

ROSA LUXEMBURG:

FIRST SOCIALIST FEMINIST

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by

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To Janna Hiemstra

Just imagine, I have become a feminist!

Rosa Luxemburg

Abstract

Traditionally, Rosa Luxemburg has not been understood as a feminist. In the beginnings of her socio-political career she did not align herself with feminism. However, as time progressed, Luxemburg became increasingly weary of male-chauvinistic ideals including Revisionism, opportunism, centralization, militarism, and war. Luxemburg's socio-political theories and her relationships with the women's movement led her to label herself a feminist. This thesis outlines and examines the claim that Luxemburg can be described and labeled a feminist.

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Introduction: Precursor to a “Liberating Alternative”

Rosa Luxemburg’s corpse casts a dark shadow over a period of history when some sought and failed to overthrow capitalism.¹ Her decaying body, mutilated beyond recognition, was found in the murky waters of the Landwehr Canal in Berlin, Germany on May 31, 1919, 136 days after she was brutally assassinated and 137 days after she proclaimed, “Tomorrow the revolution will rear its head once again, and, to your horror, will proclaim, with trumpets blazing: *I was, I am, I will be!*”² Luxemburg’s death, along with the same-day murder of Karl Liebknecht, also a member of the socialist league *Spartakus*, and the murder of her past lover and socialist comrade Leo Jogiches six weeks later, left her revolutionary energy in the hands of the thousands of working class men and women that sought a more humane existence. The impact of Luxemburg’s death reflects the voice and accomplishments of the woman who fought “for a liberating alternative to the globalization of capital.”³

In this thesis, I suggest that although she has not been described or categorized as a feminist, Luxemburg was a feminist. I propose that in the beginning of her socio-political career Luxemburg did not align herself with women’s issues or the women’s movement. However, as time progressed Luxemburg identified herself and her theories more and more with the women’s movement. The Social Democratic Party began to pursue ideals that Luxemburg deemed non-Marxist and increasingly chauvinistic. These

¹ A photograph of Rosa Luxemburg’s corpse can be found in J.P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 779.

² Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation, and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution* (New Jersey: Humanities Press; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), 75.

³ *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 7.

male-chauvinistic ideals included Revisionism, opportunism, centralization, and later, even sympathy toward militarism and war. This thesis begins by outlining Luxemburg's most important contributions to socio-political theory, including her stance on capitalism and the economy, Revisionism, and revolution. Second, I explore her stance toward women in general, and the distinction she makes between bourgeois women and proletarian women in particular. The third chapter of this thesis examines Luxemburg's contributions to the theories and agenda of a post-capitalist society. For her, capitalism and post-capitalism can only be understood and dealt with internationally; here, again, Luxemburg refutes the theories of nationalism and the nationalistic demeanors of her male comrades in the Social Democratic Party. Chapter four investigates my claim that Luxemburg was, indeed, a feminist and that, ultimately, she looked toward women and the women's movement to bring about radical social change. I conclude with a critique and evaluation of Luxemburg's stance on gender, while proposing that her overriding theories and her call for women's participation in socialist revolution remains relevant in our contemporary global socio-political situation.

Chapter One: To Revise or To Revolt?

Rosa Luxemburg was born in 1871 to a Jewish family in the Russian-occupied part of Poland. She became politically involved as a teenager with the Polish Marxists before she was forced into exile in Zurich at the age of eighteen. While at university in Zurich she became familiar with Russian Marxism and also argued against national self-determination for Poland in favor of proletarian internationalism. Already establishing herself amongst international socialist thinkers, Luxemburg became involved with the German Social Democratic Party when she moved to Germany in 1898. One year later, in *Social Reform or Revolution*, Luxemburg attacked the social democrat Eduard Bernstein's Revisionism, specifically for his statement, "For me the movement is everything, the goal is nothing."⁴ This document popularized Luxemburg's thought. In the following years she headed Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and, later, the breakaway political movement named Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania. She participated in the 1905 Russian revolution, which influenced her ideas concerning the mass strike. At a young age Luxemburg had already become a leading participant in the struggle to change society.

Chapter one outlines Luxemburg's stance on capitalism and the economy. I will identify the problems she has with Marx's economic theories as he outlines them in *Capital*. Like Marx, Luxemburg thinks that capitalism is not economically stable. Unlike Marx, though, she believes that capitalism will economically collapse in on itself not only due to lack of surplus value as it is created between the capitalist and the worker, but, more important, because capitalism fails to take into account that exploited "third

⁴ Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (New Jersey: Humanities Press; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), 10.

parties,” typically used to gain surplus value, will be exhausted. This chapter will also outline Luxemburg’s stance on Revisionism and revolution. She detested Eduard Bernstein’s theory of Revisionism and, instead, called for a mass uprising and swift revolution. Following chapter one, chapter two will outline Luxemburg’s view on women and the women’s movement.

In 1912 Luxemburg published her most well known work, *The Accumulation of Capital*. Luxemburg’s work critically assesses Karl Marx’s theories in *Capital*. The first volume of *Capital*, published during Marx’s lifetime, deals with the capitalist process of production. The second and third volumes of *Capital* were written before the first volume; however, they were edited and published by Friedrich Engels after the death of Marx. The second volume covers the circulation process and the third volume covers the capitalist system in its entirety. Overall, Marx’s *Capital* engages with the transformation from the capitalist stage of social history to the revolutionary stage of socialism. Marx understands capitalism to be a society wherein the majority of things produced are commodities. A large number of employees manufacture the commodities, and a small number of employers pay the employees. The wealthy investors are the capitalists. By means of reproduction diagrams Marx posits that through a process of circulation production is continually maintained. For instance, the capitalists invest money in paid labor and production. They sell the manufactured commodities to generate additional capital. The capitalists, then, reinvest the acquired money into the production cycle. Marx judges that capitalist commercial society contradicts itself in the relation between value and surplus value. Here, value is the monetary value of a commodity. Capitalists sell commodities at a high rate to create extra money. This extra money is surplus value.

Surplus value is created when the capitalist sells a commodity for more than the laborer who made the commodity was paid. In volume one Marx says that “a direct exchange of money, *i.e.*, of realised labour, with living labour would either do away with the law of value which only begins to develop itself freely on the basis of capitalist production, or do away with capitalist production itself, which rests directly on wage-labour.”⁵ The capitalist commercial surplus value increases at a rate whereby it undermines and diminishes the relative value of labor-power. The rate of capital profit eventually declines because the relative decrease of capital invested in labor-power comparatively affects the overall value of total social capital. Marx’s conceptual model of capitalism points to the inevitable demise of the capitalist stage as it collapses within itself due to deficient profit.

In *The Accumulation of Capital*, Luxemburg sympathizes with Marx’s critique of capitalism. She writes:

Capitalist production is primarily production by innumerable private producers without any planned regulation. The only social link between these producers is the act of exchange. In taking account of social requirements reproduction has no clue to go on other than the experiences of the preceding labour period. These experiences, however, remain the private experiences of individual producers and are not integrated into a comprehensive and social form. Moreover, they do not always refer positively and directly to the needs of society. They are often rather indirect and negative...⁶

Luxemburg agrees with Marx that capitalism must be doomed; however, she asserts that the economic grounds upon which capitalism will collapse are different from the economic grounds that Marx asserts. Luxemburg argues that Marx’s diagrams do not

⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1954), 502.

⁶ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, trans. Agnes Schwarzschild (New York and London: Modern Reader Paperbacks, 1968), 34.

necessarily foreshadow the inevitable end of capitalism. For instance, if labor value was to become proportionate with surplus value then capitalism is not economically doomed to collapse.

Luxemburg is unable to accept that capitalism's fall may not be certain. Marx's diagrams account for labor-power, time, and the growth of production. However, in *The Accumulation of Capital*, Luxemburg argues that his diagrams do not adequately account for surplus value. She says, "A further condition is required to ensure that accumulation can in fact proceed and production expand: the effective demand for commodities must also increase."⁷ This demand does not come from the capitalists' personal consumption. "On the contrary, it is the very essence of accumulation that capitalists refrain from consuming a part of their surplus value which must be ever increasing—at least as far as absolute figures are concerned—that they use it instead to make goods for the use of other people."⁸ Surplus value cannot come from the purchases made by the laborers either. "The working class in general receives from the capitalist class no more than an assignment to a determinate part of the social product, precisely to the extent of the variable capital. The workers buying consumer goods therefore merely refund to the capitalist class the amount of the wages they have received, their assignment to the extent of the variable capital. They cannot return a groat more than that..."⁹ Laborers only receive the value of their work. Surplus value is left in its commodity form to the capitalists.

⁷ Ibid., 131.

⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁹ Ibid., 132.

If demand and surplus value do not come from the capitalists or from the workers alone then it must come from outside of this relationship. Hence, a “third-party” of consumers creates surplus value for the capitalists. Luxemburg says, “Imperialism is the political expression of the accumulation of capital in its competitive struggle for what remains still open of the non-capitalist environment.”¹⁰ She goes on, “Though imperialism is the historical method for prolonging the career of capitalism, it is also a sure means of bringing it to a swift conclusion.”¹¹ Whereas Marx asserts that capitalism will collapse in on itself because surplus value will not increase at a parallel or higher rate than labor value will, Luxemburg asserts that capitalism must be inevitably doomed because commercial imperialism eventually diminishes third parties as they become enmeshed in the system of capitalism. Marx forgets to take into account people outside of the present capitalist system. Basically, in order to create surplus value, capitalists take advantage of very poor people within their own countries and very poor people outside of their own countries by paying them at very low rates and then selling the produced commodities at very high rates. These are people that were not formerly involved within the system of capitalism, that is, they were neither capitalists nor workers; they did not make up the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. These people make up what Luxemburg calls “third-parties.” Eventually people of the third-parties will become workers and consumers in the system of capitalism. However, in time, Luxemburg believes that there will be no third-party to exploit more severely than workers are exploited because all third-parties will be exhausted and become workers within the system of capitalism. And, hopefully, it is the workers that recognize and rebel against their own exploitation.

¹⁰ Ibid., 446.

¹¹ Ibid., 446.

Economically speaking, capitalism will collapse for lack of opportunities to realize its surplus value. The collapse of capitalism is important for Luxemburg because she views its imperialistic tendencies to be intersubjectively exploitative.

Luxemburg's economic theories also contest Revisionism and academic Marxian theory. Both Revisionism and academic Marxian theory had captured socialist attention during the beginning of the twentieth century. Eduard Bernstein popularized Revisionism. Revising the teachings of Karl Marx, Bernstein claimed that socialism is attainable via gradual and practical agendas for change within the political and economic systems. His Revisionism rejects the inexorability of the abrupt collapse of capitalism, and it also denies that the fall of capitalism requires a violent insurrection. Like Marx, Luxemburg assumed the historical unsustainability of capitalism. She says that "after a certain stage the conditions for accumulation of capital both at home and abroad turn into their very opposite—they become conditions for the decline of capitalism."¹² Bernstein believed that theoretical measures could be understood and implemented throughout time to secure the decline of capitalism. Luxemburg argued against Revisionism. She condemned the idea that certain political groups held the power to understand and eventually overturn capitalism; this is because, capitalism is not a national problem, but an international one. Because surplus value often comes from people and groups outside the capitalist nation, imperialism is necessarily international. Capitalism must fall at the hands of the internationally exploited. For example, "Theses in the Tasks of International Social Democracy" says:

Imperialism, militarism, and war can never be abolished
nor attenuated so long as the capitalist class exercises,

¹² Ibid., 466.

uncontested, its class hegemony. The sole means of successful resistance, and the only guarantee of the peace of the world, is the capacity for action and the revolutionary will of the international proletariat to hurl its full weight into the balance...

Thus the principal tactic of the national Sections aims to render the masses capable of political action and resolute initiative; to ensure the international cohesion of the masses in action; to build the political and trade union organizations in such a way that, through their mediation, prompt and effective collaboration of all the Sections is at all times guaranteed, and so that the will of the International materializes in action by the majority of the working-class masses all over the world.¹³

Luxemburg believed that the international working class would act to destroy the system of capitalism. This would not and could not be the gradual overturning affirmed by revisionists but, instead, it must be a swift revolution.

Luxemburg points to the potential for revolution in *The Crisis in German Social Democracy*. This work has come to be famous as “The Junius Pamphlet.” Luxemburg wrote *The Crisis in German Social Democracy* between February and April 1915, while she was in prison for politically opposing militarism and World War I. In 1916 her work was smuggled out of prison and published under the pseudonym “Junius;” hence, “The Junius Pamphlet.” “The Junius Pamphlet” pleads on behalf of the masses for the emergence of international socialism. Luxemburg argues, again against Revisionism, that its political theory will not suffice to overcome capitalist exploitation. She writes:

The real problem that the world has placed before the Socialist parties, upon whose solution the future of the working class movement depends, *is the readiness of the*

¹³ “Theses in the Tasks of International Social Democracy,” in Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike, The Political Party, and the Trade Unions and The Junius Pamphlet* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), 220, 222.

proletarian masses to act in the fight against imperialism.

The international proletariat suffers, not from a dearth of postulates, programs, and slogans, but from a lack of deeds, of effective resistance, of the power to attack imperialism at the decisive moment, just in times of war. It has been unable to put its old slogan, war against war, into actual practice.¹⁴

Imperialism, according to Luxemburg, is required for capitalist exploitative rule. “The Junius Pamphlet” makes it clear that those who are not a part of the bourgeoisie should not hope that the war or the movement of history might bring forth a peaceful and just advancement of capitalism. She condemns the betrayal of international socialism by the leadership of the socialist parties in Germany, France, and Britain, and she fears that the working class might become wedded to a national propaganda fallaciously claiming equality and fallaciously promising freedom from oppression.

Capitalism accounts for crimes committed against the national and the international proletariat, Luxemburg claims. The system of capitalism is responsible for devastating not only economic conditions but also social and cultural ways of life. If the spread and development of capitalism is to be overcome it must be overcome by the masses: “[F]or the advance and victory of Socialism we need a strong, educated, ready proletariat, masses whose strength lies in knowledge as well as in numbers.”¹⁵ Freedom cannot be only for those who support the government or for the political socialist leaders. If this is the case, freedom remains a special privilege. If socialism does not happen at the hands of the masses, then it “will be decreed from behind a few official desks by a dozen

¹⁴ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Crisis in German Social Democracy* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1969), 123.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

intellectuals.”¹⁶ A leading minority cannot determine gradual implementations concerning socialist policy; instead, the masses, the working class, must bring forth revolution and a post-capitalist society: “In the present period, when we face decisive final struggles in all the world, the most important problem of socialism was and is the burning question of our time. 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.”¹⁷

Luxemburg asserts the significance of a proletarian revolution even before her imprisonment. In 1906 she lays the foundation for the cause of a rapid uprising in her work, *The Mass Strike*. She says 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.”¹⁸ The mass strike is one way that the proletariat might overturn capitalism for socialism. This is a method of action and movement for the working class. Yet, it is not an isolated event. A mass revolution, such as a mass strike, is an event that is historically necessary. It is an event that indicates future events and policies. Because an uprising is not an isolated event it cannot be called at will. A spontaneous uprising represents a whole period of class struggle, which is identical with a period of revolution. Luxemburg’s theories are not meant to address those who are a part of capitalism or who affirm the bourgeois class, patriarchy, Revisionism, or male chauvinism. Instead, she attempts to speak to and

¹⁶ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 306.

¹⁷ Ibid., 310.

¹⁸ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike, The Political Party, and the Trade Unions and The Junius Pamphlet* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), 16.

empower people who listen to the cries of the oppressed and are most willing and able to fight against exploitation and for revolutionary justice.

Like Marx, Luxemburg anchors her understanding of capitalism and revolution in materialism. She defends a materialist position with regard to historical dialectic:

Dialectic materialism, which is the basis of scientific socialism, has broken once and for all with this type of 'eternal' formula. For the historical dialectic has shown 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.¹⁹

In line with Marx, she holds that all concepts of an historical dialectic are strictly material, and that empirical reality determines thought. Luxemburg employs existing notions of social institutions and uses them to explain contemporaneous human conditions and directions toward justice. Her understanding of dialectic materialism breaks from any formula that founds itself in claims of eternal truths concerning metaphysical rights. It is within this schema that her understanding of socialism changes “the entire store of democratic clichés and ideological metaphysics inherited from the bourgeoisie.”²⁰ Moreover, it is within the schema of scientific socialism that Luxemburg makes radical claims of distinction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; and, here, where she extends the call for revolution toward proletarian women. Luxemburg's theories concerning capitalism, Revisionism, and revolution are important to her stance

¹⁹ Rosa Luxemburg, *The National Question*, ed. Horace B. Davis (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 111.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.

on socialism and also to her view on women and their participation in the socio-economic sphere.

This chapter has outlined Luxemburg's concerns regarding the economy of capitalism and the social position of capitalism. She suggests that the system of capitalism is an imperialistic phenomenon that exploits the poor nationally and internationally. She refutes Marx's claim that capitalism is economically doomed because surplus value will not increase at the same speed that labor value increases. Instead, she suggests that capitalism is economically doomed because capitalists do, indeed, recognize labor value, and they exploit third parties outside of the existing working class to create labor and higher rates of surplus value; however, these third parties will eventually be exhausted and capitalists will no longer be able to create adequate surplus value. This chapter has also outlined Luxemburg's ardent stance against Revisionism and academic Marxian theory. She believes that these theories reject a swift revolution and an abrupt end to capitalism, and instead foster exploitation and imperialism. Her stance on revolution sets up the role of the proletariat to bring about the downfall of capitalism.

Luxemburg's theories, though, are not without flaws. In the system of capitalism, do the workers and third parties play a role that continues to foster exploitation and exploitative imperialism? In our current social order capitalism still reigns; while the capitalists gain vast amounts of surplus value, the majority of the world's population is very poor. If capitalism was not economically doomed, then, along with Bernstein's theory of Revisionism, Luxemburg's hope for a mass uprising and swift revolution also failed. We must account for this both historically and contemporarily. I will address these criticisms and concerns in chapter five. The following chapter outlines Luxemburg's

stance regarding the women's movement. It investigates her position concerning both bourgeois women and proletarian women within capitalism and within the movement beyond capitalism.

Chapter Two: The Spurious Nature of “Bourgeois Feminism,” and Its Opposite

On March 5, 1914, *Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz* published an article written by Luxemburg for International Women’s Day. The article, entitled “Proletarian Women,” has been translated from her *Gesammelte Werke*, and it appeared in English for the first time in 2004. This piece addresses the oppression of working women and their resistance against both colonialist and capitalist incivility and cruelty. Luxemburg believes that the affairs of the world, including the plight of womanhood, are desperate. “Proletarian Women” gives important clues to how Luxemburg viewed the women’s movement in general. The current chapter will examine her understanding of bourgeois women and proletarian women, including their relationship to capitalism and to the socialist movement. Chapter three will outline Luxemburg’s stance against nationalism and her internationalism with regard to both male chauvinism and feminism.

Luxemburg specifically addresses the desolation of women, on an international scale:

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 are 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.²¹

Here Luxemburg speaks of women from both colonialist and capitalist societies. She calls on women throughout the world to fight for emancipation. At the same time, there is

²¹ Rosa Luxemburg, “Proletarian Women,” in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 245.

a socio-political distinction between the bourgeois woman and the proletarian woman in Luxemburg's political thought and agenda: "For the property-owning bourgeois woman, her house is the world. *For the proletarian woman, the whole world is her house*, the world with its sorrow and joy, with its cold cruelty and its raw size."²²

According to Luxemburg the proletarian woman has a specific interest in political rights. Unlike the bourgeois woman, the proletarian woman does not benefit from class domination. Unlike the proletarian woman, the bourgeois woman does not function in society at a political or economic level because she experiences, whether with or without naiveté, the fruits of others' labor. Consequently, the bourgeois woman does not experience the oppression of the proletarian woman. The proletarian woman, on the other hand, is bound to political and economic activity. She finds herself in a situation that is exploitative and, therefore, is already caught up in a perverse socio-economic system. Luxemburg writes, "Capitalism was the first to rip [the proletarian woman] out of the family and put her under the yoke of social production, forced into others' fields, into workshops, into buildings, into offices, factories, and warehouses."²³ The capitalist positioning of the proletarian woman in an exploitative system also places her in a unique oppositional role. Because she experiences misery, the proletarian woman raises her voice and stands up on behalf of human rights and dignity. For instance, Luxemburg says, "The proletarian woman marches with the tunnel workers from Italy to Switzerland, camps in barracks and whistles as she dries diapers next to cliffs exploding into the air with blasts of dynamite."²⁴ Unlike the bourgeois woman that is solely involved in a house

²² Ibid., 243.

²³ Ibid., 243.

²⁴ Ibid., 243.

filled with products purchased at the expense of others, the proletarian woman is already involved in and continues to involve herself with the affairs of the world.

Contra the position of proletarian women, Luxemburg views bourgeois women as parasites of the parasites—parasites being those groups of people that live and gain livelihood via the fruits of others' labor while contributing nothing or little to the survival of these others. The parasites consist of the small upper class that dominates and exploits those who are outside of their class. That is, the bourgeois class preys on the proletarian class. Moreover, the more distinct class of bourgeois women is a parasite of the general bourgeois and of bourgeois men in particular: "As a bourgeois woman, the female is a parasite on society; her function consists in sharing in the consumption of the fruits of exploitation."²⁵ Not only do bourgeois women act as parasites, but their parasitic position begets inactivity and passivity, especially in the socio-political sphere. Hence, "[T]he *bourgeois woman* has no real interest in political rights, because she does not exercise any economic function in society, because she enjoys the finished products of class domination."²⁶ In actuality, the bourgeois woman plays an integral role in social and political attempts to position the upper class and the state of capitalism at the center of the world. The majority of the world's population is exploited at the hands of a few. The parasitic nature of bourgeois women positions them outside the revolutionary mindset and the act of revolution itself. Luxemburg adds: "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 antagonism between man and woman, a quirk."²⁷ So

²⁵ Ibid., 243.

²⁶ Ibid., 243.

²⁷ Ibid., 243.

Luxemburg finds bourgeois protest, in general, and bourgeois feminism, in particular, to be spurious.

By contrast, the proletarian woman has a role in relation to industry and commerce. She is aware of her position in the socio-economic sphere. Conversely, the bourgeois woman's role is typically an ignorant one. Her self-identification becomes insular and static. Typically, this suspension of self-identification takes place in the bourgeois home. Because the bourgeois woman does not normally take a direct part in social production, she lacks the possibility and responsibility that is part of her humanity. On the other hand, the proletarian woman's position in the socio-economic sphere is foundational to her self-identification. Luxemburg points out that for the first time in history, women, specifically proletarian women, are in a position to identify their personal positions and determinations. They are, for the first time, in a position to respond unabashedly to the plight of humanity. Indeed, they are called to respond to the plight of humanity.

Luxemburg finds in the socialist movement the first historical place for women in their own right. She writes:

The proletarian woman needs political rights because she exercises the same economic function, slaves away for capital in the same way, maintains the state in the same way, and is bled dry and suppressed by it in the same way as the male proletarian. She has the same interests and takes up the same weapons to defend them. Her political demands are rooted deep in the social abyss that separates the class of the exploited from the class of the exploiters, not in the antagonism between man and woman but in the antagonism between capital and labor.²⁸

²⁸ Ibid., 244.

This sets up the case for women's cultural and socio-political involvement in the world. Luxemburg's point is clear when she writes, "As a modern female proletarian, the woman becomes a human being for the first time, *since the [proletarian] struggle is the first to prepare human beings to make a contribution to culture, to the history of humanity.*"²⁹ According to Luxemburg, a contribution to the history of humanity in the form of revolution occurs when the voices of the exploited are heard, shouted out, and put into action.

Luxemburg's understanding of a responsible humanity, therefore, finds its starting point by identifying interpersonal connections. For instance, the plight of humanity can only, and must, be understood amongst varying people and groups. Through knowledge of various stories of exploitation humans can identify with one another and empathize with each other. This opens the door to combating unfair treatment and disadvantages. For instance, in the early 1900s the suffrage movement began to surface and intensify in Germany. Individual women not only recognized their own oppression but also became attuned to the exploitation of the masses of women. For this reason, Luxemburg addresses working women as follows in a 1912 speech entitled "Women's Suffrage and Class Struggle": "In truth, our state is interested in keeping the vote from working women and from them alone. It rightly fears they will threaten the traditional institutions of class rule, for instance militarism (of which no thinking proletarian woman can help being a deadly enemy), monarchy, the systematic robbery of duties and taxes on

²⁹ Ibid., 243.

groceries, etc.”³⁰ For Luxemburg, the sharing of similar stories of oppression opens up discourses and avenues for humans to attack exploitation and bringing forth positive social changes.

Public roles are important to Luxemburg’s thought and agenda because it is via the public sphere that humans realize their social potential. Through this realization, humans, especially the exploited, recognize their ability, and can thus determine courses of action. That is, they are able to form public groups and to inform public policy.

Luxemburg supports this thought when she writes:

A hundred years ago, the Frenchman Charles Fourier, one of the first great prophets of socialist ideals, wrote these memorable words: In any society, the degree of female emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation. This is completely true for our present society. The current mass struggle for women’s political rights is only an expression and a part of the proletariat’s general struggle for liberation. In this lies its strength and its future. Because of the female proletariat, general, equal, direct suffrage for women would immensely advance and intensify the proletarian class struggle. This is why bourgeois society abhors and fears women’s suffrage. And this is why we want and will achieve it. Fighting for women’s suffrage, we will also hasten the coming of the hour when the present society falls in ruins under the hammer strokes of the revolutionary proletariat.³¹

The fight for women’s suffrage increased magnificently in the early 1900’s. In addition, working women became progressively more engaged in political struggles for their class. Women’s motivation and actions during this time led to female proletarian involvement in both public assemblies and political associations. For Luxemburg, the public role is a

³⁰ Rosa Luxemburg, “Women’s Suffrage and Class Struggle,” in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 240.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 242.

tool to be used in naming and taking action against economic, societal, and cultural ills.

For instance, Luxemburg believes that change and power can be manifested via mass action:

Large masses of both men and women of the working class already consider the election campaigns a cause they share in common. In all Social Democratic electoral meetings, women make up a large segment, sometimes the majority. They are always interested and passionately involved. In all districts where there is a firm Social Democratic organization, women help with the campaign. And it is women who have done invaluable work distributing leaflets and getting subscribers to the Social Democratic press, this most important weapon in the campaign.³²

Just as Luxemburg finds women's identity in an established social context, she applies existing notions of socio-economic and socio-political situations to power contexts. For instance, in the early 1900's many German women belonged to the working class, and the number of working class women was on a continual incline. Due to their working class identification, many women assumed a role in political life. Women themselves began to obtain a basis for their rights. According to Luxemburg, in the early 1900's, the bourgeois class, that is, those who gain surplus value at the cost of exploiting the masses, were in the social position of power. On a hierarchical scale, the exploiters had the greatest control of power. Still, this does not leave the proletariat, including a great majority of women, powerless, she says. Proletarian women, as such, come together and realize that they are part of an exploited gender and an exploited class. They begin to act, and, through revolution and swift reforms, are able to realize their own power. Luxemburg believed in the power of the exploited and had high expectations for an uprising. She advocated a revolutionary process that would transform political and

³² Ibid., 238.

economic relations toward greater social power and control by and for the workers themselves: “Proletarian women, the poorest of the poor, the most disempowered of the disempowered, hurry to join the struggle for the emancipation of women and of humankind from the horrors of capitalist domination! Social Democracy has assigned to you a place of honor. Hurry to the front lines, into the trenches!”³³ Luxemburg’s plea to women to “Hurry to the front lines” captures her passion for emancipation from capitalist exploitation and for justice.

Chapter two has outlined Luxemburg’s view of women’s movement. Although she did not claim to be a feminist in the early part of her career, Luxemburg certainly became involved in the women’s movement both directly and indirectly by supporting the causes of both socialism and feminism. I have examined Luxemburg’s understanding of women, both bourgeois and proletarian. She believed that proletarian women had the drive to stand against capitalism and Revisionism, and the power to fight for emancipation and swiftly usher in revolution. On the other hand, she found bourgeois feminism to be spurious. She believed that bourgeois women were parasites on society who could not sympathize with the majority of women or take action against capitalist exploitation. Luxemburg does not address, though, the relationship between bourgeois women and proletarian women. She fails to explain sufficiently why bourgeois women are not sympathetic toward proletarian women and why they cannot be involved in an emancipation campaign and movement. I will address these concerns in chapter five. In the next chapter of this thesis, I outline Luxemburg’s stance against nationalism, as embraced by the men in the Social Democratic Party, and her stance for internationalism

³³ Rosa Luxemburg, “Proletarian Women,” in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 245.

with regard to exploitation and the defeat of capitalism. She suggests a radically new concept of democracy in a “post-capitalist” society. By this point, Luxemburg’s call for revolution and the abolition of capitalism urges the participation of women as the ushers of justice.

Chapter Three: An International Affair

In 1908 and 1909 Luxemburg published a series of articles with the title, “The National Question and Autonomy.” In these writings she establishes that a post-capitalist society can only be brought about via an international revolution. In this chapter I will examine Luxemburg’s stance on nationalism in general and centralism in particular--she was against both. Instead she urged the international proletariat to refuse totalitarian tendencies and to overthrow capitalism. I will also describe Luxemburg’s concept of democracy and her post-capitalist agenda. Chapter four will go on to argue that Luxemburg can be labeled a feminist, especially in light of her later political writings and activity.

Luxemburg insists that nationalism, as supported by Lenin and by socialist leaders in Germany, ought to be overcome. Nationalism only indirectly involves the interests of the working class, she says, and it also plays a major role in the exploitation of the masses of the world’s population. First, Luxemburg writes, “‘Nation-states,’ even in the form of republics, are not products or expressions of the ‘will of the people,’ as the liberal phraseology goes and the anarchist repeats. ‘Nation-states’ are today the very same tools and form of class rule of the bourgeoisie as the earlier, non-nation states, and like them they are bent on conquest.”³⁴ Within each self-determined nation there are different societal classes that have antagonistic interests and motives. For instance, because the bourgeois class holds a position of power over and against the working class, oppression ensues. The proletariat does not share a common cause with the bourgeoisie; rather, the power holders take advantage of the working class. Ultimately, according to Luxemburg,

³⁴ Rosa Luxemburg, *The National Question*, ed. Horace B. Davis (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 172.

the ideology of nationalism “gives no practical guidelines for the day to day politics of the proletariat, nor any practical solution of nationality problems.”³⁵ Writing as a supporter of socialism, Luxemburg focuses on internationalism. She says, “[O]ur internationalism is not a special type of nationalism differing from bourgeois nationalism only in that it does not behave aggressively—that it leaves to each nation the same right which it demands for its own nation, and thereby recognizes the complete sovereignty of each nation. Such a view, which transfers the position of anarchism concerning individuals onto nations, does not correspond to the close cultural community existing between nations of contemporary civilization.”³⁶ Her main point, here, is that the supporters of nationalism fail to recognize how oppression goes beyond the borders of the self-determined nation-state. Class relationships, including the relationship of oppression, are international. Hence, exploitation must be understood and dealt with on an international and transnational scale. According to Luxemburg, international relations are of great concern to the proletariat because it is the international proletariat that are being exploited both nationally and across borders.

In fact, Luxemburg says, “The interests of the proletariat on the nationality question are just the opposite of those of the bourgeoisie. The concern about guaranteeing an internal market for the industrialists of the ‘fatherland,’ and of acquiring new markets by means of *conquest*, by colonial or military policies—all these, which are the intentions of the bourgeoisie in creating a ‘national’ state, cannot be the aims of a conscious proletariat.”³⁷ She sees an innate connection between nationalism and imperialistic

³⁵ Ibid., 109.

³⁶ Ibid., 127-28.

³⁷ Ibid., 167.

capitalism. And, within this scheme, the bourgeois and proletarian views differ: “In international relations, the bourgeoisie represent the politics of war and partition, and at the present stage, a system of trade war; the proletariat demands a politics of universal peace and free trade.”³⁸ Furthermore, “[W]henver the formal strivings and the interests of the proletariat and those of the bourgeoisie (as a whole or in its more progressive part) seem identical—for example, in the field of democratic aspirations—there, under the identity of forms and slogans, is hidden the most complete divergence of contents and essential politics.”³⁹ Luxemburg’s stance on the national question laid the foundation for her political agenda.

Approximately ten years after writing on “The National Question,” Luxemburg continued to speak on behalf of the international proletariat. “To the Proletarians of All Countries” was published in *Die Rote Fahne* in November 1918. This article addresses all working men and women. Luxemburg believes that the proletariat sacrifice goods and “blood” at the hands of a few capitalists; that is, those who control and have substantial and abundant amounts of money and capital force misery upon the masses of people that do not belong to the class of the bourgeoisie. Like the German government, all capitalist governments are keenly aware of their own imperialistic tendencies for the sake of capitalist profit: “The imperialism of all nations knows no ‘mutual understanding.’ It knows only one law: capitalist profit; only one language: the sword; only one means: force.”⁴⁰ Luxemburg comes down even harder on national and international capitalists

³⁸ Ibid., 136.

³⁹ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁰ Rosa Luxemburg, “To the Proletarians of All Countries,” in *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, ed. Dick Howard (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 354.

when she says: “And the great criminals of this horrible anarchy, of the unleashed chaos: the ruling classes? They are incapable of controlling what they set loose. The beast capitalism conjured up the hell of war. But it is incapable of exorcising it, incapable of re-establishing true order, incapable of guaranteeing bread and work, peace and culture, law and freedom for tortured mankind.”⁴¹ Clearly, Luxemburg does not believe that capitalism fosters flourishing, especially among those outside of the bourgeoisie. Hence, she hopes for post-capitalist socio-economic conditions. There is a common struggle amongst the proletarians internationally, then, to combat unjust consequences of international capitalism. To combat and overcome capitalist exploitation the international proletariat must have a common objective. There must be one goal: “prosperity and progress for all.”⁴² Because the contemporaneous state of capitalism is international and a post-capitalist society can only be sought via a common transnational fight, Luxemburg pleads to proletarians of all countries: “[W]e call out to you: Fight! Act! The time of empty manifestos, of platonic resolutions and resounding phrases is over: the hour of action has come for the International. We urge you: Elect workers’ and soldiers’ councils to take over political power and work with us toward peace.”⁴³ And she closes the article with, “Proletarians of all countries! We call on you to carry out the work of socialist liberation; to give back to the defiled world its human face...”⁴⁴

The question of how a post-capitalist society ought to look is scarcely addressed in Marxist literature. In December 1918, however, Luxemburg took up this task in an article published by *Die Junge Garde* entitled “The Socialization of Society.” In this

⁴¹ Ibid., 354.

⁴² Ibid., 355.

⁴³ Ibid., 355.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 356.

work she focuses on the nature of a post-capitalist society. Her post-capitalist outline anchors itself in a vision whereby the political power of society rests entirely in the hands of the people-- that is, the masses, or, in other words, the working class. The realization of such a society, though, is only plausible inasmuch as there is a radical shift in economic policy. In 1918, private capitalists and aristocratic landowners controlled all the economic wealth in Eastern Europe (and the Modern West, in general). Luxemburg, in alignment with her social theories, considers the aforementioned owners of wealth to be the major exploiters of the working class—and, accordingly, the environment, the economy, and society in general. In turn, she says, “This state of affairs should be remedied.”⁴⁵ She believes that a main factor in overcoming exploitation is “the reconstruction of the economy on a completely new basis.”⁴⁶ To do this, she suggests that a “real workers’ government” ought to create a plan that declares their concerns and objectives with regards to the economy. This plan ought to decree and outline the hopes and purposes of a post-capitalist society.

Luxemburg understood, more readily than the leader of the German Social Democrats Karl Kautsky and other revisionists, that nationalism wore the guise of capitalism. She believed that “it was wrong to see positive virtues in the discipline of inculcated industrial life and to imagine that workers could obey the orders of the Party just as they did those of their employers.”⁴⁷ Certainly, Luxemburg’s hope for post-capitalistic socio-economic conditions has roots in Marxist internationalism. Yet, the

⁴⁵ Rosa Luxemburg, “The Socialization of Society,” in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 346.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 346.

⁴⁷ J.L.H. Keep, *The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 145.

roots of Luxemburg's position on the national question have been disputed. George

Lichtheim writes:

The subject is loaded with passion. It was the central issue of Rosa Luxemburg's political life... It was the one issue on which she stood ready to break with her closest associates and to fly in the face of every authority, including that of Marx. Poland was dead! It could never be revived! Talk of a Polish nation, of an independent Poland, was not only political and economic lunacy; it was a distraction from the class struggle, a betrayal of Socialism!... One thing only counted: fidelity to proletarian internationalism as she understood it (and as Marx, poor man, had plainly not understood it). On this point, and on this alone, she was intractable... One of the strangest aberrations ever to possess a major political intellect.⁴⁸

Whatever the roots of Luxemburg's internationalism may have been, she raises perhaps the most important concern of her time. Stephen Eric Bronner writes, "Given the influence of Lenin's theory of 'national self-determination', Stalin's notion of 'socialism in one country', and the popular identification of the left with 'national liberation' movements, it is difficult to remember that internationalism was once a cornerstone of radical socialist thought. With the exception of the mass strike, there is no single idea which has become so associated with Rosa Luxemburg."⁴⁹

Unlike Lenin, Luxemburg did not believe that a balanced relationship between nationalism and Socialism was possible. Lenin believed that "it would be in the interests of all nations to amalgamate themselves in a larger organisation."⁵⁰ For instance, he assumed minor groups, that is, groups that hold substantially less political and economic

⁴⁸ Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (New Jersey: Humanities Press; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981), 57.

⁴⁹ Stephen Eric Bronner, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Revolutionary for Our Times* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

power than the dominant groups, including those minor groups within their own particular nation-state, would learn, willingly and hopefully, the dominant ways of pursuing capital. This, in turn, according to Lenin, would benefit the minor groups' commercial interests. Luxemburg disagreed. Lenin wants his theory to extend to the international socio-economic world, but it maintains a sort of reformism and centralism inherently tied to a particular nation-state. Luxemburg criticizes Lenin's proposal because it justifies national bourgeois movements. Therefore, it undermines internationalism itself. For instance, smaller countries and minor groups are, and remain, economically bound to dominant bourgeois ideologies. Ultimately, the working classes of all nations would be supporting national, economically driven, bourgeois movements. Hence, "revolutionary class consciousness is already seduced once it accepts a notion of abstract 'right' that is quintessentially bourgeois in nature..."⁵¹ On an international scale, Luxemburg believed that the masses suffered great amounts of socio-economic exploitation at the hands of the bourgeoisie. In fact, the proletariat was not involved in socio-economic policy as Luxemburg thought they ought to be. "From Luxemburg's standpoint, socialism will either be international or it will not be at all."⁵² Certainly Raya Dunayevskaya is correct when she writes, "[Luxemburg] considered her stand the only true, proletarian, internationalist position."⁵³ Indeed, Luxemburg's understanding of internationalism suggests an alternative form of working class consciousness and organization. Luxemburg's concerns are clear:

⁵¹ Ibid., 21.

⁵² Ibid., 22.

⁵³ Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (New Jersey: Humanities Press; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981), 51.

On the one hand, we have the mass; on the other, its historic goal, located outside of existing society. On the one hand we have the day-to-day struggle; on the other, the social revolution. Such are the terms of the dialectical contradiction through which the socialist movement makes its way.

It follows that this movement can best advance by tacking betwixt and between the two dangers by which it is constantly being threatened. One is the loss of its mass character, the other, the abandonment of its goal. One is the danger of sinking back into the condition of a sect; the other, the danger of becoming a movement of bourgeois social reform.⁵⁴

Luxemburg was calling for a new concept of democracy. Contra Lenin, she emphasized that a central committee was unimportant and, against centralization, she stressed mass action of the proletariat. Luxemburg says that the working class must be free, as quoted by Raya Dunayevskaya, “to makes its own mistakes and to learn the historical dialectic by itself. Finally, we must frankly admit to ourselves that errors made by a truly revolutionary labor movement are historically infinitely more fruitful and more valuable than the infallibility of the best of all possible ‘central committees.’”⁵⁵ Whereas capitalistic centralization advances the cause of the elite, socialist notions of organization always relate to the class struggle. Hence, mass organization and mass struggle, for Luxemburg, are imperative. Both are made manifest in a mass movement made up of the working people in day-to-day activity. This is why Luxemburg enjoins large masses to action and to the conscious building of the future on an international scale:

⁵⁴ Paul Le Blanc, “Luxemburg and Lenin on Revolutionary Organization,” in *Rosa Luxemburg: Reflections and Writings*, ed. Paul Le Blanc (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1999), 87.

⁵⁵ Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation, and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution* (New Jersey: Humanities Press; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981), 60.

The forward march of the proletariat on a world historic scale, to its final victory is indeed not “so simple a thing.” The peculiar character of this movement resides precisely in the fact that here, for the first time in history, the popular masses themselves, *in opposition* to the ruling classes, are to impose their will, but they must effect this outside of the present society, beyond the existing society. This *will* the masses can only form in a constant struggle against the existing order. The union of the broad popular masses with an aim of reaching beyond the existing social order, the union of the daily struggle with the great world transformation, this is the task of the social-democratic movement, which must logically grope on its road of development between the following two rocks: abandoning the mass character of the party or abandoning its final aim, falling into bourgeois reformism or into sectarianism, anarchism or opportunism.⁵⁶

Luxemburg’s summarizes her criticism of nationalism as follows, “Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party—however numerous they may be—is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently.”⁵⁷ Luxemburg’s critique of nationalism is inherently a critique of centralism. She does not want social and economic policy to be delegated to the hands and votes of a few—whether the few be the bourgeoisie or an elite group of male socialists. Overall, Luxemburg understood social (and economic) relations in terms of a concrete totality; that is, “an organic system of relationships in which everything is referred to the whole and the whole takes precedence over the part, although this whole

⁵⁶ Lelio Basso, “Rosa Luxemburg: The Dialectical Method Against Reformism,” in *Rosa Luxemburg: Reflections and Writings*, ed. Paul Le Blanc (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1999), 63-64.

⁵⁷ Quoted by Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation, and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981), 65.

itself is not static and unchangeable but in constant transformation.”⁵⁸ As Lelio Basso, founder of the Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity, says with regard to Luxemburg’s theories, “[E]very separation between politics, economics, legal systems, morals, etc. is arbitrary...”⁵⁹ Given Luxemburg’s view on nationalism and centralism, one can understand her account of internationalism in relation to capitalism, and, its parallel, post-capitalism, in relation to internationalism.

Still, Luxemburg’s theories and agenda do not remain without criticism. Of main concern with regard to Luxemburg’s view on nationalism are, one, that she firmly bases her position in economics and, two, that she views the sphere of production strictly in terms of consumption and exchange. This leads to many potential problems. First, this way of thinking dismisses, even if not consciously, the sphere of culture. Hence, Luxemburg calls for proletarian action, but this action does not necessarily call upon minor groups outside of Western European working class exploitation. Dunayevskaya points to this when she writes, for example, “[Luxemburg] did not draw any conclusions about the Black Africans being a revolutionary force. That revolutionary role was reserved for the proletariat alone. In her critique of Marx’s diagrams she saw his economic categories as only economic, rather than as symbols of class struggle itself.”⁶⁰ Luxemburg fails to address sufficiently, if at all, the struggle of colonial peoples. Luxemburg’s theories do not take into account that there were new revolutionary forces to labor (or contend) with in “non-capitalist” lands; that is, groups that, in fact, could

⁵⁸ Lelio Basso, “Rosa Luxemburg: The Dialectical Method Against Reformism,” in *Rosa Luxemburg: Reflections and Writings*, ed. Paul Le Blanc (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1999), 59.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶⁰ Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation, and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution* (New Jersey: Humanities Press; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981), 37.

have become allies of the proletariat. Also, Luxemburg's stance downplays the activity of other groups in Western Europe that are not directly, and already, aligned with the proletariat. In struggling for international human rights, she seems to be saying that the proletariat should view the bourgeoisie and even socialists that believe in central organizations of power as the enemy. For Luxemburg, such people could not really be allies of the working class. Claire Cohen writes, "This raises the question of to what extent is it advisable or permissible—in Luxemburg's opinion, and also for us today—for there to be alliances across class lines in a united effort in certain democratic and human rights struggles."⁶¹ Luxemburg believed that long before capitalism's downfall the proletariat would overthrow it. This, though, for Luxemburg, rested in the confidence of mass proletarian spontaneity. What stands in the way for Luxemburg is her lack of confidence in others--for instance, international colonial peoples, or, even more particular to her own land and political situation, established socialist organizations or those that are a part of the upper-classes--that stand outside of Western European proletarian spontaneity.

This leads, second, to concerns regarding Luxemburg's post-capitalist agenda. Her proposals regarding the state and affairs of a post-capitalist society primarily concern economic matters. She focuses on the ways that goods are produced, exchanged, and distributed. Hence her understanding of the fulfillment of human rights depends on notions of possession. Luxemburg believes that the more adequately labor and goods are distributed, the more adequate life, void of exploitation, will become. However, civil

⁶¹ Claire Cohen, "Reflections on Rosa Luxemburg by a Community Activist," in *Rosa Luxemburg: Reflections and Writings*, ed. Paul Le Blanc (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1999), 118.

rights are not so easy to define and categorize in a social environment that is formed from an aggregate of individuals, each with her own external needs and internal desires.

Differing external needs and internal desires tend to produce conflict that is not so easily remedied. James A. Yunker, for example, understands distribution and rights in relation to ethics: “Ethics is concerned with finding appropriate compromises like this: compromises between conflicting internal desires of different members of society.”⁶²

Luxemburg, though, does not address the fact that there are differing external needs and she certainly does not address differing internal desires or different notions of civil rights.

Yunker writes, “The *origin* of any system of ethical rules is the effort to preserve the general society and to foster its welfare in the long run.”⁶³ When the origin of a system of ethics is strictly economical, as is Luxemburg’s post-capitalist agenda, it fails to take into account other social spheres, including the cultural. For instance, financial stability does not necessarily determine emotional stability. Hence, the field and vision of democracy when it is rooted in the economy becomes too narrow and increasingly less applicable to everyday life. Luxemburg’s social vision roots itself in emancipation from economic exploitation while neglecting other vital social spheres. If “the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues,”⁶⁴ then, the question still remains for Luxemburg, what is, or becomes, (the foundation of) a common (understanding of) good

⁶² James A. Yunker, *Socialism in the Free Market* (New York: Nellen Publishing, 1979), 189.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁶⁴ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1987), 250.

in relation to civil rights? Or, in other words, what is, or becomes, the beacon light of policy?

Justice, for Luxemburg, is not initiated by ideology, nor is it instituted via cooperation. In *Reform or Revolution*, published in 1900, Luxemburg mocks the classic understanding of justice when she writes, “We thus quite happily return to the principle of justice, to the old war horse on which the reformers of the earth have rocked for ages, for the lack of surer means of historic transportation. We return to the lamentable Rosinate on which the Don Quixotes of history have galloped towards the great reform of the earth, always to come home with their eyes blackened.”⁶⁵ Luxemburg adamantly refuses to seek justice on the terms of capitalism. She does not seek to revise justice on the terms of, or in cooperation with, capitalist exploiters. Justice, for Luxemburg, is the *working out of human rights*. Instead of the “justice” of the existing manipulators of power, she seeks and calls for revolution. Instead of an essentialist understanding of history, she supports a dialectic and materialistic understanding of it.

Viewing history in this light allows Luxemburg to call proletarians and socialists toward imaginative and creative ways of battling exploitation and injustice beyond the current ideologies of the powers-that-be. In her speech on “Women’s Suffrage and Class Struggle,” she says, “We do not depend on the justice of the ruling classes, but solely on the revolutionary power of the working masses and on the course of social development which prepares the ground for this power.”⁶⁶ Two years later, in “Proletarian Women,” she writes: “Through Social Democracy, [proletarian women] will be introduced into the

⁶⁵ Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 45.

⁶⁶ Rosa Luxemburg, “Women’s Suffrage and Class Struggle,” in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 242.

workshop of history. And here, where cyclopean forces are hammering, she will be fighting for truly equal rights, despite the lack of a written statute in a bourgeois constitution. Here, the working woman shakes the pillars of the existing social order next to men, and before it grants her the illusion of her rights, she will help to bury this social order under rubble.”⁶⁷

Throughout this chapter I raised criticisms concerning Luxemburg’s theories. Still other questions remain. For example, what is Luxemburg’s idea of justice? How does she understand human rights? Are there, or can there be, any human rights prior to the revolution? Is “revolutionary power” automatically just? And does she think that all proletarian, or other anti-exploitative, struggles are automatically just? Nevertheless, chapter three has illustrated Luxemburg’s stance against nationalism. She specifically refuted Lenin’s theories supporting centralization and, instead, she advanced an international cause led by the working class. Subsequently, this chapter outlined Luxemburg’s post-capitalist agenda and her hope for a more just society. Chapter four will show how Luxemburg’s resonance with women became stronger and stronger throughout her career and life. What follows is my claim that Luxemburg was indeed a feminist.

⁶⁷ Rosa Luxemburg, “Proletarian Women,” in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 244.

Chapter Four: A Feminist? A Feminist!

It seems clear that Luxemburg did not begin her career as a feminist. However, as time passed, Luxemburg began to identify herself more and more with women and the women's movement. Eventually, she would label herself a feminist. This chapter examines her relationship to the male-dominated Social Democratic Party and to feminism. Chapter five will critique and evaluate Luxemburg's relationship toward feminism including her theories that led her to claim feminism. Chapter five will also serve as a conclusion that evaluates Luxemburg's ideas in light of our current global world order.

Luxemburg's early political activity did not align itself with women's politics in general, nor the suffrage movement in particular. It was Luxemburg herself and Leo Jogiches who seceded from the Polish Socialist Party in the spring of 1893 to form a rival organization, the Social-Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland. Moreover, it was Luxemburg who became so intricately tied to the German Social Democratic Party. Later, though, Luxemburg went on to criticize the Social Democratic Party. She found the party's opportunism and centralization pitiful. And, she believed, the ideals of "Revisionism," "opportunism," and "centralization" had become exclusively linked to men. Luxemburg did not refute these ideas on her own; other women adamantly spoke out against the newly formed "ideals" of the socialist party. Luise Kautsky, the wife of Karl Kautsky, for instance, also attacked Revisionism.⁶⁸ Certainly, the Party itself, composed predominately and overwhelmingly of men, was becoming a huge and well-organized bureaucracy no longer committed to urgent and instantaneous revolution.

⁶⁸ Ronald Florence, *Marx's Daughters: Eleanor Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Angelica Balabanoff* (New York: The Dial Press, 1975), 98.

Germany was a country “where women were supposed to be unassertive and uneducated when it came to politics.”⁶⁹ It was the land of the three “K’s”—Kinder (children), Kirche (church), and Küche (kitchen). Women were to produce children, be active in the church community, and spend time in the kitchen. Even amongst socialists, male chauvinism reigned supreme in the household. In his book *Rosa Luxemburg and the Noble Dream*, Donald E. Shepardson writes, “Some of Zetkin’s male comrades had no problems in extolling equalitarian socialism while acting like “little Kaisers” at home.”⁷⁰ Luxemburg, a close friend of the leader of the women’s suffrage movement, Clara Zetkin, “certainly would not tolerate any condescension from men, nor would she tolerate being a token woman any more than being a token Jew, Pole, or anything else.”⁷¹ As true as this was for Luxemburg, Shepardson goes on to claim that Luxemburg distanced herself from feminism.⁷²

Surely, at the beginning of her political allegiances Luxemburg did not associate herself with feminism. In fact, approximately twenty years before her final imprisonment she wrote to Jogiches, “I have nothing to do with the women’s movement.”⁷³ Ronald Florence writes of Luxemburg’s “disassociation” with this movement, “To work directly for the women’s movement would be to admit a certain inferiority; it would be to settle for petty politics instead of the great struggle.” He goes on, “So, despite the harsh reception she felt she had received because she was a woman..., Rosa insisted on

⁶⁹ Donald E. Shepardson, *Rosa Luxemburg and the Noble Dream* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 37.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁷¹ Ibid., 38.

⁷² Ibid., 38.

⁷³ Richard Abraham, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Life for the International* (Oxford: Berg, 1989), 51.

concentrating her activity in the theoretical and tactical struggles of the SPD.”⁷⁴ In the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, though, socialist women’s organizations began to take center stage in Germany. Women acknowledged crises facing their own gender, and they began to highlight the problems facing working women. It was during this time that the Social Democratic Party began to recognize the power of women and their movement. “[T]here was a real fear among the SPD leadership that they [radical feminists] might be more successful in mobilizing working women than the SPD.”⁷⁵ Yet Luxemburg did not associate herself as a feminist for fear of the “feminist” label overriding her association with the mass proletariat; moreover, she did not associate herself with the women’s movement because she did not want to separate the rights of women from the rights of general revolution. Marxism itself, though, speaks to the situation of working women. Marxism opposes women’s oppression in the family and in the work force. Nevertheless, socialist feminism has often been dismissed by mainstream socialist politics as it was in the early 1900’s. Luxemburg recognized the abundance of male patriarchal thought within the circles of Socialism itself. Luxemburg’s allegiance to internationalism and revolution strongly opposed the latter day reforms of the Social Democratic Party including Revisionism and centralization. Her theory of internationalism did not correspond to the theories of most of the men both outside and inside of her political circle. Instead, Luxemburg’s theories on internationalism and revolution aligned more strongly with the theories and ideals found in the women’s movement in general and within feminism in particular.

⁷⁴ Ronald Florence, *Marx’s Daughters: Eleanor Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Angelica Balabanoff* (New York: The Dial Press, 1975), 98.

⁷⁵ Richard Abraham, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Life for the International* (Oxford: Berg, 1989), 52.

Luxemburg began to plot intersections between family, community, and culture—all in relation to contemporaneous production patterns. For example, Nye writes, “Writing in support of women’s right to vote, Luxemburg identified the failure to count women’s work in the home as productive with the ‘brutality and insanity of the present capitalist economy.’ Even more striking, she noted, is the untapped potential power of masses of working women in industrial, clerical, and service work.”⁷⁶ In light of their theories, the Social Democratic Party and the Women’s movement had obviously different tactics—and Luxemburg’s ideals sided more with the contemporaneous feminist ideals. On 11 February in 1902 Luxemburg wrote to Jogiches:

For a change, after the meeting in Meerane I was stringently questioned about women’s rights and marriage. A splendid, young weaver named Hoffman, has been eagerly pursuing the question, reading Bebel, Lili Braun, and [*The*] *Gleichheit*. He’s been arguing tooth and nail with the older comrades, who insist women belong in the home and want us to fight for the abolition of factory work for women. When I agreed with him, Hoffman was triumphant! “You see,” he shouted, “authority supports me!” When one of the older men said it was a shame for a pregnant woman to work among young men in a factory, Hoffman cried: “These are perverse moral concepts! Mind you, if our Luxemburg were pregnant delivering her speech today, I’d have liked her even better!” I felt like laughing at this unexpected *dictum*, but they all took it so seriously that I had to bite my lip.⁷⁷

Oftentimes, this letter to Jogiches is used as a prominent example to support the claim that Luxemburg was uninterested in the women’s movement and that she did not align herself with radical feminists. However, this letter may be more in jest than some may

⁷⁶ Andrea Nye, *Philosophia: The Thought of Rosa Luxemburg, Simone Weil, and Hannah Arendt* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 43.

⁷⁷ *Comrade and Lover: Rosa Luxemburg’s Letters to Leo Jogiches*, ed. and trans. Elzbieta Ettinger (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1979), 124-25.

like to believe. Just five years after Luxemburg wrote the aforementioned letter to Jogiches, she participated in the International Socialist Women's Conference. There she urged the women to "keep their center for the Socialist Women's Movement in Stuttgart."⁷⁸ She also made it clear that the women must maintain their own voice, specifically via *Gleichheit*. She closed with admiration for Zetkin's work. Luxemburg was not far removed from questions of polity with regard to women nor from the women's movement in Germany in particular. Raya Dunayevskaya believes that Luxemburg was, in fact, "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."⁷⁹

By 1911 Luxemburg was voicing her spite toward male chauvinism within German Social-Democracy. In September of that year at the Social Democratic Party Congress in Jena, Luxemburg wittily remarks, "When the party executive asserts something, I would never dare not to believe it, for as a faithful party member the old saying holds for me: *Credo quia absurdum*—I believe it precisely because it is absurd."⁸⁰ By this time, male chauvinism had infiltrated the whole party. In the introduction to *Comrade and Lover: Rosa Luxemburg's Letters to Leo Jogiches*, Elzbieta Ettinger writes on Luxemburg's disgust for male centralism and her proclivity toward women in the latter part of her political career. I quote Ettinger at length:

In 1915, [Luxemburg] decided to participate in an International Women's Conference in Holland. Men, she realized, controlled the German Social Democratic Party.

⁷⁸ Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (New Jersey: Humanities Press; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981), 13.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

Under their leadership the party grew increasingly conservative, more interested in the worker's wages than in his political growth. Men held positions of power in the Socialist International and in their respective governments. Now, allying themselves with those who made wars and profited by them, they voted for war budgets. If in the past she had equated courage with manhood—"there are two men left in the party," she said back in 1907, "Clara Zetkin and I"—she now saw things differently. She would have smiled ironically at what her biographer intended as a compliment: "There was much that was *manly* about Rosa Luxemburg," he wrote, "in her keen intellect, in her boundless energy, in her dauntlessness, in her confidence and assertiveness."⁸¹

For Luxemburg, revolution and women were anything but opposites. From prison, she responds to a letter from another woman, "[S]ee to it that you stay *human*... Being human means 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."⁸² On women, Dunayevskaya writes, "Ever since the myth of Eve giving Adam the apple was created, women have been presented as devils or as angels, but definitely not as human beings."⁸³ Unlike the typical male and mythic outlook on women, Luxemburg viewed woman as human beings—full and total human beings. Indeed, Luxemburg's concept of revolution, then, came not only to include women, but the call upon women to take action and seize *the* pivotal roles in revolution and post-capitalism. Certainly, Luxemburg herself was fully and totally human—throwing herself, along with other women, "on the scales of destiny." Dunayevskaya quotes Erich Fromm at length, in a letter to friends:

⁸¹ *Comrade and Lover: Rosa Luxemburg's Letters to Leo Jogiches*, ed. and trans. Elzbieta Ettinger (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1979), xxix.

⁸² Raya Dunayevskaya, *Women's Liberation and the Dialectics of Revolution* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 260.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 20.

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 as long as there is no revolution in the sex war ending in full equality, which has never existed since pre-history. I believe she was one of the few fully developed human beings, one who showed what a human being can be in the future... Unfortunately I have known nobody who still remembers her personally. What a bad break between the generations.⁸⁴

This chapter has engaged with Rosa Luxemburg's feminist orientations. I have stated that in the early period of her political career Luxemburg did not label herself a feminist nor was she directly involved in women's issues or the women's movement. However, as time passed, she became increasingly skeptical and critical of certain Social Democratic ideals. For instance, she spoke out against both Revisionism and centralization—both of which she considered to be distinctly male in nature. During this time women in Germany were more educated and became more assertive than they had been in the past. So Luxemburg's loyalty specifically with the Social Democratic Party shifted to allegiances with proletarian women and the women's movement where she called on women to fight against international capitalist exploitation and to pursue a swift uprising. And, in 1911, Luxemburg declared herself a feminist.⁸⁵ To conclude, chapter five will address questions and concerns previously mentioned in this thesis. This chapter will specifically critique Luxemburg's stance on gender and toward women. I will also

⁸⁴ Ibid., 242.

⁸⁵ Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (New Jersey: Humanities Press; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), 95.

evaluate Luxemburg's theories with regard to our contemporary global socio-political situation.

Chapter Five: The Finale Is Never Final

Luxemburg never specifically addresses her stance on feminism or her understanding of the nature or orientation of gender. Since she is a successor of Marx, though, it is safe to say that Luxemburg's approach to the question of women aligns itself with Marxism and socialism. As a historical materialist, she does not regard women's nature and orientation as being a priori, but, instead, as being formed by the "dialectical interrelation between women's praxis, their biological constitution and their physical and social environments."⁸⁶ Luxemburg does not understand the nature of woman essentially or universally. She does not define woman from the clouds or through any ideal measure outside of the contemporaneous time and conditions. She would have agreed with Alison M. Jaggar who writes, "Thus, in order to understand women in a given society, we must examine the kinds of labor they perform, the ways in which this labor is organized, and the social relations that women form with each other and with men as a result of their labor and its mode of organization."⁸⁷ During Luxemburg's time, capitalism reigned supreme in Germany. Women's nature, according to Marxists, comes into focus through a capitalist lens. And the capitalist lens, according to Marxism, is tinted by class. Ultimately, this seems to mean that the definition of woman will be different for the bourgeois woman and for the proletarian woman.

I am sympathetic to Luxemburg's global concerns over capitalist exploitation and the rights and power of the working class to overcome oppression; at the same time, her assertions about women also raise important questions. I agree with Luxemburg's

⁸⁶ Alison M. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1983), 63.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

approach toward justice because she is not seeking an ideal understanding of justice in relation to an essentialist understanding of identity or power. Instead, she understands identity in terms of the present social and political situation of her time. In general, I find it advantageous to work within Luxemburg's historical dialectic concerning identity. Because Luxemburg does not focus on essentialist or idealist understandings of identity, she is able to address issues of identity in their particular historical frameworks. This allows her to seek power and justice in light of specific and relevant issues during her time. Subsequently, out of this, she formulates theories and political agendas to undermine capitalism. However, I wonder whether it is politically advantageous to make the strong distinction between the bourgeois woman and the proletarian woman that Luxemburg asserts. Although she does not declare it fervently, the underlying tone of Luxemburg's summons to proletarian women places bourgeois women not only in a position of ignorance but also in a position as the enemy. Luxemburg notes that few bourgeois women work and are, therefore, aware of class oppression. Yet, she does not address whether or not proletarian women and bourgeois women are able to, or ought to, form alliances. She does not address whether, or how, bourgeois women can become conscious of their own identity and position of power. If bourgeois women are educable about the realities of class oppression, it is conceivable that they could become allies of the proletarian emancipation movement.

This is significant in contemporary feminist debates. For instance, in the article "Reflections on Rosa Luxemburg by a Community Activist," Claire Cohen, an African American psychiatrist and political activist, calls into question the rigid line that Luxemburg draws between "rich" and "poor" women. She specifically focuses on the

trend whereby powerful and successful business people engage themselves and their money in social and political causes of activism. Cohen seems to argue that rich people can be involved in the plight of poor people. On behalf of the underprivileged she writes, “It seems to me that the appropriate way to proceed is to say: ‘This is the way that *we*, working class and poor blacks, have decided to conduct our struggle. These are our issues and goals and methods. If you feel comfortable with that, if you want to give money to that, fine.’”⁸⁸ I agree with Cohen that Luxemburg does not adequately address the dichotomy she marks out between bourgeois women and proletarian women. At the same time, however, Cohen herself does not fundamentally address Luxemburg’s concern. The rich cannot simply give money to poor causes and assume or expect change to occur. Although contributing money to certain causes may aid in research and related costs (covering advertisements, pamphlet distribution, etc.), it does not address the underlying paradigm that forces the better part of the world’s population into exploitation and deplorable living conditions.

Andrea Nye believes that Luxemburg’s appeal to the power-force of women provides socialists a “moral compass” toward proletarian emancipation and toward an adequately sustainable and just socio-political foundation. Nye comments as follows on Luxemburg’s call for feminist and global (inter)action on behalf of growing oppressed masses:

The stimulant that might motivate such thought is no longer likely to be the oppression of male industrial workers or the suffering of middle class women in industrial countries, real as that suffering may be, but the global effects of

⁸⁸ Claire Cohen, “Reflections on Rosa Luxemburg by a Community Activist,” in *Rosa Luxemburg: Reflections and Writings*, ed. Paul Le Blanc (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), 119.

capitalist expansion: violent conflict in developing countries between indigent rural populations and wealthy elites in alliance with foreign capitalists, disputes over essential resources such as oil, environmental collapse, the unrestrained marketing of drugs and arms, the almost universal unwillingness to tolerate women in positions of power. International movements, action groups, federations that form around these issues might be the source and the training ground for a new, mass, global, feminist politics.⁸⁹

According to Luxemburg, although power was caught up in the bourgeois system of capitalism, power was also being assumed amongst, and creeping out of, the proletariat. The proletariat's power was motivated by the reality of mass and global oppression. Out of observation and involvement in women's movements, Luxemburg experienced that non-oppressive unity can be generated. Unlike the autonomous and selfish bourgeois woman, proletarian women have the ability to act as social agents. For Luxemburg, then, power is not a state of being in hierarchical control; instead, power is the manifestation of influence and authority over one's own and mass self-determination while regarding human rights.

Social identification is crucial to power and justice. Luxemburg did not arbitrarily appeal to proletarian women. She appealed to these women because they were able to recognize their own oppression and the oppression of others (including women throughout the world). Her association with Zetkin and the women's movement was not merely about suffrage. Luxemburg believed that the struggle for full emancipation for women related directly to emancipation from the evils of capitalism itself. In the early twentieth century, women played an important role in fighting the forces of capitalism--including the malevolent forces of oppression, militarism, and war. To be sure, the

⁸⁹ Andrea Nye, "Luxemburg and Socialist Feminism," in *Rosa Luxemburg: Reflections and Writings*, ed. Paul Le Blanc (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), 107.

statistics of women involved in social and political activism at the time of the declaration of World War I speaks on behalf of dedicated feminists:

By then there were 210,314 women workers in the Free Trade Unions and no less than 175,000 women belonged to the SPD. The circulation of *Gleichheit* had jumped to 125,000 and the antiwar work of the women went on not only nationally but internationally. Indeed, the first international antiwar conference was organized by women. It was to be held in Holland in early March and Luxemburg was to accompany Zetkin to make the final arrangements, but on 18 February 1915, the evening before their planned departure, Luxemburg was thrown into jail.

Still:

The tremendous antiwar activity, which had to be carried on illegally, did not stop even after Zetkin, too, was arrested in August. Early in 1915 the chauvinist SPD leadership had been made to realize that they had to reckon with the mass opposition of revolutionary women.⁹⁰

Hence, women that are *truly* conscious of social exploitation of certain groups, such as the poor working class, are less likely to give money to a cause while only half-heartedly investing in a cause. A paradigm shift from mass exploitation toward justice does not come from false empathy or surplus monetary donations. Such “alliances” are at best misleading, and at worst insincere. Norman Geras sums up Luxemburg’s concern for genuine socio-political engagement when he writes, “[S]he insisted that, in order to build socialism, the masses would have first to explode through that very framework of *bourgeois*-democratic institutions...”⁹¹ So, although I sympathize with Cohen’s concern that Luxemburg does not give bourgeois women enough credit concerning their own identity consciousness, Luxemburg correctly recognized that the majority of bourgeois

⁹⁰ Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation, and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution* (New Jersey: Humanities Press; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), 96.

⁹¹ Norman Geras, *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg* (London: NLB, 1976), 160.

women were psychologically affected by the capitalist system in such a way that they were not prepared to engage in urgent revolution.

Contemporary society faces a similar situation in relation to justice. If we understand justice as Luxemburg does--as the working out of human rights--then we must take seriously her stance against capitalist bureaucratic formalism. Exploitation will not be overcome via the funds of the rich. Moreover, the “voices” of the rich will not overcome the deep-seated vices exhibited in the established system of capitalism. At the same time, though, there is no distinct line between a bourgeois class and a proletariat class anymore. In North America a large gap remains between the few rich and the greater poor, but there is a sizeable middle class as well. In addition, throughout the world, there is a clear distinction between first-world and third-world countries. But, this distinction cannot any longer be blamed on the “bourgeois” alone. In the capitalist market, low-income peoples, middle-class peoples, and high-income peoples all play a role in what is bought and sold. Therefore, the great majority of buyers in the capitalist system are responsible for playing a role in maintaining a system that thrives on exploitation.

Bronner recognizes Luxemburg’s contribution to the idea that exploitation is an overarching issue to be faced and challenged by those who are being exploited and by those who are conscious of their role in oppression. He writes, “In Luxemburg’s view, everything that stands in the way of the masses’ attempts to control their own destiny needs to be specified and overcome. But she also realized that insofar as the mass must exercise power, it must simultaneously *learn* to exercise it. Clearly this must be done through politics, through participating in the development of an organisation that is

dedicated to building the masses' recognition of their own creative powers and their own potential for control."⁹² It seems to me, then, that people amongst different classes are able to play an active role in the fight against exploitation. However, it should not be assumed that because empathetic words are spoken on behalf of the exploited, or, because money is given to various causes, that those speaking and contributing money identify themselves and their power in a justifiable way. It is obvious that, still, today, exploitation is not being overcome on a wide scale. Therefore, Luxemburg's appeal to overthrow the system of capitalism in return for human rights and in the name of justice remains valid.

Luxemburg's socialist appeals remain valid in our current world order. More than ever, we continually feel and foster the negative effects of capitalism on a local and global scale. For example, in his book *The New Imperialism*, David Harvey points to the United States as the contemporary apex of capitalist imperialism. The U.S. has advanced the rapid growth of capital accumulation by way of international trade and international economics. What comes along with a continual accumulation of capital though is the continual accumulation of power. The "free world's" international structure of "free trade" for economic development is a hegemonic force. If "the accumulation of power must necessarily accompany the accumulation of capital then bourgeois history must be a history of hegemonies expressive of ever larger and continuously more expansive power."⁹³ As Luxemburg points out in *The Accumulation of Capital*, there must be consumers of capital outside of the capitalist and the laborer. Harvey maintains that

⁹² Stephen Eric Bronner, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Revolutionary for Our Times* (London: Pluto Press, 1981), 108.

⁹³ David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 34.

capital exchange always involves human interaction, which entails geography. Capitalist activity takes place between intersecting locations. “Driven by competition, individual capitalists seek competitive advantages within this spatial structure and therefore tend to be drawn or impelled to move to those locations where costs are lower or profit rates higher.”⁹⁴ This means that development, that is, geographical and economic development, is always uneven. To be sure, dissimilar development in different social and cultural communities per se is not unscrupulous, and, certainly, is not our concern. However, when capitalistic powers geographically and economically invade territories and lives, this affects social and cultural wellbeing, oftentimes in a negative way. For example, overaccumulation, as it occurs in our contemporary world, creates a surplus of labor and a surplus of capital. Surplus of labor causes rising unemployment, whereas surplus of capital causes commodities to be disposed of at a loss and causes money to lack outlets for productive investments. Additionally, asymmetrical exchange leaves surplus value in the hands of the few while leaving the majority of the population behind. Even under the best of economic conditions, free trade gives rise to imperial monopolistic competition at the hands of hegemonic capitalist powers.

The global trading system, instead of allowing for balanced rights and privileges, is an unfair system that degrades the already poor. For instance, conditions of employment in third-world countries fully deserve contempt. The statistics in the Oxfam report and the “Make Trade Fair” campaign confirm that stronger capitalist nations are taking advantage of underdeveloped countries. Cotton, for instance, is bought at very cheap rates from third-world countries, manufactured into clothing at cheap rates in the

⁹⁴ Ibid., 94.

third-world countries, and then sold at expensive prices in first-world countries. Third-world countries are at a huge disadvantage when it comes to their specific exports. The gap between the rich and the poor, the capitalists and the proletariat, is striking: “In the 1990s, rich countries increased the per capita value of their exports by \$1938, compared with \$51 for low-income countries and \$98 for middle-income countries.”⁹⁵ Yet, 128 million people could be lifted from poverty status if Africa, East Asia, South Asia, and Latin America were able to increase their exports by just 1 percent.⁹⁶ In line with Luxemburg’s theories and Harvey’s thoughts, the Oxfam trade campaign report reveals:

Increased interdependence has implications for the rich world as well as for the poor world. For much of history, trade has been an exercise in exploitation. The world’s richest countries have used it as a means of transferring wealth from the world’s poorest countries, whether through outright plunder or unequal exchange. Mass poverty in developing countries inevitably accompanied the growth of their exports. But in the interdependent world of today, mass poverty in the midst of plenty is not a sustainable option. The prosperity of any one country is linked to the prosperity of all. We sink or swim together.⁹⁷

The contemporary political philosopher Nancy Fraser affirms socialism and the sort of post-capitalist world that Luxemburg envisioned. In our current world, a world without second-world countries and a world after the Cold War, Fraser defines the postsocialist condition as “an absence of any credible overarching emancipatory project despite the proliferation of fronts of struggle; a general decoupling of the cultural politics of recognition from the social politics of redistribution; and a decentering of claims for

⁹⁵ *Rigged Rules and Double Standards: Trade, Globalisation, and the Fight Against Poverty* (Oxford: Oxfam, 2002), 12.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

equality in the face of aggressive marketization and sharply rising material inequality.”⁹⁸ She characterizes the postsocialist condition by a dearth of utopian vision, a change in the language concerning policy whereby cultural politics overshadows social politics, and a “resurgent economic liberalism.”⁹⁹ Distrusting comprehensive and normative thinking, the postsocialist mindset creates a lack of plausible and progressive social theories. It discredits the problem of justice in terms of redistribution and shifts the problem of justice to terms of recognition, thereby forming a dichotomous ideology. This condition harbors injustices formed in “institutionalized patterns of value”¹⁰⁰ thereby fostering a capitalism that cultivates and intensifies material inequality while “worsening the life-chances of billions.”¹⁰¹

Today’s capitalist system assumes and sustains hierarchical oppositions such as “masculine/feminine, public/private, work/care, success/love, individual/community, economy/family, and competitive/self-sacrificing.”¹⁰² This structure fosters socio-economic and cultural injustices oriented in “social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication.”¹⁰³ Fraser describes capitalist discourse as dichotomous, and she claims that this sort of dichotomous understanding fosters injustices because they paint a black and white picture of the socio-economic structure. Luxemburg, an anti-capitalist, seems to speak in similar dichotomous terms.

⁹⁸ Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the “Postsocialist” Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 3.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003), 212.

¹⁰¹ Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the “Postsocialist” Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 3.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 14.

Luxemburg's discourse regarding bourgeois women and proletarian women bears a striking resemblance to Fraser's notion of dichotomous capitalist discourse. Luxemburg's discourse paints bourgeois women as little devils and proletarian women as little angels. Bourgeois women become the enemy and proletarian women are asked to become the redeemers. Although Luxemburg was a passionate advocate for socialism and human rights, her dichotomous discourse follows in line with a dichotomous capitalist discourse—a discourse that fosters the split between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots, those that can and those that cannot. Therefore, it is worth pursuing Fraser's conception of a discourse that engages in emancipatory questions, critique, and participation. Such a conception of discourse ought to be able to identify how people's social characteristics and distinctions take shape and change throughout time; how collective agents that effect and are affected by inequality acquire and lose their identities; how hegemonic factions are secured and disputed; and how “emancipatory social change and political practice” may be envisioned and inaugurated.¹⁰⁴ This kind of discourse anticipates dialogue concerning redistribution and recognition in light of historically, culturally, and pluralistically situated societies.

Fraser contends that because interests concerning “struggles over distribution” and interests today concerning “struggles for recognition”¹⁰⁵ are both relevant with regard to justice, “the best of socialism” must not be overlooked and must, instead, be appreciated and integrated.¹⁰⁶ She is aware that, oftentimes, the policies surrounding

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 152.

¹⁰⁵ Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003), 2.

¹⁰⁶ Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the “Postsocialist” Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 4.

recognition do not jibe with the policies surrounding redistribution; the former tend to endorse group differentiation while the latter are apt to undermine it. However, the apparent conflicts between injustices of recognition and injustices of redistribution are merely analytical. In our day-to-day practices the two intermingle. To manage this tension, Fraser suggests, “Feminists must pursue political-economic remedies that would undermine gender differentiation, while also pursuing cultural-valuational remedies that valorize the specificity of a despised collectivity.”¹⁰⁷

We can evaluate redistribution and recognition in terms of affirmation and transformation. According to Fraser, affirmation refers to “remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them,” and transformation refers to “remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework.”¹⁰⁸ Redistribution/affirmation represents the liberal that prefers surface reallocations of commodities to already existing groups; redistribution/transformation represents socialism, which focuses on profound restructuring of manufacturing relations; recognition/affirmation represents mainstream multiculturalism, which emphasizes surface reallocations of deference to already existing identities; and, recognition/transformation represents deconstruction, which aims at profound restructuring of recognition relations.¹⁰⁹

Here we see parallels between Fraser’s concepts of affirmation and transformation and the debate between Revisionism and revolution, respectively. Like the supporters of

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 27.

affirmation practices, the supporters of Revisionism believed that exploitation could be overturned within the already existing socio-economic system, within capitalism itself. Given time, through reform, exploitative practices will change into just practices. But how long must the exploited bow down at the feet of the capitalist gods? How long must the exploited wait to be set free? How long until the capitalist anti-Christ's eyes are opened and justice reigns supreme? Luxemburg's criticisms toward the theory of Revisionism are enlightening. Like Fraser, she did not believe that slow revision and affirmation alone would suffice to overturn unjust practices. Luxemburg's anti-Revisionism and Fraser's theory of transformation are similar at the socio-economic level, where both give priority and urgency to radical structural change. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, Luxemburg does not give adequate consideration sociological and cultural concerns. Fraser supports a philosophical and political direction that amalgamates transformative redistribution and transformative recognition.¹¹⁰ Consider the issues of gender. Transformative redistribution has roots in socialist thought. It aims to acknowledge and rectify gender injustices as they participate in, affect, and are affected by the economic realm. Similarly, transformative recognition promotes long-term deconstructive goals wherein hierarchical dichotomies, such as those present in society concerning gender, "are replaced by networks of multiple intersecting differences that are demassified and shifting."¹¹¹ Therefore, Fraser asserts that, "the scenario that best finesses the redistribution-recognition dilemma is socialism in the economy plus

¹¹⁰ For Fraser's description of the problematic concerning affirmative redistribution and affirmative recognition, see Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 23-31.

¹¹¹ Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 31.

deconstruction in the culture.”¹¹² Fraser’s contemporary theories align with Luxemburg’s early 20th century concerns.

To our local and global woe, though, the revolution that Luxemburg so willfully hoped for and worked for did not bear fruit. Moreover, a post-capitalist society did not beget itself within our midst, nor did our ancestors usher it in. Indeed, women gained suffrage, and throughout the decades they have gained more and more rights within the political system. Still, we must not continue to forsake ourselves, our sisters, our brothers, our children, our children’s children. Ultimately, Luxemburg’s socio-political theories and ideals did not line-up with the views of the men within the SPD. Instead, Luxemburg called out to the people that she believed were listening and to the people that she believed could bring about revolution and usher in post-capitalism—Luxemburg called out to all proletarians and to women. Perhaps, then, Luxemburg was truly the first socialist feminist. Without a doubt, she was a socialist. And, although many historians and her own biographer claim that she was not a feminist and did not partake in the fight for the plight of women, Luxemburg speaks for herself, “Just imagine, I have become a feminist!”¹¹³

Our socio-political paradigm has shifted in the past hundred years. Today, for example, Western countries do not experience the extreme nationalism that Luxemburg refuted; North Americans do not have direct exposure to the oppression of women around the world; and there is no longer a simple dichotomy between the intentions of a

¹¹² Ibid., 31.

¹¹³ In 1911 Luxemburg wrote this in a letter to Luise Kautsky; in the same letter, and, also, in a prior 1907 letter, Luxemburg asks Kautsky to remain an active participant in the women’s movement. Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation, and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution* (New Jersey: Humanities Press; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), 95.

bourgeois class and a proletariat class. Yet the plight of the exploited remains. Our globalized world, thanks to mass communication, gives us access to knowledge and information that reveals severe exploitation suffered at the hands of capitalism. So we face an indeterminate future that continually calls for action toward justice. Feminists of all classes must recognize their role in the capitalist system. We must each take responsibility for the role that we play in a system that is ultimately corrupt. We face similar realities to those which Luxemburg faced. As feminists, that is, as ardent supporters of human rights, we must orient ourselves, as Luxemburg did, toward interpreting, understanding, and vehemently opposing exploitation. We must fervently seek justice.

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