



CHAPTER 10

.....

ROSA LUXEMBURG

(1871–1919)

.....

LYDIA PATTON

ROSA Luxemburg was a Polish socialist activist, political theorist, and political economist. Her life, spent in sympathy with workers' struggles, has been romanticized, and her controversial, pioneering work has been revived repeatedly.¹ Themes of her political theory include:

- The capitalist state as an expression of class antagonism, versus natural, cooperative economies characteristic of preindustrial forms of social organization
- The accumulation of capital as an imperative of the capitalist state and as a motivation for imperialism and colonial exploitation
- Rejection of the view that gradual reform of the capitalist state could serve the people's interests, and a spirited defense of a proletarian revolution

Luxemburg's work was revived as part of the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s,² and has enduring importance to anticolonial and antiimperialist thought. And Luxemburg's work is a significant expression of the Marxist tradition in philosophy.

This essay will first present a vignette of Luxemburg's life and work, referring to classic and recent biographies. Following that, section 3 examines concepts of the state and nation in Hegel, Marx, Engels, and Lenin. The subject of section 4 is Luxemburg's substantial work of political economy, *The Accumulation of Capital*. It is a most significant achievement, analyzing the contradictions of the capitalist state and its role in driving imperialist expansion and colonialism. Section 5 traces how Luxemburg's political economy in *Accumulation* underwrites her interventions in the heated debates over

¹ See Peter Hudis and Kevin Anderson, eds., *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), for an edited selection of Luxemburg's work.

² See Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991).



Polish independence. And section 6 concludes with remarks on Luxemburg’s significance for philosophy and political thought.

1 LIFE

Rosa Luxemburg was instrumental in the founding of the revolutionary Polish Socialist Party, called the Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland (SDKPL), of the German Communist Party (with Karl Liebknecht), and of the Social Democratic Party in Germany. She led workers’ strikes, published extensively in the popular and socialist press, participated in multiple Internationals of the Socialist Party, and took part in the week-long Spartacist uprising in Germany that began on January 5, 1919. Luxemburg published academic works in political economy, philosophy, and socialist theory. She was imprisoned repeatedly and, later, brutally murdered in response to her political activity.

Luxemburg’s short life is so exciting that it has been retold many times, and she has experienced several revivals, one of which is currently under way.³ In the 1960s, interest in Luxemburg was revived as part of the first wave of Western feminism, which prompted reexaminations of her own work and of her collaborations and friendship with Clara Zetkin.⁴

Paul Buhle notes that Luxemburg’s affinity for Trotsky, and her debates with Lenin and Marx, led to her denunciation under Stalin.⁵ Some European thinkers who supported reform (but not overthrow) of capitalist institutions mistook her for a historical ally, in consequence. She was a controversial figure in life, debating the leaders of communist and socialist movements of Russia, Germany, and Poland. It is no surprise, then, that after her death others inside and outside the socialist movement took the opportunity to tell misleading stories about her views and life.⁶ “Myths and misrepresentations,” as

³ In 1959, Tony Cliff published a pamphlet on Luxemburg’s life: “Rosa Luxemburg: A Life of Struggle”. The pamphlet was reprinted in *Socialist Review* (January 2009). Link: <https://socialistworker.co.uk/socialist-review-archive/rosa-luxemburg-life-struggle/>.

⁴ More on this history can be found in Dunayevskaya, *Women’s Liberation*. J. P. Nettl published a biography of Luxemburg in 1966, and in the 1980s another well-known account of her life was contributed by Elzbieta Ettinger. Linda Edmondson, “Lives of Rosa Luxemburg,” *Revolutionary Russia* 2, no. 2 (1989): 35–44, is a review of biographies available until the mid-1980s. Recently, in 2020, Dana Mills published a new biography of Luxemburg, and in 2019 Nettl’s biography was reissued by Verso. Kate Evans published a detailed graphic novel of Luxemburg’s life in 2015, *Red Rosa* (London: Verso Books, 2015), with an afterword by historian Paul Buhle.

⁵ Paul Buhle, afterword to Evans, *Red Rosa*, 215–219.

⁶ In Linda Edmondson’s view, the publication of J. P. Nettl’s well-known biography of Luxemburg in 1966 came at an “opportune moment,” when the “Stalinist stranglehold on Marxist thought had been loosened, allowing new (or old and repressed) ideas of a democratic Marxism to surface for the first time since the 1920s” (“Lives,” 1989, 35).

one scholar puts it, have “been Rosa Luxemburg’s fate almost from the moment of her death.”⁷

Rosa Luxemburg was born in Poland on March 5, 1871. Around 1886, she joined the Polish revolutionary party Proletariat and began participating in its political activities.⁸ By 1889 “the police had caught up with her,” and she emigrated to Switzerland. Despite her exile, Luxemburg quickly became “the theoretical leader of the revolutionary socialist party of Poland”, first called Proletariat and then the SDKPL.⁹ The paper of the SDKPL, *Sprawa Robotnicza*, was a major outlet for her work.

In August 1893, at the age of twenty-two, Luxemburg attended the Congress of the Socialist International as the representative of the SDKPL. There were two Polish socialist parties in attendance: the SDKPL and the rival Polish Socialist Party (PPS), “whose main plank was the independence of Poland.” The PPS had historically had the support of “all the experienced elders of international socialism,” including even Engels, who, with Marx, had earlier made Polish independence a key part of the platform of the German Communist Party.¹⁰ The twenty-two-year-old Luxemburg stood up to the PPS, arguing against the independence of Poland on the strongest terms. She “struck out at the PPS, accusing it of clear nationalistic tendencies and a proneness to diverting the workers from the path of class struggle; and she dared to take a different position to the old masters and oppose the slogan of independence for Poland. Her adversaries heaped abuse on her, some of them, like the veteran disciple and friend of Marx and Engels, Wilhelm Liebknecht, going so far as to accuse her of being an agent of the Tsarist secret police. But she stuck to her point.”¹¹ During the debates, Luxemburg cited Marx’s own arguments and analyses in making critical points against his earlier support for the PPS. Throughout her life, Luxemburg argued against nationalism as a distraction from class struggle, and against populism as a basis for nationalism. Luxemburg’s arguments regarding nationalism are inseparable from her economic, sociopolitical, and class analysis.

Luxemburg is best described as a socialist activist, political theorist, and political economist, who begins within a largely Marxist framework, but who, by the end of her career, defines her own sphere of influence. Luxemburg took on most of the orthodox Russian Marxist thinkers of the time, arguing that their interpretations of Marx were retrograde or misguided, including Vasily Vorontsov (*Accumulation*, chap. 19) and Nikolai Frantsevich Danielson, who went by the name “Nikolayon” (*Accumulation*, chap. 20).¹²

⁷ Edmondson, “Lives,” 35.

⁸ Proletariat was “founded in 1882, some 21 years before the Russian Social Democratic Party (Bolsheviks and Mensheviks) came into being” (Cliff, “Rosa Luxemburg.”)

⁹ Cliff, “Rosa Luxemburg.”

¹⁰ Cliff, “Rosa Luxemburg.”

¹¹ Cliff, “Rosa Luxemburg.”

¹² Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, trans. Agnes Schwarzschild (London: Routledge, 1951; reprint, New York: Monthly Review), 2. Hereafter *Accumulation* in the text.

In 1903–1904 she entered into a debate with Lenin “on the national question, and on the conception of party structure, and the relation between the party and the activity of the masses.”¹³ In many ways, however, she was sympathetic with Lenin’s position and with the Bolshevik split from the more moderate elements in the Communist Party.¹⁴

After her key role along with Karl Liebknecht in the formation of the German Communist Party (following a split with the German Socialist Party when they failed to oppose World War I), Luxemburg spent several years in prison during the 1910s, and was freed only on November 8, 1918. She joined in the Spartacist revolution with “all her energy and enthusiasm,” but “unfortunately the forces of reaction were strong. Right wing Social Democratic leaders and generals of the old Kaiser’s army joined forces to suppress the revolutionary working class. Thousands of workers were murdered; on 15 January 1919 Karl Liebknecht was killed; on the same day a soldier’s rifle butt smashed into Rosa Luxemburg’s skull.”¹⁵ The reception of Luxemburg’s thought after her death is tied closely to the fate of the Soviet Socialist Republics—in both positive and negative ways. Luxemburg was denounced under Stalin for Trotskyism. Her work was revived in so-called Eastern Bloc countries and in the West in the 1960s. But revivals of her work have been undermined, to an extent, by suppression of socialist research. To understand Luxemburg, one must understand socialist thinking, which has been kept alive only sporadically in the academic context. Marx and Marxist thought were leading strains of philosophical research in East German and Eastern European academia between the 1960s and 1991. But after 1991, many East German philosophy departments were emptied of socialist, including Marxist, philosophers and replaced with analytic philosophers from the West.¹⁶

Whatever one’s political views are, this is unfortunate given the historical importance of socialist thought. The eroding away of competence in socialist thought and history would have undermined our ability to understand some of the most influential thinkers in history. But that erosion did not happen—or, at least, not as completely as it could have. In the German tradition, the Frankfurt School, and later thinkers including Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas, were an important conduit to socialist

¹³ Cliff, “Rosa Luxemburg.”

¹⁴ “When the October Revolution broke out, Luxemburg welcomed it enthusiastically, praising it in the highest terms. At the same time, she did not believe that uncritical acceptance of everything the Bolsheviks did would be of service to the labour movement” (Cliff, “Rosa Luxemburg”).

¹⁵ Cliff, “Rosa Luxemburg.”

¹⁶ See Ulrich Schneider, “The Situation of Philosophy, the Culture of the Philosophers: Philosophy in the New Germany,” *Social Research* 64, no. 2 (Summer 1997), 281–300. In addition to the evidence presented in Schneider’s article, I heard the same in conversation, during an unofficial visit of several months to a department in the former Deutsche Demokratische Republik in 2001. On the question of the entwined fates of academic philosophy, McCarthyism, and the Cold War in the USA, see John McCumber, *Time in the Ditch* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), and George Reisch, *How the Cold War Transformed Philosophy of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). I am grateful to Dalia Nassar for guidance on this subject.



thought and to Marx in particular, presented in a form that was acceptable to Western philosophers.¹⁷

However, the radical tradition of socialism to which Luxemburg belongs was kept alive in a different way. Here the history of thought owes a crucial debt to anticolonial, feminist, and radical traditions of research. Anticolonial and radical thinkers including Angela Davis,¹⁸ C. L. R. James,¹⁹ and Cedric Robinson (*Black Marxism*) kept the study of socialist thought alive in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and their influence and popularity helped to maintain that study into the 1990s and up to the present day.²⁰

Luxemburg's relationship to anticolonial thought is complex. She is a potential ally of anticolonialism because of her insight that the capitalist desire for increasing accumulation drives imperialist conquest.²¹ But she is also criticized for belonging to the tradition which sees certain nations (especially Germany and Russia) as central to socialist history and progress, giving less attention to the rest of the world.²² Her positions on the independence of Poland are closely linked to her views on the relative importance of Germany and Russia to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

Rosa Luxemburg's views on "the national question" are relevant, not just to the renewed assessment of her work and its impact, but to her relationship to contemporary currents in political thought, especially antiimperialist thought and international socialism. The sections that follow will, first, present the analysis of states and nations found in Marx, and then Luxemburg's analysis of imperialism as arising from the capitalist drive for accumulation of surplus value. Following that, Luxemburg's analysis will be related to her criticism of the Polish independence movement, which put her at odds with Socialist Party leadership of the time.

¹⁷ Habermas sometimes is seen as part of the tradition of "analytical Marxism" that also includes G. A. Cohen and John Roemer.

¹⁸ Angela Y. Davis, "Marcuse's Legacies," in *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader*, ed. John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb (New York: Routledge, 2004), 43–50, and *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, ed. Joy James (Hoboken: Wiley, 1998).

¹⁹ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938); *World Revolution, 1917–1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1937).

²⁰ Movements like Science for the People, which were influential in the formation of Science and Technology Studies as a field, have also helped to maintain engagement with socialist thinking in the scientific context. See Sigrid Schmalzer, Alyssa Botelho, and Daniel Chard, eds., *Science for the People: Documents from America's Movement of Radical Scientists* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018).

²¹ See, e.g., Hannah Holleman, *Dust Bowls of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 64–65. More contemporary perspectives often reverse Luxemburg's arrow of causation, arguing that colonialism and settler occupation is a necessary condition for capitalist expansion and the more fundamental of the two. See, e.g., Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, No. 1 (2012): 1–40. Thanks are due to Dalia Nassar for reference to this significant work.

²² Those sympathetic to Luxemburg also cite this, as it is a clear conclusion to be drawn from her work. Cedric Robinson criticizes this tendency in Luxemburg, as it lays aside the revolutionary potential of nations beyond her analysis. *Black Marxism* (London: Zed Books, 1983; reprint, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 62–65.



2 THE STATE AND THE NATION IN MARXIST THOUGHT

It is well known that Marx's early thought was developed in conversation with the Young Hegelians, but also that that conversation led to his significant departure from the Hegelian tradition, especially in his conception of the state. Still, Marx's view can be seen as a further development away from Kant's idealist position regarding moral agency, in a way inspired by Hegel's own criticisms of, and amendments to, the Kantian position. Kant's Kingdom of Ends (*Reich der Zwecke*) rests on the idea that moral agents are self-legislating and autonomous, and thus that the only true law is the moral law.

In the Kantian and Hegelian traditions, the state can embody the moral law and promote individual freedom, and thus is not (necessarily) coercive. In the Marxist tradition, the state is an enemy of freedom, a bureaucratic machine that serves the capitalist ends of exploitation and maintains class antagonisms. (The *nation*, however, may embody the will of the people.)

Hegel's political theory is grounded, as are Rousseau's and Kant's, on the community of autonomous subjects.²³ But Hegel's analysis of the relationship between the individual and the state is quite different. As Lydia Moland notes, "Hegel's description of the citizen's disposition aims first of all, then, to identify what must be true both of the state and of the individual's perception of the state in order to allow the citizen to be at home in his actions," that is, not to be alienated from the state even when following its laws.²⁴ When the state's laws are seen, not as "external and imposed," but as part of the individual's own agency, the citizen develops an "ideal political disposition," which "combines insistence that the state cultivate its citizens' individuality with the requirement that individuals modify their self-interest for the good of the state. When the citizen and the state mutually recognize each other, the citizen can see the laws of the state as his own and so be at home in them."²⁵ It is fundamental to Hegel's political—and even his ethical—philosophy that the ethical-political subject should recognize the state as a legitimate actor and should even make the state's interests her own. The ethical subject is essentially a citizen of a state, and her freedom rests on the existence of that state: "Hegel's definition of patriotism makes it clear that this disposition is built on the mutual recognition that is the foundation of Hegel's ethical philosophy. In order for the individual to develop the disposition Hegel describes, he must recognize the state and,

²³ The classic text is G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820), ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

²⁴ Lydia Moland, *Hegel on Political Identity: Patriotism, Nationality, Cosmopolitanism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 47.

²⁵ Moland, *Hegel on Political Identity*, 47.



just as importantly, he must know that he, as an individual with rights and interests, is recognized by the state.”²⁶ The state must recognize its citizens as free agents, and the individual must see the state as taking action to “promote his freedom.”²⁷ This “mutual recognition” between the individual and the state comes about when the state is seen as acting in line with the individual’s agency, not as imposing external sanctions from an alien perspective.²⁸

For Hegel, as for Kant, true freedom requires, not only recognition of a law valid for oneself, but recognition of the law as binding on—and protecting the freedom of—all rational agents. In the Kantian and Hegelian accounts, the role of the ideal state is not restricted to wielding power. This can be contrasted to Hobbes’s “Naturall force” in *Leviathan*, where the state imposes authority as a father does on a family. The Kantian and Hegelian ideal state is more like a Hobbesian “Common-wealth by Institution,” where the state is an “Artificial Man” designed to protect the actions and interests of its citizens.²⁹

Hobbes arguably recognizes individual agency independently of the state (although life outside the state is, he famously notes, “nasty, poor, brutish, and short”). In contrast, Hegel argues that individual agency and freedom develop only in interaction with other rational subjects and with institutions. But what is the essence of free subjectivity for Hegel, if it requires engagement with agents and structures outside the subject to develop in the first place? Human subjectivity requires interaction with other human subjects: humans are essentially social beings whose agency develops in and through recognition of others’ agency. To Hegel and Kant, the ideal state recognizes the agency of each rational being. The structures that enable mutual recognition include the moral law and legislation as part of the moral community.

Marx’s political theory begins from his recognition of the essence of human existence as part of a “collectivity,” and “the primary form of human collectivity is the species [Gattung], or, more specifically, the species-being [Gattungswesen].”³⁰ The essence of the human species is our ability to engage with nature, to change it and to interact with it through labor.³¹ For Marx, the development of capitalism results in the alienation of the

²⁶ Moland, *Hegel on Political Identity*, 53. Moland cites Hegel here: “as a result, this other immediately ceases to be an other for me, and in my consciousness of this, I am free” (Hegel, *Elements of Philosophy of Right*, §268).

²⁷ Moland, *Hegel on Political Identity*, 53.

²⁸ “Ideally . . . the citizen does not look at the state as an external power imposing laws and sanctions. He instead understands the institutions and procedures that govern the state and, in recognizing that they are designed to promote his freedom, does not view them as an imposition” (Moland, *Hegel on Political Identity*, 53).

²⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, Parts I and II* (1651), ed. A. P. Martinich and Brian Battiste, rev. ed. (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2010), 18.

³⁰ “There is a fundamental continuity in Marx’s writings deriving from his philosophical position as an Hegelian and Feuerbachian.” Joseph Petrus, “Marx and Engels on the National Question,” *Journal of Politics* 33, no. 3 (1971): 800. See also David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx’s Capital: The Complete Edition* (London: Verso Books, 2018), 114–117.

³¹ Harvey, *Companion*, 114, 175.

laborer from nature and from his own labor.³² The marketplace destroys mutual recognition: “in the marketplace, people relate to one another not as people but as buyers and sellers of things.”³³ Capitalists have the aim of accumulating surplus value from the labor of workers.³⁴ A capitalist nation is oppressive in its essence since it supports the upper classes in their project of extracting and accumulating surplus value from nature and from people.

Marx argues that global communism resolves the conflict between the interests of the state and those of the people: “the teleological development of history leads towards the re-establishment of the species on a higher plane of existence, and the overcoming of alienation and divisions. Universal, cosmopolitan society, on the highest level of global communism, will be without the divisions and conflicts between such secondary forms of human existence as distinct social systems, classes, nationalities, nations, and states.”³⁵ Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote “The German Ideology” in 1845 and 1846, a work critical of the “Young Hegelians,” who reduced every conflict to contradictions produced by “consciousness,” or to a contradiction found in the religious outlook (pt. 1, A). Marx and Engels characteristically respond that the conflicts facing Germans are, instead, to be found in the material conditions in which they find themselves: in particular, in the conditions of human labor and production (pt. 1, A). Some Hegelians argue that freedom is found by seeing the state as an extension of one’s own conscious moral agency. Marx and Engels argue here that human freedom is found in global organization under communism. In “The German Ideology,” “one finds . . . explicit references to the ultimate universalism to be attained under global communism. Before the final resolution of the antagonism between men, civil society expresses itself in separatism and organizes itself vis-à-vis other peoples as discrete nationalities. It organizes itself internally in the form of the state.”³⁶ Organization into particular states or nations will always separate workers from each other and set up artificial differences between their material needs and conditions of labor.

Socialist thinkers differed in their analyses of what would happen as workers began to organize and revolt. Lenin contributes a famous analysis in *The State and Revolution* (1917). Engels had argued against the Hegelian notion that the state is “the reality of the ethical idea,” “the image and reality of reason.” Instead, Engels argues, the state

is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, these classes with conflicting economic interests, might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have a

³² See, e.g., Harvey, *Companion*, chap. 4.

³³ Harvey, *Companion*, 112.

³⁴ Harvey, *Companion*, chap. 10.

³⁵ Petrus, “Marx and Engels,” 800.

³⁶ Petrus, “Marx and Engels,” 800.

power, seemingly standing above society, that would alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of “order”; and this power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state.³⁷

Lenin cites the foregoing passage approvingly in *The State and Revolution* (1917), noting that “the state is a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms. The state arises where, when and insofar as class antagonism objectively cannot be reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable.”³⁸ The “contradictions” cited by Engels and Lenin are *class* conflicts within society: conflicts arising from the material exploitation of the people who do the labor (the working class) by those who accumulate surplus value from that labor (the capitalist class). The state has been mistakenly seen as a way to mediate those conflicts (*State and Revolution*, chap. 1 §1), but the presence of a state is instead an indication that class conflict is present.

Following the revolution of the working classes and the seizure of the means of production, Engels famously argued that the bourgeois state—the institutions that maintained civil society—would “wither away”: “as soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection, as soon as class rule, and the individual struggle for existence based upon the present anarchy in production, with the collisions and excesses arising from this struggle, are removed, nothing more remains to be held in subjection — nothing necessitating a special coercive force, a state. . . . State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies down of itself. . . . The state is not “abolished.” It withers away.”³⁹ As Lenin points out, Engels meant to say that *once* the proletarian revolution was accomplished, there would be nothing more for the state to do (*State and Revolution*, chap. 1 §4). The state exists as a consequence of class antagonism, so if that antagonism is removed, the state has no further reason to exist. The state will not wither away by itself in the absence of revolution and overthrow of the capitalist order.

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels argue for the destruction of the bourgeois state as necessary to postrevolutionary workers’ society, and Lenin cites this in *The State and Revolution*, arguing for “the destruction of the bureaucratic-military state machine” (chap. 3 §2). Marx and Engels take the Paris Commune as a model for a people’s revolution. Following a people’s revolution, the social and political organization that replaces the “state machine” should be an expression of the people’s will. Lenin argues for the voluntary organization of the people in communes and for their eventual organization into a central body, constituting voluntary “proletarian centralism.”⁴⁰ Lenin’s

³⁷ Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) (Moscow: Progress, 1976), 177–178.

³⁸ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (August 1917), in *Collected Works*, vol. 25 (Moscow: Progress, 1964), chap. 1, §1.

³⁹ Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring. Herr Eugen Dühring’s Revolution in Science* (Moscow: Progress, 1947), 301–303.

⁴⁰ “Now if the proletariat and the poor peasants take state power into their own hands, organize themselves quite freely in communes, and unite the action of all the communes in striking at capital, in

“national” unity is based on the development of the “higher phase of communist society,” one that arises “when people have become so accustomed to observing the fundamental rules of social intercourse and when their labor has become so productive that they will voluntarily work according to their ability” (chap. 5, §4).

Lenin condemns the “bureaucratic-military state machine” of the capitalist state and exalts the unified people’s nation. The “bureaucratic-military state machine” is antithetical to freedom. But the organization of a free people’s nation requires, first, the development of consciousness among the proletariat to the point that they voluntarily observe rules of social interaction and work voluntarily for goods held in common. Lenin concludes that “so long as the state exists there is no freedom. When there is freedom, there will be no state” (chap. 5, §4). In the people’s nation, voluntarily gathering in communes with centralized organization, freedom comes from the people rather than from the state. Still, the people must be organized: their freedom comes from voluntary organization that is developed over time.⁴¹

The organization of the “people’s nation” is behind Lenin’s defense of “the right of nations to self-determination,” which Luxemburg will famously challenge (section 5 here). Nationalism can be defended, in Lenin’s (and Marx’s and Engels’s) politics, insofar as it is an expression of the will and interests of working people. As I will show in section 5, Luxemburg provides a scorching critique of even this attenuated “nationalism,” and she does so on two grounds: first, *Realpolitik* concerning the role of Germany, Poland, and Russia in workers’ struggles, and second, her analysis of the role of the state in imperialism and capitalist accumulation. I will turn to Luxemburg’s analysis of imperialism and accumulation first, in section 4, and then to the question of *Realpolitik* and Polish independence in section 5.

3 IMPERIALISM AND ACCUMULATION: LUXEMBURG ON POLITICAL ECONOMY

In 1913, only about five years before her death, Luxemburg published *The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to the Economic Explanation of Imperialism*.⁴² The work

crushing the resistance of the capitalists, and in transferring the privately-owned railways, factories, land and so on to the entire nation, to the whole of society, won’t that be centralism? Won’t that be the most consistent democratic centralism and, moreover, proletarian centralism?” (*State and Revolution*, chap. 3 §4).

⁴¹ Thus, one might ask whether Lenin has, in fact, moved so far away from Hegel. After all, one of the most significant functions of the state for Hegel is *Bildung*, which could be seen as analogous to Lenin’s appeal to the people’s will and its development, for instance, through the organization of people’s councils and the Commune. I am grateful to Dalia Nassar for this insight into the comparison between Hegel and Lenin.

⁴² The centenary of the publication of *The Accumulation of Capital* in 2013 was marked by conferences and publications, including Judith Dellheim and Frieder Otto Wolf, eds., *Rosa Luxemburg: A Permanent Challenge for Political Economy* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), and Riccardo Bellofiore, ed., *Rosa*

makes valuable contributions, many of which I will note here, even though it has known limitations.⁴³

The Accumulation of Capital is a substantial contribution to political economy, to social thought, and to antiimperialist theory. The achievements of the book are grounded in Marx's analysis of capital, labor, and value. But Luxemburg went further, achieving (among other things):

- (1) An expanded account of Marx's analysis of production, adding the production of the "means of exchange"⁴⁴
- (2) Thoroughgoing criticism of Sismondi's theory of crises⁴⁵
- (3) A defense of "natural economies" as a basis of socialism⁴⁶
- (4) A decisive refutation of "Russian populism" as a basis for socialism⁴⁷
- (5) An argument that imperialism results in degradation of the social control of production and reproduction, and, thus, an argument for a "socially planned economy"⁴⁸
- (6) Sharp criticism of militarism as a site of accumulation of capital under imperialism⁴⁹

Luxemburg is a natural ally of anticolonial and antiimperialist thought. She views capitalist economies as extractive and exploitative at their core. Luxemburg's analysis views imperialism as "the product of capital's need to realize surplus value in an accumulating economy."⁵⁰

In section 1, Luxemburg begins with the question of reproduction. Cultures in what Rousseau called the state of nature realized that some sort of reproduction of value through labor (for instance, preserving food or building infrastructure) was necessary to avoid starvation or other misfortunes. But in these "communist agrarian" societies,

Luxemburg and the Critique of Political Economy (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009). Luxemburg's work on political economy is becoming more well-known and studied. These collections provide an admirable review of the strengths, contributions, and limitations of Luxemburg's *Accumulation*.

⁴³ Like many works of political economy, *The Accumulation of Capital* at times rests on a somewhat shaky empirical foundation, drawing on partial examples and single cases to support more general conclusions. See Dellheim and Wolf, *Rosa Luxemburg*, and Bellofiore, *Rosa Luxemburg and the Critique of Political Economy*, for detailed discussion.

⁴⁴ This discussion is found in Section 1. A general note: In the translation used, *The Accumulation of Capital* is divided into sections, which then are divided into chapters with sequential numbering. So there are larger 'sections' divided into smaller 'chapters', but the chapter numbering does not restart with each section.

⁴⁵ Section 2.

⁴⁶ Section 3, especially chapters 27, 28, and 29.

⁴⁷ Section 2.

⁴⁸ Section 1.

⁴⁹ Section 3, especially chapter 32.

⁵⁰ Roberto Veneziani, "Rosa Luxemburg on Imperialism," in Bellofiore, *Rosa Luxemburg and the Critique of Political Economy*, 130.

the nature and scope of reproduction is determined by “the community of all workers,” in a system of “planned cooperation” (*Accumulation*, 32). Luxemburg argues that this “planned cooperation” is in fact “natural,” in the sense that planning for cooperative social interaction is a natural human capacity and desire. At the conclusion of the work, Luxemburg notes that capitalist societies must resist natural, cooperative, social organization of economies, since capitalism cannot survive without the enslavement of one class to another, and enslavement is not a feature of the natural organization of society (*Accumulation*, chap. 27).

Capitalism emerges as an inherently exploitative system in which the ruling class exploits the working class, extracting surplus value from workers and from the natural environment. Luxemburg’s argument thus draws on Marx’s analysis of labor and value in *Capital*.⁵¹ She goes beyond Marx in her analysis of the role of social organization. First, Luxemburg argues that capitalism depends on the “anarchy” of the market (*Accumulation*, 45). In capitalist societies, as opposed to “natural” economies, the market is lawless: that is, it is not planned or governed by social or cooperative organization. A capitalist society may produce more than enough food for its citizens, but that food may not get to those citizens because the market is organized to make money, not to distribute food efficiently. Despite sufficient production, then, people go hungry.

Much of the argument of *The Accumulation of Capital*—the entirety of section 2—is aimed at political economists like Adam Smith and François Quesnay, who had argued that the capitalist market economy is not lawless, as Luxemburg argued, but rather governed by rational principles, and thus serves the interests of its citizens. Interestingly, given that he is often regarded as a precursor to Marx,⁵² Luxemburg also devotes much of *Accumulation* to criticizing Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi, who had argued that interventions could avert irrational crises caused by unregulated markets. Luxemburg argues that nothing short of the overthrow of capitalism could overcome market crises in the long run.⁵³

Luxemburg’s criticisms of Adam Smith are reminiscent of Marx’s. She acknowledges as correct Smith’s view that labor constitutes value.⁵⁴ But Smith didn’t realize that labor can *impart* value as well. Labor can create new means of production (equipment, like printing presses or tractors; infrastructure; intellectual capital). The means to create new means of production—wages for labor, money for component parts of tools—then

⁵¹ For more detailed analysis of the relationship between Luxemburg and Marx on this question see Paul Zarembka, “Value: Marx’s Evolution and Luxemburg’s Legacy,” in Dellheim and Wolf, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 55–91.

⁵² Sismondi anticipated Marx’s division between bourgeois and proletariat, and argued against laissez-faire economics in favor of market regulation.

⁵³ In this sense, Luxemburg’s arguments against Sismondi in *Accumulation* are akin to her criticisms of Eduard Bernstein in *Social Reform or Revolution?*

⁵⁴ See Rosa Luxemburg, “Wage Labor: Selections from *Introduction to Political Economy*,” trans. Anna Ezekiel, in *Women Philosophers of the Long Nineteenth Century: The German Tradition*, ed. Dalia Nassar and Kristin Gjesdal (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 214–240.

becomes part of a new tally of total capital (*Accumulation*, 66). Luxemburg notes that few of the classical economists have the capacity to account for capital of this kind. Even Marx does not provide a complete account of the flow of capital in this sense, Luxemburg argues. Marx allows for production and consumption, but his chart mapping capital does not account for “means of production of the means of exchange” (*Accumulation*, 99). This type of production is the material manifestation of the social aspects of the economy. As Govind summarizes Luxemburg’s argument: “where reproduction on an expanded scale with the two departments (means of production and consumption) took place, a portion of the surplus value had to be proportionately realised. It is here that a third market (as effective demand)—a means of production of the means of exchange—was required and so there was imperial-colonial expansion.”⁵⁵ Capitalism even within a nation’s borders, Luxemburg notes, provides incentives to expansion: larger enterprises have the advantage (*Accumulation*, 40). But, following the law of capitalism that surplus value must increase continuously over time (*Accumulation*, 76–78), Luxemburg explains that enterprises must reach out beyond the borders of their own states (chap. 25). At some point, surplus value must be realized, that is, more tools and equipment must be produced, and more value extracted from nature and from workers, in order to exchange more value on the market. Luxemburg notes that, in this sense, surplus value that will become wages or equipment is in fact a form of capital, which complicates the calculations of Smith and Marx alike.

Luxemburg’s analysis of value and labor leads to her characteristic claim that capitalist economies—and capitalist state organization—inherently lead to imperialism and expansion. She marshals this argument against figures outside socialism like Smith and Quesnay, but also against socialist figures, like Nikolayon, and social democrats, including Eduard Bernstein. Bernstein, a protégé of Friedrich Engels, became a significant figure in the early Social Democratic Party in Germany, helping to write its 1891 Erfurt Program. The debates between Bernstein, Luxemburg, Lenin, August Bebel, and Karl Kautsky between 1898 and 1903 were formative for this party.⁵⁶

Eduard Bernstein published several articles in *Die Neue Zeit* between 1896 and 1898, and a book, *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgabe der Sozialdemokratie*, in 1899. Luxemburg’s celebrated *Social Reform or Revolution?* of 1900 was written as a contribution to these debates, and features her revolutionary critiques of Bernstein’s reformist program.⁵⁷ Bernstein argued that the final aim of revolution was unnecessary, and that gradual, evolutionary reforms could achieve the workers’ goals. Luxemburg opposed this view strongly.

The question arose quickly, whether Luxemburg’s analysis of the exploitative aspects of the state would apply to what Lenin would call a nation, as well. As I’ve shown, Lenin

⁵⁵ Rahul Govind, “Nation State in the Age of Imperialism,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 48, no. 14 (2013): 51.

⁵⁶ David W. Morgan, “The Father of Revisionism Revisited: Eduard Bernstein,” *Journal of Modern History* 51, no. 3 (1979): 526.

⁵⁷ Rosa Luxemburg, *Social Reform or Revolution?* (1900) (London: Militant Publications, 1986).

seems to allow for a “nation” to arise within a state, one that expresses the will of the working people, even before the revolution. The occasion of the debate over the independence of Poland revealed the question of the “right” of nations to self-determination as a contested one within socialist circles. Luxemburg’s position was drawn from her own distinctive analysis and rooted in her account of political theory.

4 ROSA LUXEMBURG ON NATIONALISM

Luxemburg’s writings on nations and states discussed in this section are drawn from the materials reprinted in *The National Question*, a 1976 collection edited by Horace Davis that has recently come back into print.⁵⁸

One can read Luxemburg’s writings on nationalism in multiple contexts. There is a particularly instructive contrast between readings of Luxemburg that center internal Russian and German politics (the Bolshevik/Menshevik debates, her fights with Lenin and affinities with Trotsky)⁵⁹ and readings that emphasize the relevance of Luxemburg’s work to broader questions of imperialism and colonialism.⁶⁰

In many ways, the debate over the independence of Poland that animated Luxemburg’s debates with Marx, Engels, and Lenin was inspired more by *Realpolitik* than by theory. In the 1790s, Poland was partitioned, leaving it with areas (“partitions”) effectively governed by Prussia, Russia, and Austria. At the 1896 International Socialist Congress in London, the PPS asked for a motion endorsing Polish independence. Marx and Engels supported the independence of Poland, arguing that the workers had the right to dismantle the bureaucratic, capitalist state set up by the occupying powers. But their arguments also rested on the idea that Poland had a “right” to establish itself as an independent “nation.”⁶¹

Luxemburg’s criticisms of Marx’s and Engels’s positions focused on two questions:

1. Whether there was a Marxist argument for an independent Poland
2. Whether there is a “right of nations to self-determination”

⁵⁸ Rosa Luxemburg, *The National Question: Selected Writings*, edited by Horace Davis (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976). Hereafter *National Question*.

⁵⁹ See Heinz Schurer, “Some Reflections on Rosa Luxemburg and the Bolshevik Revolution,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 40, no. 95 (June 1962), 356–372.

⁶⁰ E.g., Govind, “Nation State in the Age of Imperialism”; Veneziani, “Rosa Luxemburg on Imperialism”; Holleman, *Dust Bowls of Empire*, 64–65; Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 62–65.

⁶¹ Marx and Engels wrote frequently supporting the restoration of a Polish nation, linking it with the fate of Germany and Russia. In “A Polish Proclamation,” in an issue of *Der Volksstaat*, the organ of the German Social Democratic Workers Party, from June 11, 1874, Engels wrote: “Poland has demonstrated in 1863 and further proves every day that it cannot be done to death. Its claim to an independent existence in the European family of nations cannot be refused. But its restoration has become a necessity particularly for two peoples: for the Germans, and for the Russians themselves.”

Luxemburg argues “no” on both fronts. She realized more clearly than anyone the conflicts between Marx’s, Engels’s, and Lenin’s positions on Poland, and other aspects of their political thought. In setting out her position, Luxemburg articulated her own interpretation of the “essence” of Marxism. A Marxist argument for an independent Poland must rest on the conditions of the political economy and on the working conditions and interests of the proletariat. But in Luxemburg’s view, the argument Marx and Engels gave rested mainly on the fact that the Russian partition of Poland was under the tsardom. The purportedly “socialist” argument for an independent Poland was that it would undermine the tsardom from within, and that this would galvanize proletarian revolution in Russia, and, in turn, in Germany.⁶² Luxemburg objects that it was not Poland that was propping up the tsardom, but the old peasant order and the interests of the landed classes and bourgeoisie in Russia: “the tsardom finds itself forced to support a capitalist economy, but in doing so it is sawing off the limb on which it sits.”⁶³

The difference between Luxemburg’s position and Marx’s depends less on socialist doctrine than on their differing views of the role of Russia in global proletarian revolution. As Marx and Engels put it in a letter to a Polish group, “the cry ‘Let Poland live!’ which then resounded throughout Western Europe was not only an expression of sympathy and support for the patriotic fighters . . . the cry . . . in and of itself meant: ‘Death to the Holy Alliance, death to the military despotisms of Russia, Prussia, Austria.’”⁶⁴ To Marx and Engels, Polish independence held out the promise of effective resistance to that military despotism. Luxemburg, who was much more familiar with the situation in Poland, argued that Polish independence from Russia would not achieve any substantial goal for socialism.

In Luxemburg’s view, socialist conclusions on particular political questions may change with the historical, material conditions. Marx and Engels tended to tie the independence of Poland to the fate of Prussia, Russia, and Austria, and to argue that the workers of Poland would inevitably want to rise up against the “despotic” rule then spreading over western Europe. Luxemburg objected that this perspective was rooted in international politics, not in an analysis of the workers’ interests and material conditions. On *Marxist* grounds—and here Luxemburg appears more Marxist than Marx—it is incumbent on anyone writing on the issue to explain how the independence of Poland would be in the interests of the proletariat, including whether it would aid in bringing about a workers’ revolution.

What about the “right of nations to self-determination”? When the PPS asked the London Congress to support an independent Poland, the Congress instead adopted a very grand-sounding statement: “the Congress—the resolution states—declares itself in favor of ‘the complete right of all nations to self-determination, and expresses its sympathy for the workers of every country now suffering under the yoke of military, national,

⁶² For a clear statement of this view, see Engels, “A Polish Proclamation.”

⁶³ Luxemburg, “The Polish Question at the International Congress in London,” repr. in *The National Question*, 52.

⁶⁴ Letter from Marx and Engels to the group “Rovnosoc,” received November 1880, cited in Luxemburg, foreword to *The Polish Question*, repr. in *The National Question*.

or other despotism; the Congress calls on the workers of all these countries to join the ranks of the class-conscious workers of the whole world in order to fight together with them for the defeat of international capitalism and for the achievement of the aims of international Social Democracy.”⁶⁵ As Luxemburg points out, the Congress punted the question by appealing to a universal “right” of “all” nations to “self-determination,” and by linking this right to the liberation of the working classes. She subjects this strategy to strong criticism, supporting the conclusion that socialist thought does not justify a universal “right of nations to self-determination.”

Luxemburg notes that the Congress statement is very vague. It grandly tells the working classes to rise up, but not how or when or why to do so: they are to stand up for their national interests in order to “self-determine” in whatever way seems right to them (“The Polish Question”, 109). But within the capitalist state, the ability of workers to organize freely is severely restricted.

There are two senses of “right” at issue here. One is based on the mutual recognition between citizens and state found in Kant and Hegel, and in the Enlightenment tradition generally. That cannot be the Marxist sense of “right”: in Marxist terms, the capitalist state denies its citizens mutual recognition. Another sense, more attuned to Marxist thinking, is the workers’ prerogative to organize themselves, to seize the means of production, and to take control of the machinery of the state. Global communism requires a workers’ revolution. As Luxemburg argues, in Marxist terms the workers’ right to found a *nation* depends on their first rising up to overthrow the *state*.

Luxemburg argues that the formation of free “nations” in Lenin’s sense is limited under capitalism and imperialism. There is no universal democratic “right” of organization into a nation, independently of the historical, material, economic conditions that can make those rights manifest. If one tries to find a Marxist justification for nationalism, we find that on socialist grounds there are “no ‘eternal’ truths and there are no ‘rights.’”⁶⁶

Thus, in a socialist context, the formula “right of self-determination” either expresses nothing, or an “unconditional duty of all socialists to support all national aspirations,” which is unfounded.⁶⁷ Luxemburg points out that even Marx and Engels implicitly support this conclusion: in the revolutions of 1848, Marx and Engels did not support Czech independence, but did support Polish independence, even though on Marxist doctrinal grounds the justification for the two cases is the same.⁶⁸ The conclusion Luxemburg reaches is, therefore: there is no universal, socialist right of nations to self-determination.

Luxemburg does acknowledge a right of the people to organize themselves and to assert their class interests. After the workers’ revolution,⁶⁹ it will then be possible for people

⁶⁵ Rosa Luxemburg, “The National Question and Autonomy,” in *National Question*, 107.

⁶⁶ “The Polish Question”, repr. in *The National Question*, 111.

⁶⁷ “The Polish Question”, repr. in *The National Question*, 112.

⁶⁸ “The Polish Question”, repr. in *The National Question*, 115.

⁶⁹ *The Communist Manifesto* is Marx’s and Engels’s classic analysis of the place of revolution in communist politics. Luxemburg herself wrote a key text in this regard, *Social Reform or Revolution?*

to organize into nations without thereby asserting an idealist “right” of the individual to determine her national interests. Nations will be based on the achievement of the right historical-material conditions, which will allow for self-determination in a global democracy.⁷⁰ There is no such thing as a universal, conceptual “right” of nations to self-determination on socialist grounds: such rights are won by the workers through struggle.

To Luxemburg, certainly, workers are free to form a nation: but only *after* the revolution. Luxemburg thus criticizes Marx’s, Engels’s, and Lenin’s implicit conclusion (which would be developed into a political program by Bernstein) that a worker’s nation, along the lines of the Paris Commune, can come about within a capitalist state. The will and interests of the people are insufficient, according to Luxemburg’s account, to bring a nation about before the overthrow of the capitalist state. Luxemburg’s writings on nationalism are thus consistent with her conclusion, in *Social Reform or Revolution?*, that gradual reform of the state from within is insufficient: revolution is necessary.

Beyond her broader points on nationalism and the state, Luxemburg criticizes Marx’s personal stance on Poland. On her assessment of the situation, Marx’s support for an independent Poland derives from two sources:

1. Ignorance of the conditions on the ground, and consequent disregard for the bloodshed that would result if Polish socialists were to start an independence movement. Marx would regard this from the comfort of the West.
2. Marx’s view that the independence of the Russian Polish partition would help the cause of a socialist revolution in Germany. Given (1), Luxemburg effectively accuses Marx of sacrificing the Polish proletariat to the interests of Germany.

Luxemburg’s positions on Polish independence reflect her deep knowledge of the Polish situation, her diagnosis of flaws in Marx’s and Lenin’s analyses (e.g., the impossibility of forming a worker’s nation within the capitalist state), and her position on world politics (her view that Polish independence would not further the cause of revolution in Germany).

5 CONCLUSION

Luxemburg’s position on the role of the capitalist state never wavered: it was the manifestation of class conflict and antagonism. A proletarian uprising—via her favored tactic of mass strikes and workers’ movements—was necessary to overthrow the state. As Horace Davis remarks, this distinctive position was one of Luxemburg’s most influential:

it is perhaps little known that despite Lenin’s attacks on her, the philosophical position so ably expounded by Rosa Luxemburg in her articles of 1908–1909 was never

⁷⁰ “The Polish Question”, repr. in *The National Question*, 108.

refuted; that it was, on the contrary, adopted by a substantial section of the Bolshevik Party, which fought Lenin on the issue, using Rosa Luxemburg's arguments—and eventually, in 1919, defeated him, so that the slogan of the right of self-determination was removed from the platform of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Later, when the issue was no longer so acute, the slogan was revived and today represents part of the CPSU's stock in trade. But the basic arguments in its favor are precisely those which were successfully opposed by Rosa Luxemburg and her partisans. The Soviet leadership is working with a blunted tool.⁷¹

Luxemburg rejected Marx's and Lenin's position (expressed earlier on) that workers could form a nation with a "right of self-determination" within the capitalist state.⁷² To Luxemburg, the right of cooperative social organization is, in one sense, inalienable and "natural"; but in another, is only achievable with the overthrow of the state.

Kant and Hegel had argued that rights are guaranteed by the mutual recognition between citizens and state, where the laws of the state are not imposed by arbitrary authority, but rather derive their binding force by recognizing the moral status of free citizens. Marx, Engels, and Lenin responded that the capitalist state cannot engage in mutual recognition because capitalism is oppressive by nature. The capitalist state alienates workers from their labor and uses them as a mere means to an end: the accumulation of surplus value.

However, Engels famously argued that violent overthrow of the state may not be necessary in all cases. If the workers were to organize and claim ownership of the means of production and of their own labor, the state might simply "wither away," as it would have no more to do.⁷³ Eduard Bernstein, a protégé of Engels, worked this position into a larger politic: that gradual reform of the state, rather than revolution, could address workers' exploitation.

Rosa Luxemburg's classic *The Accumulation of Capital* provides a deep analysis of why the state will not "wither away" without a fight. Capitalist states have an interest in acquiring, not only surplus value, but the means to accumulate more capital. The inherent contradiction between the freedom of the workers and the capitalist state, which Marx, Lenin, and Engels identified, becomes with Luxemburg a deeper problem. She provides a novel dynamic analysis of why modern capitalist states will attempt, not only to survive, but to become stronger over time: to annex more property, more land, and more surplus value from workers' labor.

Luxemburg's analysis in *The Accumulation of Capital* is the motivation behind her positions in the debates over whether reform or revolution was necessary (in, of course,

⁷¹ Horace Davis, introduction to *National Question*, 9.

⁷² Löwy, "Why Socialism Must Be Internationalist," sees this as a weakness in Luxemburg's view; I argue that it is a distinctive position and one that characterizes her entire career.

⁷³ As is well known, Marx himself argued that capitalism contains inherent contradictions that will inevitably result in revolution and the establishment of socialism. For discussion of Marx's thesis see G. A. Cohen, R. Veryard, D. H. Mellor, A. G. M. Last, Randolph Quirk, and John Mason, "Historical Inevitability and Human Agency in Marxism [and Discussion]," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London* 407, no. 1832 (September 8, 1986), 65–87.

Social Reform or Revolution?) and in the debates over Polish independence. Marx and Engels argued that the Polish workers could establish a nation within the Polish state that would fight for the workers' interests. Luxemburg pointed out that the workers had not yet overthrown the Polish state, and that without a revolution, Polish independence would mean the reestablishment of a capitalist state.

If one had Engels's confidence that that state would wither away in time, one might argue that establishing a capitalist state would be beneficial to the workers' interests in the long run. This may, in fact, be the reasoning behind Marx's, Lenin's, and Engels's support of Polish independence. But Luxemburg saw only the call to reestablish an entity that was fundamentally opposed to the workers' interests, an entity that inevitably would move to accumulate surplus value and to exploit labor.

Marx famously thought, along with Luxemburg, that capitalism replaced the existing feudal order in Europe, not a state of nature. One might respond to Luxemburg on Marx's behalf, that the dynamic of history is not a return to an earlier social order, but rather a dialectic: a move toward socialism. Luxemburg's theory threatens, one might think, to appeal to a mythical "natural" order of things to justify her opposition to capitalism. But some might see this as just as irrational and romantic as an appeal to "nationalism" or "culture" to justify the establishment of a state. Certainly, the history of precapitalist societies is not peaceful or perfect, and one might mount a criticism of Luxemburg's account along these lines. Marx could argue, for instance, that the move toward socialism is not a move backward toward a previously existing "natural economy," but rather a move toward an aim the workers have chosen for themselves. In this sense, Marx, Engels, and Lenin defend the ideal of "self-determination" of a people. On this reading, Luxemburg arguably does not have the scope for "self-determination," as she argues that states should be overthrown and replaced by nations following a "natural economy," not principles chosen by the workers.

In *The Accumulation of Capital*, Luxemburg argues that the capitalist state owes its existence, not to "rational" principles as Smith alleged, but to its violent resistance to earlier forms of social organization. Luxemburg argues that human beings have historically not been found in the mythical "state of nature" of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, but rather, in a "natural economy," "institutions maintain their economic power by subjecting the labor power, and the most important means of production, the land, to the rule of law and custom" (*Accumulation*, 369). Capitalism did not replace the state of nature, coming as a beneficial means of protecting citizens from violence. Instead, capitalism itself overthrows the natural economy that existed previously.

Luxemburg argues that colonialism and capitalism must violently resist this natural economy. There are laws and customs that govern natural economies, and they provide a method of social organization that does not exploit the labor of its workers, or the most fundamental means of production (the land). In Luxemburg's view, the "nation" set up by the workers is an institution capable of enforcing the "laws and customs" that develop in, and govern, all natural economies. Thus, there can be governance in Luxemburg's analysis, but not coercion. The original sin, in Luxemburg's view, is the



violent replacement of natural economy by a commodity economy, which sets in motion the inevitable cycle of exploitation and accumulation. Chapter 27 of *Accumulation* is a brief but bloody history of the advent of commodity economies across Europe and Asia.

In one sense, Luxemburg's theory resembles that of Kant and Hegel: Luxemburg's nation, like the state in Kant and Hegel, is set up only to recognize laws that already implicitly govern exchanges between citizens (and, in Luxemburg's case only, their relation to the land). But there are significant differences. Luxemburg does not build her nation on the alleged rights of the citizen, but rather on the laws that come about in the course of natural social activity. She does not appeal to any feature that is not found in *any* natural economy. Thus, her view does not endorse any form of nationalism, even though it does allow for nations.

Read in the context of *Accumulation*, Luxemburg's position in the debates on Polish independence comes into clearer focus. As Luxemburg sees it, nations should be founded on the social enforcement of laws that effortlessly come to organize natural economies in the absence of capitalist, colonialist exploitation. The "independence" of Poland, to Luxemburg, would not be the establishment of a natural economy, but rather the restoration of a state and commodity economy. To Marx, Engels, and Lenin, Polish independence would aid in the international struggle for workers' rights since the Polish workers' movement was strong. To Luxemburg, the Polish government her socialist comrades were so eager to restore would inevitably resist the workers, since any capitalist state must do so to survive. Luxemburg's position is clear: only revolution restores the natural order of things.

I am grateful to Kristin Gjesdal and Dalia Nassar for the opportunity to write this chapter. Dalia Nassar's comments on a draft of the chapter were insightful and led to marked improvements. An earlier version of this chapter was read at a workshop, "Women Philosophers in the Long Nineteenth Century," at Temple University in September 2018. The questions at that workshop, from Kristin Gjesdal, Samantha Matherne, Lydia Moland, and others among the authors of this volume, were instrumental in guiding revisions.

REFERENCES

- Bellofiore, Riccardo, ed. *Rosa Luxemburg and the Critique of Political Economy*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2009.
- Buhle, Paul. Afterword to *Red Rosa*, by Kate Evans, 215–219. London: Verso Books, 2015.
- Cliff, Tony. "Rosa Luxemburg: A Life of Struggle" (1959). Pamphlet reprinted in *Socialist Review* (January 2009). <https://socialistworker.co.uk/socialist-review-archive/rosa-luxemburg-life-struggle/>.
- Cohen, G. A., R. Veryard, D. H. Mellor, A. G. M. Last, Randolph Quirk, and John Mason, "Historical Inevitability and Human Agency in Marxism [and Discussion]." *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London* 407, no. 1832 (September 8, 1986): 65–87.



- Davis, Angela Y. *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*. Edited by Joy James. Hoboken: Wiley, 1998.
- Davis, Angela Y. "Marcuse's Legacies." In *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader*, edited by John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb, 43–50. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Davis, Horace. Editor's introduction to *The National Question*, by Rosa Luxemburg, 9–48. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976.
- Dellheim, Judith, and Frieder Otto Wolf, eds. *Rosa Luxemburg: A Permanent Challenge for Political Economy*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016.
- Dunayevskaya, Raya. *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991.
- Edmondson, Linda. "Lives of Rosa Luxemburg." *Revolutionary Russia* 2, no. 2 (1989): 35–44.
- Engels, Friedrich. *Anti-Dühring. Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*. Moscow: Progress, 1947.
- Engels, Friedrich. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). Moscow: Progress, 1976.
- Engels, Friedrich. "A Polish Proclamation." *Der Volksstaat*, July 11, 1874.
- Ettinger, Elzbieta. *Rosa Luxemburg: A Life*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.
- Evans, Kate. *Red Rosa*. London: Verso Books, 2015.
- Govind, Rahul. "Nation State in the Age of Imperialism." *Economic and Political Weekly* 48, no. 14 (April 6, 2013): 48–58.
- Harvey, David. *A Companion to Marx's Capital: The Complete Edition*. Vol. 1. London: Verso Books, 2018.
- Hegel, G. W. F. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820). Edited by Allen W. Wood. Translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan, Parts I and II* (1651). Edited by A. P. Martinich and Brian Battiste. Rev. ed. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2010.
- Holleman, Hannah. *Dust Bowls of Empire*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.
- Hudis, Peter, and Kevin Anderson, eds. *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004.
- James, C. L. R. *The Black Jacobins*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1938.
- James, C. L. R. *World Revolution, 1917–1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1937.
- Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich. *The State and Revolution*, trans. Brian Baggins. In *Collected Works*, vol. 25. Moscow: Progress, 1964. Originally published August 1917.
- Löwy, Michael. "Why Socialism Must Be Internationalist . . . And What Rosa Luxemburg Can Teach Us about It." *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung*, January 23, 2020. URL: <https://www.rosalux.de/en/publication/id/41529/why-socialism-must-be-internationalist>.
- Luxemburg, Rosa. *The Accumulation of Capital*. Translated by Agnes Schwarzschild. London: Routledge, 1951; reprint, New York: Monthly Review, 1968.
- Luxemburg, Rosa. *The National Question: Selected Writings*. Edited by Horace Davis. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976.
- Luxemburg, Rosa. *Social Reform or Revolution?* Translated by Integer. London: Militant, 1986.
- Luxemburg, Rosa. "Wage Labor: Selections from *Introduction to Political Economy*" (1925). Translated by Anna Ezekiel. In *Women Philosophers of the Long Nineteenth Century: The German Tradition*, edited by Kristin Gjesdal and Dalia Nassar, 214–240. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.

- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. The German Ideology. In 1845–47, vol. 5 of *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, edited by Maurice Cornforth, translated by Clemens Dutt, 19–539. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975.
- McCumber, John. *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001.
- Mills, Dana. *Rosa Luxemburg*. London: Reaktion Books, 2020.
- Moland, Lydia. *Hegel on Political Identity: Patriotism, Nationality, Cosmopolitanism*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011.
- Morgan, David W. “The Father of Revisionism Revisited: Eduard Bernstein.” *Journal of Modern History* 51, no. 3 (1979): 525–532.
- Nettl, J. P. *Rosa Luxemburg: The Biography* (1966). London: Verso, 2019.
- Nixon, Jon. *Rosa Luxemburg and the Struggle for Democratic Renewal*. London: Pluto Press, 2018.
- Petrus, Joseph. “Marx and Engels on the National Question.” *Journal of Politics* 33, no. 3 (1971): 797–824.
- Reisch, George. *How the Cold War Transformed Philosophy of Science: To the Icy Slopes of Logic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Robinson, Cedric J. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. London: Zed Press, 1983; reprint, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Schneider, Ulrich Johannes. “The Situation of Philosophy, the Culture of the Philosophers: Philosophy in the New Germany.” *Social Research* 64, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 281–300.
- Schurer, Heinz. “Some Reflections on Rosa Luxemburg and the Bolshevik Revolution.” *Slavonic and East European Review* 40, no. 95 (June 1962): 356–372.
- Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.
- Veneziani, Roberto. “Rosa Luxemburg on Imperialism.” In *Rosa Luxemburg and the Critique of Political Economy*, edited by R. Bellofiore, 130–143. London: Taylor & Francis, 2009.
- Zarembka, Paul. “Value: Marx’s Evolution and Luxemburg’s Legacy.” In *Rosa Luxemburg*, edited by J. Dellheim and F. O. Wolf, 55–91. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016.