

World Revolution and its Requirements

On the National Right to Self-determination,
Autonomy, and the Accumulation of Capital

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Before German officers murdered Rosa Luxemburg in January 1919, she devoted her life to the promotion of socialism, anti-imperialism, and anti-militarism. While she was a prolific writer of shorter articles, polemics, and party commentaries, two of her best-known works deal with the so-called »national question« in light of capitalist development, a question that was on her mind throughout her political career. This essay is based on these two works: »The National Question and Autonomy«¹, first published as a series of articles in *Przegląd Socjal-demokratyczny* (Social Democratic Review), and »The Accumulation of Capital.«² My primary focus will lie on the first of these two works. Rosa Luxemburg's assessment of this question can be read both considering the specific Polish-Russian situation she was commenting on in 1908 and in a broader context of different forms of burgeoning nationalisms in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. Her understanding of capital accumulation, imperialism, and the meaning of self-determination in the context of certain social and economic constraints make her account compelling from a normative point of view. While many of her contemporaries – Lenin (1870–1924) among them – criticized her heavily for generalizing her »Krakow horizon« to assess the viability and dangers of national self-determination, I argue that her narrowly tailored local analysis offers insightful angles on

1 Rosa Luxemburg: Nationalitätenfrage und Autonomie, Berlin 2018.

2 Rosa Luxemburg: Die Akkumulation des Kapitals, Berlin 1923.

»the national question« that go beyond the specific historical context and have broader implications for socialist theory. Drawing from her observations of large, multi-ethnic empires and the perks of centralized government, she develops an account of local self-governance that does not reject but rather contributes to a broader state-building project.

In the early 20th century, Poland was divided into three parts. The three consecutive partitions occurred in the 18th century and eventually dissolved the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.³ At the time of the publication of »National Question« (*Nationalitätenfrage*), one of the parts was under Prussian and then – after the German unification – German rule, one under Tsarist Russian rule, and one under Austro-Hungarian rule.⁴ Following the partitions, Poland stayed divided until 1918, creating tensions between the Poles and the respective ruling powers in each part of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.⁵ Luxemburg's engagement with Polish sovereignty, the lack thereof, and the possibilities and limits of the Polish proletariat in revolutionizing society were shaped by her upbringing as a child of a bourgeois Jewish family rooted in Zamość who later moved to Warsaw.⁶ Since 1809, Zamość had been under Russian control, and while »the Jewish community [...] suffered under Russian rule, [...] they were able to maintain and develop a thriving cultural and religious life, giving the city a disproportionately important role in Polish-Jew-

3 Justin Corfield: *Partitions of Poland*, in *Facts on File* (Eds.): *World History. A Comprehensive Reference Set*, New York 2016.

4 Dieter Bingen: *Polnische Geschichte vom Anfang bis zur Wiederherstellung der Staatlichkeit 1918*, Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 10.02.2009. Online: <https://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutsch-polnische-beziehungen/39751/geschichte-polens-bis-1918?p=1>.

5 Ibid.

6 Rory Castle: »You Alone Will Make Our Family's Name Famous.« Rosa Luxemburg, Her Family and the Origins of her Jewish-Polish Identity, in: *Praktyka teoretyczna* 06/2012, pp. 96–97; 104.

ish culture.«⁷ Rory Castle assumes that Luxemburg's grandfather and other assimilated Jews supporting the *Haskalah*⁸ »were enthusiastic in their support« for anti-Russian Polish resistance and eager to prove their allegiance to their home country.⁹ Like her grandfather, Luxemburg's father was also »a leading member of the reformist Jewish community in the city.«¹⁰ This embeddedness in both Jewish congregational life and Polish civic life under Russian rule led to support for Polish independence within the Luxemburg family while also elevating the importance of the religious cultural heritage.¹¹ The local rootedness of the Luxemburg family was accompanied by multilingualism, as they spoke Polish, German, and Yiddish and »had contacts with like-minded people around Poland, and in Austria and Germany.«¹² Thus, the environment Luxemburg was brought up in was both decidedly »Polish« and firmly international.

Having witnessed the 1863 Rising against Russia and its failure, Rosa Luxemburg did not join the chorus advocating for another armed uprising for the cause of Polish independence.¹³ After seeing the military supremacy of the Russian army, »Luxemburg's conclusion was that the struggle for the restoration of the Polish state must be abandoned.«¹⁴ For her, the distribution of power rendered the likelihood of success minimal, which is why different coalitions needed to be organized and another kind of struggle needed to be priori-

7 Ibid., p. 97.

8 According to Sara Karesh and Mitchell Hurvitz's definition, »the Haskalah [...] was the Jewish version of the European Enlightenment; it began in the 1770s and continued for the next 100 years« (*Haskalah*, in *Encyclopedia of World Religions: Encyclopedia of Judaism*, Facts on File, 2nd edition, New York 2016).

9 Castle: »You Alone«, p. 99.

10 Ibid., pp. 101–102.

11 Ibid., pp. 99–103.

12 Ibid., 102–103.

13 Ibid., pp. 108–109.

14 Ibid., p. 109.

tized. This stance led her to break with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), which connected »the demands for socialism with the restoration of Poland.«¹⁵ Both strategically and morally, the connection of national liberation with socialism was regarded as a »betrayal of workers' interests, as a watering down of the socialist idea« by Luxemburg and her party colleagues from the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL).¹⁶

Rosa Luxemburg conceptualized class struggle primarily from an international perspective. For her, any revolution should also always contribute to world revolution. Her analyses started from the goal of a world of classless societies and defined this goal with reference to specific historical situations. She was interested in a method that allowed for a balancing of the self-determination of specific national or ethnic groups with the broadest possible progress and development. In »Nationalitätenfrage,« Luxemburg denaturalizes nationality to some extent. For her, the cultural components of sharing a language and sometimes – though not always – a geographic space and certain cultural practices are the most important markers of ethnicity and/or nationality. Therefore, these terms will be used interchangeably and operate independently of nation-states. In her analysis of the »national right to self-determination,« she points out that nations are not something metaphysical generating a sacred right but are always bound by their capacity (or the lack thereof) to defend themselves.¹⁷ When writing about the aspects of social life that constitute »nations,« she emphasizes »the respective language and intellectual culture of any one nationality.«¹⁸ The aim of her socialist project moves beyond

15 Holger Politt: Rosa Luxemburgs »Krakauer Horizont,« in: Rosa Luxemburg: Nationalitätenfrage und Autonomie, Berlin 2018, p. 11. Translations from German, if not stated otherwise, are my own.

16 Ibid., p. 11.

17 Rosa Luxemburg: Nationalitätenfrage und Autonomie, Berlin 2018, p. 83.

18 Ibid., p. 223.

the aims of any one nation-state and towards an internationalism of classless societies.

To illuminate her analytical angle, her specific concerns, and her harsh criticism of the formula of »a nation's right to self-determination,« I will connect her specific take on the Polish question to her later theory of capital accumulation. This theory underlines the *global* dimensions of capitalist development and the subsequent consequences for any national struggle within an internationalized economic system. I disagree with the criticism that Robert O'Brien and Michael Forman have voiced about her works when they argue that, for Luxemburg, »socialism and nationalism were incompatible.«¹⁹ While she believed that militarist European and capitalist expansionist nationalism were incompatible with socialism, her writings on national autonomy and self-governance reveal a complex understanding of the importance of cultural identities. When following this line of her thought, oppressive regimes demanding the assimilation or acculturation of a subject-population such as colonial governments and also state-socialist regimes privileging one national culture within multi-ethnic empires²⁰ have to be opposed when regional languages and cultures are oppressed. Because of this sensitivity to cultural variety, anti-colonial thinkers point to Luxemburg's work both because of her analysis of imperialism and her attentiveness regarding the role and importance of cultural sovereignty when debating questions of self-determination and protection from coercion.²¹ According to her

19 Michael Forman referenced in Robert O'Brien: Revisiting Rosa Luxemburg's Internationalism, in: *Journal of International Political Theory* 19/2019, no. 3, p. 9.

20 The Serbian domination of Yugoslavia and the Russian domination of the Soviet Union come to mind here.

21 Jie-Hyun Lim: Rosa Luxemburg on the Dialectics of Proletarian Internationalism and Social Patriotism, in: *Science & Society* 59/1995–96, p. 500; Kanishka Chowdhury: Rosa Luxemburg's »The Accumulation of Capital«, *Postcolonial Theory, and the Problems of Present Day Imperialisms*, in: *New Formations* 94/2018, pp. 145–147.

perspective, nationalism – if it should serve progressive ends – must be thought of and enacted following socialist principles.

To emphasize her internationalist commitments, I will provide a brief sketch of the main argument in »Die Akkumulation des Kapitals« (The Accumulation of Capital), and then turn towards her understanding of capitalist nationalisms emerging in the 19th century and their consequences for the working class. In the second part of this chapter, I will analyze Luxemburg's fierce opposition to the phrase of »national self-determination« as a viable political guiding principle for her party, the SDKPiL.²² In response to this, she develops an alternative and contrasts »the right of self-determination« with local autonomy and self-government. Here, her broader theoretical aims and principles meet concrete infrastructure and governance requirements such that theory and practice converge. I will briefly address how her commitments to social democracy relate to ideas of self-determination and how her answers to the national question are connected to notions of progress, regress, and solidarity. To conclude, I will discuss the historical context in which she was writing, address the contemporary interest in Luxemburg's work on nationalism and internationalism, and try to connect this to contemporary discussions on the idea that tackling capitalism on a national basis *only* is at best a first step and at worst a futile effort.

22 Holger Politt in Rosa Luxemburg: Nationalitätenfrage und Autonomie, Berlin 2018, p. 12.

The Intertwined and Global Dimensions of Capitalism

Luxemburg's work, according to Stephen Morton, »emphasizes how the capitalist economy is at one and the same time a world economy.«²³ This becomes especially clear when reading »The Accumulation of Capital« where she describes the process by which »capital rummages through the entire world, wrangles means of production from all corners of the earth« and obtains access to more and more raw materials, cheap labor, and formerly non-capitalist spaces.²⁴ She perceives Marx's analysis as short-sighted because he »sets out to describe the accumulative process on the assumption that the capitalists and the workers are the sole agents of capitalist consumption.«²⁵ This account, for her, is deficient because it does not consider that the realization of surplus requires a non-capitalist periphery where capital will inevitably move to once the market in already capitalist societies is »saturated.« Capitalism in its »full maturity is in every respect dependent on the simultaneous existence of non-capitalist strata and societies.«²⁶ Because of this interdependence, Luxemburg argues that »modern capitalist development is incompatible with an actual becoming-independent of all nations.«²⁷ To her, then, the notion of capitalist nationalism is a contradiction in terms.

This emphasis on the role of the »periphery« and of »free« but exploited labor in the core of global capitalism has frequently been analyzed with a focus on the racial subjugation of the peripheral populations, their resources that are frequently expropriated by colonial powers, and the potential for conflict between workers in the center

23 Stephen Morton: Capital Accumulation and Debt Colonialism after Rosa Luxemburg, in: *New Formations* 94/2018, p. 84.

24 Rosa Luxemburg: *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals*, Berlin 1923, pp. 279–280.

25 Quoted in Morton: Capital Accumulation, p. 86.

26 Luxemburg: *Akkumulation des Kapitals*, p. 286.

27 Luxemburg: *Nationalitätenfrage und Autonomie*, p. 68.

and the periphery.²⁸ Ingo Schmidt emphasizes how Luxemburg's analysis in »The Accumulation of Capital« observed and anticipated how those peripheral populations are pitted against the European proletariat in the center and summarizes: »This form of capital accumulation which was dependent on external colonization had to find its limits in the partition of the world among a handful of colonial powers. Thus, Luxemburg concluded, it would come to economic stagnation and heightened competition and subsequently to an intensification of international conflicts and class wars.«²⁹ Prior to the outbreak of open conflict, however, »there is constant change in the power relations between different capitalist countries. Driven by competition, capital shifts from one country to the next, constantly transforming the international division of labour in the process. As a result, the political situation becomes extremely unstable.«³⁰ This notion of instability shaped European politics in the late 19th and early 20th century until the cumulation of tension resulted in the First World War.

Capitalist Nationalism

Luxemburg understands »nations« as historical constructs and contends that »affording all [...] ethnic groups or nationalities the possibilities of actual ›self-determination‹ is, in light of the historical development of contemporary societies, a utopia.«³¹ For her, »the fact of the matter is that all former states are, without exception, [...]

28 See, for example, Gargi Bhattacharyya: *Rethinking Racial Capitalism*, London 2018.

29 Ingo Schmidt: *Rosa Luxemburgs »Akkumulation des Kapitals«: Die Aktualität von ökonomischer Theorie, Imperialismuserklärung und Klassenanalyse*, Hamburg 2013, p. 7.

30 Marcel van der Linden: *Rosa Luxemburg's Global Class Analysis*, in: *Historical Materialism* 24/2016, p. 139.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

extremely diverse constructs.«³² Writing in early 20th century Europe, Luxemburg saw herself confronted with empires, large, multi-ethnic states, or loose associations of small and ever smaller kingdoms and princedoms: German regionalism (*Kleinstaaterei*), the Austro-Hungarian empire, and multi-ethnic Tsarist Russia. For her, the question of national self-determination is not only complicated by capitalist interdependence but also by the complexities of the concept itself – a nation is neither a clearly defined, self-evident, and empirically »real« subject, let alone a »subject« that is stable over time, nor, and this is arguably the most important concern from a socialist perspective, politically progressive.

Nation-states, as Luxemburg sees them emerging in the late 19th century, are primarily a project of the bourgeoisie to rid themselves of feudalism and to solidify their social status as the owners of capital and holders of political power. In her brief account of national development and the eventual emergence of consolidated nation-states, she points out that »apart from the market, even though here exists the closest connection, the capitalist bourgeoisie needs many other factors for its appropriate development«: a strong military, tariffs, infrastructure, an appropriately trained bureaucracy, a legal system, an educational system, appropriate financial policies, an entire state apparatus.³³ Nationalism, for her, is always bourgeois nationalism and brings with it both specific institutions and a certain national culture that is constructed to defend the bourgeoisie's interests and directed against other nations.

Luxemburg, however, does not reject the state as an organizational form because this would be a regressive move away from the broader project of capitalist and, subsequently, socialist development. Accordingly, the contradiction of historical development at the time of Luxemburg's intervention was not the emergence of nation-states *as such*

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., pp. 89–90.

but the »murderous struggle« among them and their drive towards domination and oppression.³⁴ Accepting the organizational form of a state as a product of progress and capitalist development leads Luxemburg to differentiate between national self-determination and the autonomy of certain ethnic or national groups. This allows her to develop a specifically socialist approach that does not fall prey to either regressive localism or militarist imperialism.

Autonomy versus National Self-Determination

Luxemburg's account in »The National Question and Autonomy« opens with a polemical dismissal of a paragraph in the program of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (SDAPR) that grants every nation the right to self-determination.³⁵ According to her analysis, this paragraph merits special scrutiny because several left Polish parties have used it to make their claim for independence.³⁶ Based on her assessment of centralized states as progressive organizational forms despite their specific ties to bourgeois interests, any attempt to split up existing states into smaller »national« or ethnic units would lead sooner or later to »pre-bourgeois, feudal conditions.«³⁷ This return contradicts the desire of the proletariat for modernization and would amount to a rejection of the advantages of improved – and centrally regulated – institutions such as public schools, modern transportation systems, water supply infrastructure, etc.³⁸

Another, potentially more important point for her rejection of the right to national self-determination is her sober assessment of the *de facto* impossibility of true self-determination within internation-

34 Ibid., p. 65.

35 Ibid., p. 45.

36 Ibid., pp. 48–51.

37 Politt in Luxemburg: Nationalitätenfrage., p. 31.

38 Ibid.

al capitalism. She states that »today, social democracy comprehends that ›the right to work‹ stops being sound and fury only at a point in time when capitalism has been abolished.«³⁹ Analogously, the right to self-determination stops being an empty phrase only when nations are no longer threatened by invasion, bound by debt, object to the whims of and exploitation by their hegemonic neighbors, or constrained by market forces. According to her argument, the formula of national self-determination makes no sense in the system she analyzes because it fails to connect specifically to the goals and demands of »socialism or workers' politics.«⁴⁰ Since Luxemburg acknowledges exploitative or oppressive structures *within* large empires or centralized states, she proposes regional *autonomy* as a more viable – and more socialist – alternative to either classic federalism or national self-determination.

Due to her childhood and adolescent experiences in Russian-ruled Congress Poland and her family's emphasis on Jewish congregational life as well as on Polish national identity, she did not advocate the giving up of one's language or culture in pursuit of the greater good. Instead, she »called for Polish workers to cooperate with the other nationalities in their respective empires; Austrians, Germans and Russians, towards the goal of socialism.«⁴¹ Jie-Hyun Lim makes a useful distinction when writing about Luxemburg's »opposition to Polish independence [which] never carried an automatic implication of anti-patriotism.«⁴² This thinking, which consequently opposes »every form of social injustice and societal domination,«⁴³ would consequently reject both government that aims to level regional and cultural specificities as well as the kind of government built solely around an idea of national independence divorced from workers' governance. For Luxemburg, questions of national independence, the embedded-

39 Luxemburg, *Nationalitätenfrage*, p. 61.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

41 Castle: »You Alone«, pp. 109–110.

42 Lim: Rosa Luxemburg, p. 500.

43 Luxemburg, *Nationalitätenfrage*, p. 51.

ness of ethnic groups within larger empires, and demands for self-governance can only be decided with regard to the specific historical and material conditions of any given place.⁴⁴ There could and should be no formula privileging national independence at the expense of international labor solidarity. Her template for preserving local differences and cultural goods, then, does not necessarily center the nation-state.

Autonomy, according to Luxemburg's theory, consists of »a combination of broad local self-government based on equality of all citizens [...] with a respective federal language law.«⁴⁵ Here, she emphasizes the non-competitive nature of this form of self-governance and the protection of minority cultures. By combining the advantages of a strong centralized legal system and public infrastructure that would not be possible on a smaller scale with strong local ties and institutions that allow for territorial and cultural diversity within state boundaries, the working class will have access to the progress achieved by the bourgeoisie. Her two-level approach would – in theory – also allow for the cultural and economic flourishing of rural areas, a part of any centralized state that risks being neglected in a bourgeois order centered on a few urban centers. For autonomy to be a viable alternative to national self-determination, the role of public education cannot be overestimated. In her book about the national question, she devotes entire sections to the development of different educational systems in different countries and emphasizes the importance of local institutions to provide anyone, not just bourgeois elites or the urban proletariat in the metropole, with the tools necessary for advancing the socialist cause. In her view, local self-governance and education provide the preconditions for agency within the centralized state. She thus provides a comprehensive approach to the intricate balancing act of industrialist progress, international class struggle, cultural independence, and freedom from oppression.

44 Ibid., p. 53.

45 Ibid., p. 186.

Regress, Progress, and Solidarity

Rosa Luxemburg's analyses of and answers to pressing political and economic issues were always connected to and built upon her conviction that the ultimate goals of all historical development should be a classless society which realizes »society as a sum of individuals who are connected to a greater whole via harmony and solidarity of interests.«⁴⁶ The notion of solidarity of interests is crucial for Luxemburg's conception of both politics in general and autonomy in particular. Contrary to the German word »*Interessengemeinschaft*,« which translates to »community of interests,« »*Interessensolidarität*,« i. e. »solidarity of interests,« implies an acknowledgment and acceptance of differences. Those differences, however, are not negotiated via war, oppression of marginalized groups, imperialist expansion, or exploitation, but in solidarity, that is, with a willingness to understand other peoples' or other groups' demands without having to automatically align oneself with these interests. This scenario, while already utopian, still addresses the continuities of conflicts tied to as well as going beyond economic interests. Thus, it can be read as an intermediary stage on the way to a classless world community. Luxemburg's investment in pragmatic approaches to pressing political and economic problems, however, leads her to an analysis of nation-states and empires as she sees them in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Holger Politt points out that this may be seen as one of the weaknesses of *Nationalitätenfrage* because she »held on to the European world as it were. The border between the large territorial states were unalterable to her.«⁴⁷ It is precisely this pragmatism, however, and her willingness to think about alternatives other than small and ever-smaller nation-states largely at the whim of a few hegemony that make her account insightful today. When we ask what a world without or at least with significantly less economic

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 72.

⁴⁷ Politt in Luxemburg: *Nationalitätenfrage*, p. 30.

and political competition, without the pitting of workers in developed countries against workers in developing countries, and without the constant domination and suppression of ethnic minorities and regional cultures would look like, Luxemburg does offer intriguing perspectives. These perspectives may still be worthwhile precisely because they do not anticipate the breakup of the European empires and believe in a solidarity among workers who later generations of Marxists were far less confident in.⁴⁸

For Luxemburg, »the fight and protest against national oppression [...] does not result from a special ›right of nations‹ [...] but from a general opposition to the class system, to every form of social inequality and societal domination, [...] from the fundamental stance of socialism.«⁴⁹ Thus, any analysis of national liberation struggles has to pay attention to the agents of the struggle, the respective interests at play, and whether or not this struggle aligns more broadly with the international socialist struggle. If it does not – and Luxemburg is very clear on this – there is no socialist duty to support it. Her first unit of analysis, here and elsewhere, is the class struggle. Both in »The National Question« and later in »The Accumulation of Capital,« she attempts to connect the local, national, and international concerns of the proletariat. Even though these interests might contradict themselves at times depending on the respective level of analysis, her writing depicts a deep concern with urgent problems in need of quick solutions *as well as* the much broader perspective of long-term historical development. In creating a centralized state, then, that supports strong local institutions and »dismantl[es] the standing army, [supports] the general armament of the public, and mak[es] the decision over peace and war dependent on public representatives,« her socialist principles aim

48 Mark P. Worrel: *Dialectic of Solidarity: Labor, Antisemitism, and the Frankfurt School*, Boston 2008, p. 9.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

at curbing the potential for imperialist warfare.⁵⁰ The principle agent of socialist revolution, the proletariat, aims to ameliorate the existing state structures while relentlessly working towards the eventual abolition of the bourgeois state. While keenly aware of the traps of nationalist perspectives that lose sight of either the long-term socialist perspective or the intricacies of capitalist economic interdependence and competition, she remains committed to a belief in progress and social development towards a global sphere of classless societies.

Context, Conclusion, Connections

When the German Social Democrats (SPD) supported war bonds in 1914 and eventually the entry of Germany into the First World War, Rosa Luxemburg was shaken.⁵¹ For her, the war meant »a reversion to barbarism,« the embodiment of socialism's alternative and the consequences of the collapse of capitalism.⁵² Her previous – and subsequent – work aimed at supporting international working-class solidarity, accommodating and protecting minorities within the large and multi-ethnic European empires of the time, opposing colonialism and the exploitation of non-capitalist spheres, and being both practical and principled, two stances that, as Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) observed, do not always go together.⁵³ Thus, the fulfillment of her grim prophecy of increased competition leading to war and mass death and, on top of this, the German SPD's support of the war went against everything Luxemburg advocated for politically.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 202.

⁵¹ Evelin Wittich: Perspectives on Rosa Luxemburg I, in: *New Formations* 94/2018, p. 46.

⁵² Luxemburg quoted in Norman Geras: *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg*, London 2015, p. 32.

⁵³ Hannah Arendt: A Heroine of Revolution, in: *New York Review of Books*, October 1966.

After she was murdered in 1919, the European empires broke up, new – and smaller – nation-states emerged, and the international struggle for a socialist world became even more fragmented. One hundred years after her death, however, Luxemburg's work has elicited a variety of new editions, critical re-assessments, and popular takes on her life and writings.⁵⁴ Her theory of the interdependence of capitalist and non-capitalist spheres in particular can be read as a wise foreshadowing of economic subjugation via »development« policy and the increasing awareness that capitalist development is more often than not tied to underdevelopment.⁵⁵ They also provide starting points for analyses of racial capitalism, a concept introduced by Cedric Robinson in 1983 when writing about the Black Marxist tradition.⁵⁶ Racial capitalism aims to provide a framework within which structures of capitalist exploitation, expropriation and dispossession can be understood in conjunction with regimes of racial domination.⁵⁷ The framework thus emphasizes a concern with people's actual working and living conditions, which mirrors Luxemburg's approach. Marcel van der Linden emphasizes that, in her work, Rosa Luxemburg did not imagine the world as a sphere of abstract economic relations among

54 Among the recent works on Luxemburg are Ernst Piper: *Rosa Luxemburg. Ein Leben*, Munich 2019; Kate Evans: *Red Rosa. A Graphic Biography of Rosa Luxemburg*, New York 2015; the republished biography by John Peter Nettl: *Rosa Luxemburg. The Biography*, London 2019; the English version of Klaus Gietinger: *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*, London 2019; and countless journal and newspaper articles commemorating the 100th anniversary of her death in 1919.

55 Andre Gunder Frank: *The Development of Underdevelopment*, in: *Monthly Review*, 41/1989, pp. 17–31; Walter Rodney: *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, London 1972.

56 Cedric Robinson: *Black Marxism. The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, London 1983.

57 Nancy Fraser: *Roepke Lecture in Economic Geography – From Exploitation to Expropriation. Historic Geographies of Racialized Capitalism*, in: *Economic Geography* 94/2017, pp. 3–7.

faceless agents but as »a globe that is populated, invigorated and cultivated by the most diverse peoples and tribes, who are made into ›land‹, ›spheres of capital investment‹ and ›sales markets‹ by brute force.«⁵⁸ Critically analyzing capitalism means extending a reading of labor conditions and confronting the numerous ways in which economic relations stratify, categorize, and rank people. It also, importantly, urges us to move beyond a narrow European-centered analysis and to highlight the connections between production and consumption in the Western world and production and consumption in developing countries.

Beyond the economic realm, Luxemburg's reflections on the role of centralized states in conjunction with autonomous self-governance provide starting points for assessing the relations of local, national, and international emancipatory claims and projects. Thus, they lead us back to discussions of post-colonial thinkers, the questions on the necessity and dangers of nationalism, and the long and contested search for an international agent of change. For Luxemburg, once more, national self-determination remains a farce if the ambitions do not go any further than delineating new borders and writing a new legal code while maintaining prior economic and social relations. Her thought did not stop at the vision of an independent Poland or socialist Russia or social democratic Germany. The enormous tasks of taking on existing states, using their structures for the advancement of the working class, and progressing towards non-exploitative relations could only be thought of from an international perspective because to Luxemburg, as a socialist, »no nation is free whose national existence is based upon the enslavement of other people.«⁵⁹

58 van der Linden: *Global Class Analysis*, p. 136.

59 Nye quoted in O'Brien: *Revisiting Rosa Luxemburg's Internationalism*, p. 9.

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