swallowed up in fires of the proletarian revolution. From a creolizing perspective, it is striking that her Polish-Jewish heritages never found major places in her Marxism. In this regard, she was a lot like Marx. This absence becomes all the more striking in this context when we consider that Max Weber was in conversation with W.E.B. Du Bois because he was planning a study of Polish immigrants to Germany on the model of Du Bois's *The Philadelphia Negro* (Morris, 2015: 149–167).

Like Luxemburg, Jones definitely had her epistemic priorities and hierarchies. However, like James and Wynter, she was able to disassemble and reassemble them depending on the nature, goals, and interests of the knowledge needed by a particular struggle. With regard to race and gender, Jones

wrote: “a developing consciousness on the woman question today, therefore, must not fail to recognize that the Negro Question in the United States is prior to and not equal to the woman question” (2011c: 83). It is also important to note here that outside of the United States or at a different period in the country’s history, this particular politico-epistemic priority may not be appropriate. This was the dialectical flexibility that was greater in Jones than in Luxemburg, and, I am suggesting, was rooted in the decentered creative realist metaphysics that supports the Caribbean creolizing tradition.

The above examples should suffice to indicate what I have in mind when speaking of the creolizing of Rosa Luxemburg. It is a transformation that deepens and opens up the significance of her important revisions to Marx’s theory of capital accumulation. However, in relation to Jones, it is impossible to imagine Luxemburg agreeing to Jones’ nationalist reading of the Black Belt and framing its liberation through the Leninist discourse on the right to self-determination. She had fought too long and too hard against that idea.

CONCLUSION

This look at Claudia Jones in the mirror of Rosa Luxemburg and vice versa was definitely an attempt at contributing to the growing literature that is establishing Jones’s rightful place in the tradition of Marxism, in general, and Caribbean Marxism, in particular. In this regard, great appreciation must go to the work of Carole Boyce Davies, Rhoda Reddock, Alrick X. Cambridge, and Marika Sherwood. But, in addition, this essay was also for me an attempt at looking once again at the energy, boldness, and innovative capabilities of the Caribbean creolizing tradition of thought. In particular, what this tradition has done with Marx, Shakespeare, cricket, Western music, the Rastafarian transformation of Christianity, and other imposed European cultural staples, how it has indigenized them and in doing so changed them, has enhanced and furthered our own self-formation. The work of Jones brought out very clearly these aspects of the Caribbean creolizing tradition.

Given all of this, I certainly wish that I could conclude my essay on this magnificent Jonesian note. But that would be misleading. I would be less than truthful if I did not acknowledge that at the present moment, the Caribbean creolizing tradition has fallen into a state of external capture that, by its own internal and anti-colonial principles and impulses, it should not be trapped in this manner. This capture has been by two hegemonic Western discourses that have transformed us more than we have been able to transform them. I am of course speaking of French post-structuralism and American neoliberalism. The latter has captured and curtailed the dynamism of our creole economic thinking and has been an integral part of what Du Bois might have called the

current “counter-revolution of property” (1998: 580), which has followed the anti-colonial and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The former, post-structuralism, has captured our creole cultural thinking and is closely connected to our increasing, rather than decreasing, dependence on the theoretical outputs and training capacities of the Western academy. The capture of our economic thinking was facilitated by our debt crisis of the 1980s, while the capture of our creole thinking was mediated by the emergence of striking similarities between the metaphysical discourse of Caribbean creative realism and that of French post-structuralism. Lorna Burns, speaking of Wilson Harris, puts this similarity very nicely: “Harris’ sense of a diverse, creolizing, and, very importantly, always-incomplete and non-absolute totality or wholeness reflects a concurrent shift in contemporary European philosophy from transcendence to immanence as the basis of ontology” (2013: 174).

This metaphysical convergence should have been the occasion for a series of brilliant innovations in French post-structuralism, since this shift occurred first in the Caribbean. These innovations should have been comparable to those made to the tradition of European Marxism. But this has not been the case. Rather, except for scholars like Édouard Glissant, Sylvia Wynter, and Adlai Murdoch, the dominant tendency has been to either subsume or recode the creolizing categories of Caribbean cultural theory in the terms of post-structuralism. If there is one thing that creole theorists like Glissant have given us, it is a theory of our being and dwelling in the spaces between two languages and of how the world looks from that perspective. It is this well-documented but under-theorized experience of the self-formative and de-formative capabilities of language that should have been the basis for a creolizing of post-structuralism. This did not occur. The result has been a peculiar and paradoxical form of capture in which Caribbean creole theory, a critical anti-colonial discourse, has allowed itself to be taken over by the cultural capital and more explicit theorizing of French post-structuralism. Its critical voice and its metaphysical originality now operate through differing, deferring, and other deconstructive strategies of post-structuralism. After the major contributions of James, Fanon, and Gordon to what Drucilla Cornell has called “the decolonization of critical theory” (2008: 54) it is quite disappointing to see this decolonizing tradition in such a state of near-colonial re-capture.

So, all is definitely not well with the Caribbean creolizing tradition. Indeed, the most innovative work in the tradition has been developing outside of the region. The creolizing work of Jane Gordon, Michael Monahan, Drucilla Cornell, and Neil Roberts is the best example of using the fluidity of the creolizing tradition to address epistemic concerns left unaddressed by post-structuralism and of which this volume on Luxemburg and the larger “Creolizing the Canon” series are parts. However, on the slavery and race

issues, it is good to see the region, with Sir Hilary Beckles in the front, leading the reparations fight that emerged after the corporate-driven abandonment of policies of affirmative action.

With regard to its economic challenges, the Caribbean region has not yet found a credible response to the realities of neoliberal globalization. Governments and private sectors have been scrambling to put together various responses to the higher entrepreneurial demands that the globalization of markets has introduced. Between this scrambling and the debt pressures, there has been precious little time for innovative thinking. This difficulty in finding a credible alternative has in large part been due to the collapse of the democratic socialist tradition of the region and other parts of the globe. Hopefully, as these two hegemonic discourses continue to decline, we will enter a period of new popular upsurges of transformative creativity and new Caribbean thinkers who, with these new winds of change under their wings, will be able to represent the pressing issues of the future as well as Jones represented and engaged those of her time. Thus, to remind and return us to this popular self-organizing creativity of the Marxism and feminism shared by the major thinkers featured in this essay—Luxemburg, Jones, James, and Dunayevskaya—I will conclude with a verse from a poem by Garcia Lorca that I once heard James reference:

The poem, the song, the picture
Is only water drawn the well of the people
And it should be given back to them in a cup of beauty
So that they may drink and in drinking
Understand themselves

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Chapter 19

To Be Young, Gifted and Woman

Reading Rosa Luxemburg through Lorraine Hansberry and the Black Radical Tradition

LaRose T. Parris

In Lorraine Hansberry's unfinished book review "Simone de Beauvoir and *The Second Sex: An American Commentary*" (1995a [1957]: 133), Hansberry praises Beauvoir's philosophical intervention while lamenting the limits of Beauvoir's middle-class perspective. While Beauvoir is somewhat hopeful about the changing status of women in the Soviet Union¹ and her brief chapter "The Point of View of Historical Materialism" examines both Engels's and August Bebel's writings on female subordination (Beauvoir, 1974: 59–63), for Hansberry *The Second Sex* lacked a comprehensive, historical-material analysis that would foreground the rebellion, political agitation, and eventual transcendence of enslaved African American women and working-class European women (Hansberry, 1995a [1957]: 133). Beauvoir's work impressed and fascinated Hansberry,² but it also left her wanting much more. Interestingly, the historical-materialist feminism that Hansberry yearned to see unfold in Beauvoir's work had already been voiced in the writings of the formidable Marxist theorist and revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, whose inimitable leadership of Germany's Spartacus League is mentioned in *The Second Sex* (1974: 141).

If Hansberry had gone on to publish observations on Luxemburg's transdisciplinary theoretical writings, we would be graced with an early/

¹ Beauvoir criticizes the Soviet Union's state-imposed "patriarchal restrictions of marriage and child-bearing." She also inveighs the Soviets' acceptance of prostitution since it necessitates the capitalist exploitation of women's bodies. See Simone de Beauvoir (1974: 65–66, 153, 475–476).

² Hansberry candidly states, *The Second Sex* may very well be the most important work of this century. And that further, it is a victim of its own pertinence and greatness" (1995a [1957]: 129).

mid-twentieth-century creolized³ feminist discourse that simultaneously centralizes proletarian struggle, European imperialism and Global South decolonization, and the Black freedom struggle in the African diaspora. Both Luxemburg's and Hansberry's egalitarian feminism emanates from problem-based inquiry, geared toward solving the age-old problems of racial and economic injustice. This transdisciplinary approach, combined with their sensitivity to European imperialist-capitalist expansion in the Global South, led both Hansberry and Luxemburg to articulate a theoretical solidarity with the Black radical tradition and Black feminist thought decades before these ideologies were formally named as such. Thus, their syncretic approach led both thinkers to fruitful economic, socio-political, and historical reflections that were decades ahead of their respective times.

To highlight Luxemburg's and Hansberry's innovative discursive contributions, I will present reflections on how their writings, speeches, and letters promote Black radical and Black feminist ideals in three related ways: in their decision to privilege a life of intellectual pursuits; in their political engagement; and in their commitment to advancing an authentic humanism.

WOMAN'S WORK: A LIFE OF THE MIND AND ACTION

Dedicating oneself to the life of the mind in order to contribute to the betterment of humanity is an altruistic pursuit. Nonetheless, the historical record shows that the male thinker is consistently celebrated for this endeavor while the female thinker is generally diminished for the same. Black feminist thought challenges this patriarchal axiom. Its focus on the intersectional nature of racial, sexual, and class-based oppression includes an emphasis on African American women's empowerment through self-definition and self-valuation. Indeed, Patrice Dickerson stresses that African American women "come into being" and attain self-awareness through achievements, and through this process of self-actualization, their success is made manifest (quoted in Hill Collins, 2000: 40). Both Lorraine Hansberry and Rosa Luxemburg garnered self-worth and strength from their calling as public intellectuals and activists. Both women lived during historic times of great social and political transformation: the advent of socialist revolution in Europe; the United States Civil Rights Movement (often referred to as

³ Just as this volume's title and contents suggest, creolized theory refers to the groundbreaking work of Jane Anna Gordon (2014). Gordon defines theoretical creolization as transdisciplinary, problem-based scholarship whose aim is to resolve complex socio-political issues using combined wisdom from various disciplines in equal measure. Henceforth, the terms creolized, creolization, and transdisciplinary will be used interchangeably.

America's Second Revolution); and Third World decolonization.⁴ Although Luxemburg and Hansberry enjoyed the relative comforts of a middle-class upbringing, they shared the experience of living under hegemonic domination: Hansberry under white supremacist segregation on Chicago's South Side, and Luxemburg in Poland under Tsarist Russian occupation. Working as thinkers and activists in their societies' respective insurgencies, Luxemburg and Hansberry heeded the call to arms. Their writings reveal that these women thinkers saw themselves first and foremost as human beings who embraced their mission to write, agitate, and raise political awareness in the fight against injustice, exploitation, and oppression in its varied yet related forms: classism, racism, sexism, and anti-humanism.⁵

LUXEMBURG'S REVOLUTIONARY THOUGHT AND PRAXIS

While pursuing her doctoral degree at the University of Zurich⁶, Luxemburg became involved in the local proletariat movements and went on to co-found the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland (SKDP) in 1893. She later moved to Berlin in 1898 where she edited *Wirtschaftliche und sozialpolitische Rundschau* (*Economic and Social Review*) (Frölich, 2010: 21–31). One year later, in October 1899, Luxemburg gave a rousing speech, peppered with her trademark humor and wit, at the Hanover Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. She issued a spirited challenge to her older male comrades' findings on the role of trade unions and cooperatives in working-class revolution, which garnered enthusiastic applause and shouts of agreement (Howard, 1971). By this time she was already a highly sought after speaker who moved crowds with a potent blend of logical analysis and unwavering conviction; this approach inspired her audiences to look beyond their formerly held provincial viewpoints toward more expansive possibilities (Frölich, 2010: 40–41). Luxemburg penned a letter to her long-time collaborator and companion

⁴ The term "Third World" will only be used in reference to the period of decolonization during which Hansberry lived. Outside of this chronological marker, the Global South will be used to describe the countries of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America.

⁵ Luxembourg's love for animals and the natural world is detailed at length in the following sources: Luxemburg (2004, 2011) and Paul Frölich (2010).

⁶ There is some disagreement among biographers and critics as to the specific disciplinary contours of Luxemburg's PhD. Frölich maintains that Luxemburg received her PhD in Political Science, while Paul LeBlanc and Helen Scott hold that she earned her PhD in Public Law and Political Science. What is certain, however, is that Luxemburg's dissertation, "The Industrial Development of Poland," is a work of economic theory. See (Frölich, 2010: 22); LeBlanc and Scott (2010: 5); (Hudis and Anderson, 2004: 8).

Leo Jogiches a few short months before giving her speech at the Hanover Congress. In it, she set forth her intent to galvanize the masses:

In my "soul" a totally new, original form is ripening that ignores all rules and conventions. It breaks them by the power of ideas and strong convictions. I want to affect people like a clap of thunder, to inflame their minds not by speechifying but with the breadth of my vision, the strength of my conviction, and the power of my expression. (Luxemburg, 2004: 382)

The power of Luxemburg's words is undeniable. At 28, Luxemburg had not only achieved a level of self-awareness beyond her years but she also understood and relished her pivotal role in the European socialist revolution. Hers is the voice of a woman who welcomed the role of leader *and* compatriot in the struggle to realize a socialist society. Luxemburg's zeal for the realization of a class-less society was rooted in a hatred of human suffering, and this is why she prioritized the socio-political *problems* of exploitation and oppression. This focus led her to entertain the woman question in a transdisciplinary manner that combined historical, sociological, economic, and political considerations. In her 1914 article, "The Proletarian Woman," Luxemburg explains the political motivations of bourgeois women as an expedient means of increasing their class privilege. She chides these women as

nothing but co-consumers of the surplus value their men extort from the proletariat. They are parasites of the parasites of the social body...The women of the property-owning classes will always fanatically defend the exploitation and enslavement of the working people by which they indirectly receive the means for their socially useless existence. (Luxemburg, 2004: 240)

Luxemburg then contrasts bourgeois women's socio-political solipsism to the communal resistance of the subjugated, colonized women of the Global South, whose economic exploitation arises from globalized capitalist expansion in the form of European imperial hegemony. She points to the suffering of Black women in German colonial Africa and that of Indigenous Columbian women under Spanish rule. At the same time, Luxemburg emphasizes that the socialist-feminist project of posterity requires the cooperation of *all* oppressed, exploited people:

The workshop of the future requires many hands and hearts. A world of female misery is waiting for relief. The wife of the peasant moans as she nearly collapses under life's burdens. In German Africa, in the Kalahari Desert, the bones of defenseless Herero women are bleaching in the sun, those who were hunted down by a band of German soldiers and subjected to a horrific death of hunger

and thirst. On the other side of the ocean, in the high cliffs of Putumayo, the death cries of martyred Indian women, ignored by the world, fade away in the rubber plantations of the international capitalists. (Ibid)

Luxemburg's call for an anti-imperialist, socialist-feminism establishes her as a creolized theorist who was well ahead of her time. She drives home the need for interracial, transnational alliances with the women of the Global South. While this transnational, anti-imperialist perspective is mirrored in Black radical and Black feminist thought, its organizational praxis comes to pass in the activist work of the Communist Party USA's Black and Caribbean women members from the 1930s–1950s.⁷ But it is not until the formation of the 1960s–late 1980s Third World Women's Alliance that global socialist-feminism was realized on a mass-scale.

Luxemburg's 1914 critique of bourgeois women's political opportunism bears striking resemblance to Angela Davis's 1983 assessment of the same. Davis utilizes the theoretical framework of Black radical and Black feminist thought to unveil white feminists' furtherance of late nineteenth-century white supremacist domination in their agitation for their enfranchisement to the exclusion of African Americans, immigrants, and working-class people of *all* races "whose labor was exploited and whose lives were sacrificed . . . by the new class of monopoly capitalists who were ruthlessly establishing their industrial empires" (Davis, 1981: 110–116). Both Luxemburg and Davis delineate the ways that white bourgeois women have, historically, sought political equality with white men in order to become compatriots in the struggle for white racial predominance. Elizabeth Cady Stanton's unabashed declaration that "I will cut off this right arm of mine before I will ever work for or demand the ballot for the Negro and not the woman" (quoted in Gates and Smith, 2014: 510) best exemplifies Davis's and Luxemburg's position on the bourgeois woman's predatory self-interest. Thus, Luxemburg's antipathy toward bourgeois women reveals a feminism rooted in a global, anti-imperialist class consciousness. It is a feminism that must be understood as one facet of a radical egalitarian worldview that informed her life-long quest for a social democratic society in which the humanity of every individual would be deemed of equal worth.

In "The Proletariat Woman" Luxemburg injects a feminist perspective into the historical-materialist analysis that she initially proffered in *The Accumulation of Capital* (2003 [1913]). Here she surpasses Marx's analysis of European imperialist expansion by explaining that such hegemonic encroachment would inevitably lead to the economic exploitation of Europe's colonial

⁷ For a thorough discussion of committed African American and Caribbean women activists in the Communist Party USA from the 1930s to the 1950s, see Erik McDuffie's (2011).

territories: “Luxemburg sought to uncover the economic roots of imperialism by focusing on the problem of expanded reproduction” (Luxemburg, 2004: 32). She does precisely this in her analysis of chattel slavery’s role in capitalist accumulation in the United States and England. Voicing a theoretical allegiance with what would come to be known as a Black radical analysis on the indispensability of enslaved African labor power in Western colonial development, Luxemburg emphasizes that

For the first genuinely capitalist branch of production, the English cotton industry, not only the cotton of the Southern states of the American Union was essential, but also the millions of African Negroes who were shipped to America to provide the labor power for the plantations, and who later, as a free proletariat, were incorporated in the class of wage laborers in a capitalist system. Obtaining the necessary labor power from non-capitalist societies, the so-called “labor problem,” is ever more important for capital in the colonies. (Luxemburg, 2003: 343)

Luxemburg’s point is clear: without enslaved African labor, the significant capital accumulation of chattel slavery would not have been possible. Luxemburg then applies this analysis to her critique of the bourgeoisie’s role in the societal and economic devastation of Europe during and after World War I.

In her December 1918 speech, “What Does the Spartacus League Want,” Luxemburg explains how the rapacious capitalism of the bourgeoisie led to World War I, arguing that the war not only instantiated state-sanctioned mass murder but also destroyed the means of production for the entire region. She imagistically describes International capital as “the insatiable god Baal, into whose bloody maw millions upon millions of steaming human sacrifices are thrown” (Luxemburg, 2004: 349). This vivid metaphor acts to support Luxemburg’s subsequent, oft-cited declaration that only socialism can vanquish global capital, or Baal, the consumer of human souls: “In this hour, socialism is the only salvation for humanity. The words of the *Communist Manifesto* flare . . . above the crumbling bastions of capitalist society: Socialism or barbarism!” (Luxemburg, 2004: 350).⁸ Luxemburg’s geo-political economic analysis presents the deduction that capitalism would lead to the inevitable destruction of human life. This certainty, according to her comrade Paul Frölich, reveals that, for Luxemburg, “socialism was not only a hope, but the fixed object of a tremendous will to action . . . There was no room for compromise in her thought, and no conflict between her theoretical work

⁸ Editors Hudis and Anderson note that here Luxemburg is paraphrasing from Marx’s and Engels’s text, not quoting directly.

and her practical action” (Frölich, 2010: 190). In our current age of advanced neo-liberal global capital, this is precisely why Luxemburg’s words should inspire us all to emulate her political commitment.

HANSBERRY’S BLACK RADICAL POLITICS AND ART

For Lorraine Hansberry, political commitment defined her life’s work as an artist-activist, and there was no divergence between her radical ideas and her deeds, either. At the height of McCarthy era, political repression in the early 1950s, she embarked on a course of political and creative self-actualization that led to a varied corpus of writing and domestic and international activism during the American Civil Rights Movement. In the opening pages of her auto/biography, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* (1995 [1969])⁹ readers learn of a young woman who fully grasps the import of her unique abilities and vocation:

I am audacious enough to think of myself as an artist – that there is both joy and beauty and illumination and communion between people to be achieved through the dissection of personality. That’s what I want to do. I want to reach a little closer to the world, which is to say people, and see if we can share some illuminations together about each other . . . I think virtually every human being is dramatically interesting. Not only is he dramatically interesting, he is a creature of stature whoever he is. (1995 [1969]: 5)

Hansberry was an artist. But, more importantly, she was a socially engaged artist who came into political consciousness through knowledge of the Black radical tradition. Robert Nemiroff described her in 1951 as, “a young woman on fire with black liberation, not only here but in Africa, an insurgent with a vision that embraced two continents” (1995 [1969]: 28). Her father, an active member of local NAACP, challenged restrictive real estate covenants by moving the family into a white neighborhood where they stood firm against a violent white mob. Hansberry’s early education in socio-political resistance led her to value the strength of all African Americans as they challenged institutional racism and anti-black violence. Her uncle, William Leo Hansberry—who was one of the nation’s foremost Africanist scholars—instilled within her an appreciation of African history, a sense of race pride, and an African diasporic consciousness (Carter, 1991: 8–9). Thus, Hansberry came to view

⁹ This text was adapted and edited by Hansberry’s husband Robert Nemiroff, in the years following her death.

her art as both potential catalyst for progressive social change and the reflection of her highest aspirations.

This position is made plain in her 1952 speech, “Tribute to Paul Robeson,” her mentor, which was given at a Harlem rally to advocate for the restoration of Robeson’s passport. Hansberry reminds the participants that Robeson had “accepted the greater responsibility of the artist: to embody at once—not only in your art but in your life, as artist, as private citizen and public figure—the people from whom you spring: to be voice, member and champion of the people’s struggle” (Lorraine Hansberry Papers, box 56, file 20).

Hansberry then goes on to name the United States government as complicit in the historical tyranny of African people throughout the diaspora:

To the . . . Department of State we say: ‘This man is an American citizen, his forebears fought tyranny on three continents, so that he might draw breath as a free being. His is a sacred heritage. When you infringe on his liberty you tamper with the labor and lives of generations of freedom seekers. We charge you with this responsibility. (Ibid)

Here Hansberry equates the attainment of freedom as part and parcel of the Black radical tradition of resistance to white supremacist domination. Hansberry, like Luxemburg, frequently used her gifts as a speaker to rouse people toward heightened political awareness and to embolden them to resist state-sponsored injustice.

Since Robeson’s passport was never reinstated, Hansberry took his place at an international meeting of communist activists in Uruguay, the Inter-American Peace Conference later that year, which had to be held under the guise of a large social gathering due to police surveillance. Hansberry participated in a women’s meeting where she was honored to represent African Americans during the red-baiting McCarthy era; she also joined arms with her comrades as they marched through the streets of Montevideo, defying the menacing, sword-wielding police force that monitored their activities (Perry, 2018: 57–58).

Two weeks before Hansberry’s landmark play *A Raisin in the Sun* opened on Broadway, she delivered another address in 1959 to the American Society for African Culture entitled, “The Negro Writer and His Roots: Toward a New Romanticism” (Hansberry Papers, box 56, file 4).¹⁰ In the talk, Hansberry furthers the views she outlined in her “Tribute to Paul Robeson.” She forcefully states her position on the enduring question of whether art is meant for purely aesthetic or social purposes, aligning herself with the latter

¹⁰ This essay was published twenty-two years later in *The Black Scholar*.

position. Hansberry highlights the similarities between the American Civil Rights Movement and Third World decolonization struggles while stressing the Negro artist's indispensable role in "the war against the illusions of one's time and culture" (Ibid). With the same rhetorical flair that Luxemburg used to characterize bourgeois women, Hansberry attacked the Black bourgeoisie, framing their embrace of materialism as the primary impediment to achieving true freedom: "The desire for the possession of 'things' has rapidly replaced among too many of us the impulse for the possession of ourselves, for freedom . . . The war against illusions must dispel the romance of the black bourgeoisie" (Ibid). To further her argument, she warns against political isolationism and apathy, urging the audience to grasp the exigency of the political moment:

Negro people [can no longer] afford to imagine themselves removed from the most pressing world issues of our time—war and peace, colonialism, capitalism vs. socialism . . . If the world is engaged in a dispute between survival and destruction . . . in a dispute between the champions of despair and those of hope and glorification of man—then we as members of the human race, must address ourselves to that dispute. (Ibid)

Hansberry's juxtaposition of war and peace and capitalism and socialism is a clear reflection of her progressive political leanings. She then takes her argument one step further by invoking the spirit of the Bandung Conference of 1955, convened just four years earlier, stressing that the bonds between African Americans and continental Africans are no longer abstract but concrete in the immediacy of the Third World decolonization and American civil rights conflicts. Hansberry underscores that

The unmistakable roots of the universal solidarity of the colored peoples of the world are no longer "predictable" as they were in my father's time—they are here. And I for one, as a black woman in the United States in the mid-twentieth century, feel that I am more typical of the present temperament of my people than not, when I say that I cannot allow the devious purposes of white supremacy to lead me to any conclusion other than what may be the most robust and important one of our time: that the ultimate destiny and aspirations of the African people and twenty million American Negroes are inextricably and magnificently bound up together forever. (Ibid)

Hansberry's transnational anti-colonialism is not entirely surprising. She understood the urgency of the historical moment as the peoples of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America were overthrowing centuries of European colonial rule; she also saw the domestic civil rights struggle as

integral to this subversion of global white supremacist hegemony. Thus, Hansberry was not only calling upon her people to advance the cause of racial justice but she also made this appeal to exhort their sense of mutual responsibility as members of the larger human family.

When Hansberry made these compelling remarks in 1959 she was in her late 20s, and through Robert Nemiroff's contextualization we are better able to appreciate the prescience of Hansberry's thought. He observes that Hansberry made these remarks

eleven months before the Greensboro sit-ins and fifteen [months] before the formation of [the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] SNCC; Malcolm X was . . . the leader of an obscure mosque in Harlem, and Martin Luther King, the great days of Montgomery three years behind, had quietly shifted [the Southern Christian Leadership Conference] SCLC headquarters to Atlanta. The Freedom Rides, Birmingham, voter registration, the Mississippi [Freedom] summer, the cry of Black Power and the slogan "black is Beautiful" . . . and the rise of nationalism in all its multiple forms all lay ahead. (in Hansberry, 1995b)

Nemiroff's observations bring Hansberry's Black radical leanings in her address to the fore. Four years before Dr. King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963) compared the American Black Freedom Movement to African and Asian liberation struggles, and five years before Malcolm X's anti-colonialist, Black nationalist polemics in "The Ballot or the Bullet"¹¹ (1964), Hansberry had already urged African Americans to disavow bourgeois complacency and instead embrace a progressive Pan-Africanist agenda. And nearly a decade before the Black Panthers' rise to national and international prominence, Hansberry's address called for Black pride and Black power through heightened African diasporic consciousness and political solidarity.

A few years later, Hansberry published "This Complex of Womanhood," an editorial in *Ebony* magazine in 1963 (Lorraine Hansberry Papers, box 59, file 2). Though concise, the article may be read as a Black feminist treatise that foregrounds the import of Black women to and for the development of Western history *and* capitalism. Hansberry exalts the African woman as the progenitor of ancient human civilization whose reversal of fortune came with the rise of Euro-modernity and globalized capital through the advent of racialized slavery. Her ruminations rise to the level of theoretical discourse

¹¹ While Dr. King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" makes only a brief comparative mention of Third World decolonization, Malcolm X's "The Ballot or the Bullet" explicitly terms African American oppression in the United States a form of colonial subjugation. Malcolm X furthers this point by calling for African Americans to unify psychologically and politically with the peoples of continental Africa and the Global South. See Howard-Pitney (2004: 74–89, 165–176).

because they are at once historical and philosophical, invoking elements of the Black radical tradition's focus on historical recuperation and Black feminist thought's emphasis on Black women's agency. Hansberry enlightens her readers with a historiographical overview that spans ancient and modern times:

The African woman who first reached the shores of the New World in the 17th century was already part and parcel of the fabric of history. She was descended from women who had birthed some of the great militarists of antiquity and from whose number had come some of the most famous queens to sit upon the thrones of ancient Egypt and Ethiopia. Her exploits and beauty were remembered by Semitic writers and fused into Greek mythology.

But for three centuries in the New World she was to cut cane, pick coffee, and chop cotton in the fields of the Indies and the plantations of Brazil and the United States. For three centuries she moved in stealth beside and, sometimes, in advance of black men who wrought havoc against the slave system with musket, machete, and petition. (Ibid)

Here readers are graced with Hansberry's gifts as a Black radical feminist thinker. In her opening paragraphs on the African woman's place in the ancient and modern worlds, she recuperates ancient Africa's pivotal role in Western civilizational development; highlights the reversal of fortune that racialized chattel slavery visited upon enslaved Africans; and stresses the "deformed equality" (Davis, 1972) that the labor of chattel slavery created between Black women and men, which engendered a lived, self-affirming feminism among Black women that required neither societal nor Constitutional validation. This three-part analysis reflects Hansberry's privileging of Black feminist and Black radical histories. Quite tellingly, Hansberry's article articulated the very historical-materialist perspective she yearned for years earlier when she first read *The Second Sex*. Hansberry herself had developed the very radical feminist ideology for which she had been searching in the thought of others.

"A FIERCE HATRED OF INJUSTICE"¹²: HUMANISM AS PRACTICE

Hansberry and Luxemburg dedicated their lives to intellectual reflection and political agitation because they could not tolerate the self-infliction of humankind's own desolation. Theirs was humanism for all, but especially for those

¹² Winston James (2000).

suffering under the boot-heel of exploitation, oppression, and injustice. Yet at the same time, each woman held the greatest faith in humankind's ability to transcend its plight through the realization of its inherent greatness. Consider Hansberry's closing remarks in "The Negro Writer and His Roots":

one cannot live with sighted eyes and feeling heart and not know and react to the miseries which afflict this world. I have given you this account so that you know that what I write is not based on the assumption of idyllic possibilities . . . I think the human race does command its own destiny and that destiny can eventually embrace the stars. If man is as small and ugly and grotesque as his most inhuman act, he is also as large as his most heroic gesture.

Hansberry articulates her personal, political, and artistic credo with this commentary on human nature. She was cognizant of misery, yet well aware that humankind must rise up and exercise its greatness to eradicate it.

This fervent belief is evident in Hansberry's journalistic, teaching, and political commitments during her years in 1950s Harlem when she worked in the office of Paul Robeson's *Freedom* magazine, stressing that it, "ought to be *the* journal of Negro liberation . . . in fact it will be" (Perry, 2018: 46). As a journal that chronicled independence struggles throughout the African diaspora and the Global South, *Freedom's* articles placed the nascent southern Civil Rights Movement within a global context by making connections to liberationist struggles for native sovereignty on the African continent. To that end, Hansberry wrote a piece on Kwame Nkrumah and the Ghanaian independence movement, in which she states, "The people of Ghana clearly see their struggles and victories in connection with black folk on the rest of their continent as well as in the United States" (quoted in Perry, 2018: 48).

Hansberry complimented her Pan-African journalistic pursuits with teaching and studying responsibilities at the Jefferson School of Social Science, which was associated with the Communist Party USA. There she engaged in dialogues with another mentor, W.E.B. Du Bois. Hansberry then shared her knowledge with other Harlemites, as she gave lectures on racial and economic justice at the famed Harlem Speaker's Corner on Lenox Avenue. At this time, she also considered herself a communist and stated the following: "I am sick of poverty, lynching, stupid wars and the universal maltreatment of my people and obsessed with a rather desperate desire for a new world for me and my people" (Perry, 2018: 49).

Hansberry's yearning for a more human world for Black people found further literary expression in her 1964 collaboration with the SNCC in a work of photojournalism entitled, *The Movement: Documentary of a Struggle for Equality*. This atypical coffee table book chronicles the Civil Rights Movement through Hansberry's socio-political and historical commentary:

moving portraits of African American activists, like Fannie Lou Hamer and Malcolm X; arresting photographs of southern whites pointing gleefully at burning/hanging lynched Blacks; and select quotes from W.E.B. Du Bois, Fredrick Douglass, and James Baldwin. The 1964 cover photo of a white southern police officer violently choking an unarmed African American woman is a stark reminder that the Black freedom struggle is ongoing, for the officer's death grip immediately calls to mind Eric Garner's and George Floyd's shared last words: "I can't breathe."

Despite the fact that the photographs plainly depict the brutality of white supremacy and anti-black violence, Hansberry uses her socialist orientation to inform readers that working-class and poor whites suffered under the economic exploitation that is intrinsic to any capitalist system. She states that the abusive white police officers are "from a class of Southerners who are themselves victims of a system that has used them and their fathers before them for generations" (Hansberry and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1964: 68). Immediately below this commentary, Hansberry cites a supporting quote from Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* (1934) to provide further historical contextualization of poor whites' manipulation under the American capitalist system.¹³

That Hansberry was influenced by Du Bois's intellectual legacy is only natural. She was of an immediate post-war generation of African American thinkers for whom he was *the* Father of African American, Africana, and Black Radical Studies. Hansberry illuminates Du Bois's intellectual bequest in her remarks at his 1964 memorial service in New York City's Carnegie Hall. The lyricism and poignancy of her comments on DuBois's significance bear lengthy repetition:

I do not remember when I first heard the name Dubois. For some Negroes it comes into consciousness so early, so persistently that it is like the spirituals or the blues or discussions of oppression; he was a fact of our culture. People spoke of him as they did the church or the nation . . . And without a doubt, his ideas have influenced a multitude who do not even know his name . . . I think that [his legacy] tells us to honor thought and thinking . . . I think his legacy bids us pay attention to the genuine needs of humankind . . . Dubois' legacy teaches us to look toward and work for a socialist organization of society as the next great and dearly won universal condition of mankind. (Hansberry Papers, box 56, file 21)

¹³ "In the South the great planter form proportionately a quite small class, but they have, singularly enough, at their command some five million poor white... Considering the economic rivalry of the black and white worker, it would have seemed natural that the poor white would have refused to police the slave...But...it gave him work and some authority as overseer, slave driver and member of the patrol system...The result was the system was held intact by the poor white" (quoted in Hansberry and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1964: 68).

Hansberry's reflections on the towering intellectual, that is Du Bois, are without compare. With her opening lines that liken the great philosopher to the spirituals and the blues, she likens Du Bois himself to his groundbreaking, transdisciplinary work, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Similarly, Hansberry captures the vast reach of Du Bois's ideas in her assertion that so many who do not know his name have been affected by his thought. One of which is the notion that only a socialist society, the only true form of humanistic socio-economic and political relations, will cure the ills of capitalism, including exploitation, poverty, and racism.¹⁴ And though Hansberry was echoing Du Bois's thoughts on socialism, she was also giving voice to Luxemburg's renowned and previously quoted words: "In this hour, socialism is the only salvation for humanity . . . Socialism or Barbarism" (Luxemburg, 2004: 350).

LUXEMBURG ON THE GLOBAL SOUTH

The desire to alert the masses to the related tragedies of human exploitation and degradation drove Luxemburg to political writing and activism. Her youth in Russian-occupied Poland was spent appreciating Polish and German literature. Luxemburg was so enamored with the written word that she wrote poetry, sometimes sharing her verse with family and friends (Frölich, 2010: 4–5). As a young student, she included the following line in one of her poems: "I want to burden the conscience of the affluent with all the suffering and all the hidden, bitter tears" (Luxemburg, 2010: 5). Luxemburg met her goal of disturbing the conscience of the wealthy many times over. However, with her brief article, "Martinique" (1902), she set her sights on a particular brand of exploitative capitalists: Western imperialists with colonial dominions in the Global South.

"Martinique" may be read as a theoretical prologue to Luxemburg's explication of European imperialist-capitalist exigencies in the colonized countries of the Caribbean and Africa that is detailed a decade later in *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913). Similar in brevity to Hansberry's previously discussed article "This Complex of Womanhood," Luxemburg narrates the human devastation of the 1902 eruption of Mt. Pelée to expose the harsh realities of French imperialism and the historical legacy of chattel slavery and Black subjugation in the Caribbean. With rhetorical flair, she personifies

¹⁴ Though Hansberry viewed socialism as the only just expression of human relations, she did not consider anti-black racism another manifestation of class oppression. Hansberry understood the complex historical legacy of white supremacy as one that could not be solely explained by economics, but rather through an analysis of historical and socio-political hegemonic forces. See Perry (2018: 49–56).

Mt. Pelée as a “true giant” who, though furious, was still “[g]reat-hearted” enough to emit smoke and fire to “warn the reckless creatures that crawled at his feet” (Luxemburg, 2004: 123).

Luxemburg then shifts to a nuanced, anti-imperialist reading of the eruption that highlights the hypocrisy of the Western imperialists’ uncharacteristic altruism toward the Afro-Caribbean populace. Confronted with the tragedy of this natural disaster, Luxemburg avers that, for the Western imperialists, racialized slavery, class hierarchies, and hegemonic systems of domination suddenly ceased to exist. Instead, Mt. Pelée’s eruption announced the arrival of

a new guest—the human being. Not lords and bondsmen, not blacks and whites, not rich and poor, not plantation owners and wage slaves—human beings have appeared on the tiny shattered island, human beings . . . who only want to help and succor. Old Mt. Pelée has worked a miracle! Forgotten are the days of Fashoda, forgotten the conflict over Cuba, forgotten “la Revanche”—the French and the English, the Tsar and the Senate of Washington . . . donate money send telegrams, extend the helping hand . . . a resurrection of humanism among the ruins of human culture. The price of recalling their humanity was high, but thundering Mt. Pelée had a voice to catch their ear. (Ibid)

Luxemburg then continues to castigate the European imperialists’ newfound sense of compassion for the people of Martinique through what we now identify as a Black radical critique of French colonial rule in pre-revolutionary Haiti (the late eighteenth-century San Domingo) and France’s late nineteenth-century annexation of Madagascar:

But how was it then, centuries ago, when France spilled blood in torrents for the Lesser and Greater Antilles? . . . Madagascar: fifty years ago there we saw the disconsolate Republic who weeps for her lost children today, how she bowed the obstinate native people to her yoke with chains and the sword . . . the mouths of French cannons spewed out death and annihilation; French artillery fire swept thousands of flowering human lives from the face of the earth until a free people lay prostrate on the ground, until the brown queen of the “savages” was dragged off as a trophy to the “City of Light.” (Ibid)

Here we may appreciate Luxemburg’s rhetorical and polemical strengths. In one searing paragraph, she denounces the French imperialists’ uncharacteristic empathy for their colonial subjects in Martinique, since these same oppressors attempted to squelch the liberationist impulses of the Haitian revolutionaries and then, one century later, used genocidal military campaigns in their imperial acquisition of Madagascar. What is more, in Luxemburg’s

allusion to the Haitian Revolution we see glimmers of Hansberry's unfinished play *Toussaint*, written in 1958, to honor the memory of

The people of Haiti [who] waged a war and won. They created a nation out of a savagely dazzling colonial jewel in the mighty French empire . . . their achievement of wresting national freedom from one of the most powerful nations on the face of the earth by lowly, illiterate and cruelly divided black slaves—has, aside from almost immeasurable historical importance, its own core of monumental drama. (“A Note to Readers,” Hansberry Papers, box 42, file 4)

Hansberry's words ring with the same tenors of C.L.R. James's Black radical critique in his classic study of the San Domingo Revolution, *The Black Jacobins* (1938).¹⁵

Just as Hansberry mentioned the contemporaneous historical events of the Bandung Conference of 1955 and Third World decolonization in her talk on the Negro writer, Luxemburg furthers her anti-imperialist message in “Martinique” through the recitation of watershed moments in second-wave, nineteenth-century European imperialism and reactionary political repression: the American occupation of the Philippines; British imperial involvement in the Boer War; Tsarist Russia's colonization of Poland; and the French army's destruction of the Paris Commune.

Luxemburg closes “Martinique” with a stunning prediction of global climate change and ecological disaster, declaring that retribution will be visited upon Western imperialists in the form of an extinction-level event that could end human life. In the wake of this destruction, she avows that “only in its ruins will the nations come together in true humanity, which will know but one deadly foe—blind, dead, nature.”¹⁶

CONCLUSION

It is no surprise that these prescient political observations on the unsustainable nature of Western capitalist-imperialist global expansion came from Luxemburg. Both Luxemburg and Hansberry prioritized the problems of exploitation, oppression, and human suffering. Epistemologically speaking,

¹⁵ In his Preface, James describes San Domingo as “the pride of France, and the envy of every other imperialist nation.” Furthermore, he characterizes the revolution as “The only successful slave revolt in history,” and “the transformation of slaves . . . into a people able to organize themselves and defeat the most powerful European nations of their day, is one of the great epics of revolutionary struggle and achievement.” James also uses the word “dazzling” to describe San Domingo's tremendous colonial wealth. See James (1963: ix, 55).

¹⁶ Ibid 124–125.

their selected letters, writings, and speeches present a counter-hegemonic feminist perspective that has ideological roots in both the Black radical and Black feminist thought traditions, since both thinkers prioritized the advancement of gender, racial, and socio-economic equality. As both Black radical and Black feminist thought are generated in the transdisciplinary convergence of historical, socio-economic, and political analyses, it stands to reason that Luxemburg's and Hansberry's progressive writings would meet at the intersection of these insurgent thought systems. Their intellectual work is rich with theoretical insights gleaned from a range of disciplines, including history, sociology, economics, and politics. This is their significant contribution to creolized theory and progressive humanistic discourse; this is the undeniable power and prescience of Hansberry's and Luxemburg's timeless works and truly radical vision.

CODA: LORRAINE AND ROSA IN COMMUNION

In Hansberry's undated prose poem, "A Woman" (Hansberry Papers, box 61, file 16), she recalls the human ability to see art in the mundane, as she opines that the image of a proletarian woman reminds her of *all* women:

A woman lifts a window across the street and rests on the sill for a moment. Her hands are white against the dark blue of the working woman's sweater. She is full bodied and strong . . . The hands do not know that they are especially beautiful.

She does not know that in this moment—perhaps never again not ever—she is

the women I remember striding out in Chapala's waters in the Mexican sun;
certainly black mothers I have seen in Southside windows since I was very
young;

a Jewish woman I remember in an East Side market when New York was
new to me—

she cannot know that in this moment she is sprung from Michaelangelo.
(Ibid)

In Hansberry's moving tribute to woman, we see the spirit of Rosa Luxemburg's "Proletarian Woman," as she recalls the heroic Southern African Herero women fighting the German imperialists and the valiant Putumayo women of Columbia resisting the Spanish. Through the breadth of Hansberry's and Luxemburg's political writings, creative works, and activism, we find two gifted thinkers who stood firm in their womanhood

and their love for humanity to demand a better, more livable world for *all* humankind.

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