

SPECIAL SECTION ON ROSA LUXEMBURG'S POLITICAL ECONOMY

## Accumulation, Imperialism, and Pre-Capitalist Formations Luxemburg and Marx on the non-Western World

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### Abstract

The dramatic changes that have unfolded in the global economy in recent years make this a worthwhile moment to explore the similarities and differences between Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg's understanding of what is now termed the "globalization of capital." Both Marx and Luxemburg were intensely interested in the impact of the expansive logic of capital accumulation upon non-capitalist or developing societies, as seen in Marx's late writings on agrarian societies, communal formations in India and North Africa, and among Native Americans and in Luxemburg's studies of some of the same formations in her *Introduction to Political Economy and Accumulation of Capital*. Although Luxemburg was unaware of Marx's writings on these issues, since many of Marx's manuscripts on non-Western societies are only now coming to light, there are striking similarities, on a number of issues, between her approach and Marx's analyses. At the same time, there are also serious differences in their approach, in that Marx adopted a far less unilinear and deterministic approach to the fate of non-Western social formations as compared to Luxemburg. This paper explores these similarities and differences by exploring a number of manuscripts by Marx and Luxemburg that have only recently come to light or which have received insufficient attention, such as Marx's *Notebooks on Kovalevsky* and Luxemburg's studies of pre-capitalist societies of 1907, originally composed as part of her research for the *Introduction to Political Economy*. One of the article's aims is to generate a re-examination of both Marx and Luxemburg's contributions in light of these less-known writings.

### Résumé

Les transformations dramatiques qui ont eu lieu dans l'économie globale ces dernières années rendent opportun d'explorer les similarités et les différences entre les analyses

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de ce qui est maintenant appelé la mondialisation du capital par Karl Marx et Rosa Luxemburg. Marx et Luxemburg étaient tous les deux très intéressés par l'impact de la logique expansionniste de l'accumulation du capital sur les sociétés non capitalistes et celles en voie de développement, comme en témoignent les écrits tardifs de Marx sur les sociétés agraires, les structures communales en Inde, en Afrique du Nord et parmi les Autochtones de l'Amérique du Nord, ainsi que les études de Luxemburg de certaines de ces mêmes formations dans son *Introduction à l'économie politique* et *L'accumulation du capital*. Bien que Luxemburg n'était pas au courant des écrits de Marx sur ces sujets, parce que beaucoup de ses manuscrits sur les sociétés non-Occidentales sont seulement maintenant en train de paraître, il y a des similarités frappantes, sur de nombreux sujets, entre leurs approches. En même temps, il demeure des différences importantes, dans la mesure où Marx a adopté une approche beaucoup moins linéaire et déterministe que Luxemburg à propos du destin des structures sociales non-Occidentales. Cet article explore ces similarités et différences en explorant plusieurs manuscrits de Marx et Luxemburg qui ont seulement récemment vu le jour ou qui ont reçu une attention insuffisante, comme *Les Carnets de Kovalevsky* de Marx et les études de Luxemburg sur les sociétés pré-capitalistes de 1907, écrites à l'origine dans le cadre de ses recherches pour l'*Introduction à l'économie politique*. Un des objectifs de l'article est de générer un nouvel examen des contributions de Marx et de Luxemburg, à la lumière de ces écrits moins bien connus.

**Keywords**

Communal forms • dialectics • imperialism • Islamic civilization • Karl Marx • Rosa Luxemburg

**Mots-clés**

civilisation islamiques • dialectique • impérialisme • Karl Marx • Rosa Luxemburg • structures communales

The dramatic changes that have unfolded in the global economy in recent years have brought two figures to the forefront of re-examination—Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Marx. Among the most important of the changes that have swept the globe in recent years is the transformation of hundreds of millions of peasants in China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Brazil, and other nations into 'free' wage labourers, often working in sweatshop conditions for multinational capital. Few periods of history have witnessed such a massive displacement of human labour from rural to urban areas. The impact of this latest chapter of the 'great transformation' has clearly not yet run its course, and it is sure to be felt in both the developing and developed nations for many years to come.

Luxemburg and Marx take on particular importance in light of these realities, largely because they emphasized the interconnections between

capitalist development in 'advanced' industrial lands and the destruction of pre-capitalist or communal social formation in technologically underdeveloped ones. For Marx, the emergence of capitalism was inseparable from the discovery of the New World and the displacement of massive numbers of peasants from the land. For Luxemburg, the ability to sustain capital accumulation and social reproduction on an expanded scale hinges upon taking over and destroying non-capitalist sectors outside of the European and North American sphere. While both thinkers were firmly rooted in the historic milieu and environment in which they lived, the ideas developed by each of them speak in provocative ways to the realities confronting humanity at the dawn of the twenty-first century. As part of the effort to contribute to renewed discussion of the contemporary relevance of both thinkers, this paper aims to draw out the similarities as well as differences between Marx and Luxemburg's understanding of pre-capitalist societies—especially in terms of whether or not it such societies are inevitably fated to suffer the vicissitudes of capitalist industrialization and alienation that has so marred the modern history of the Western world.

### **Rosa Luxemburg on Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations**

Rosa Luxemburg's study of pre-capitalist societies was a central part of her effort to show that imperialism is inseparable from the nature of capitalism. Her *Accumulation of Capital* famously argued that since the accumulation of capital requires the realization of surplus value, and since neither workers nor capitalists possess the purchasing power to 'buy back' the surplus product, capitalism is compelled to seize hold of social strata in the non-capitalist world. Imperialism is therefore not a mere political policy on the part of capitalist governments, but rather a social and economic *necessity* for capitalist reproduction. She wrote, "The decisive fact is that the surplus value cannot be realized by sale either to workers or to capitalists, but only if it is sold to such social organisations or strata whose own mode of production is not capitalistic". (Luxemburg 2004a, 50-51) Capitalism's 'law of motion' compels it to continuously take hold of and undermine communal social formations in the technologically underdeveloped world through imperialist expansion.

Although Luxemburg's position in *The Accumulation of Capital* is well known, much less so are the arguments contained in her 1907 *Introduction to Political Economy*, a work that has yet to appear in full in English. Not known at all is a series of manuscripts penned by her in 1907 on pre-capitalist social relations in ancient Greece and Rome, the European

Middle Ages, and Volumes Two and Three of Marx's *Capital*. These were composed in connection with her work on *Introduction to Political Economy* and her courses at the German Social-Democratic Party's school in Berlin, where she was an instructor.<sup>1</sup> When studied as a unit, these writings provide a far more comprehensive view of Luxemburg's understanding of the relation between capitalist and non-capitalist lands than has heretofore been available.

A major object of investigation of the *Introduction to Political Economy* is the 'primitive' agrarian commune. The book examines not only the mark community of the early Germans and Greeks but also a number of non-Western societies, some of them still functioning, in her own lifetime, such as the Russian *mir*, the traditional villages of India, the Lunda Empire of South Central Africa, the Kabyles of North Africa, the Bororo of the Amazon, and the Inca Empire. In discussing pre-capitalist communal forms in these societies, Luxemburg emphasized their 'extraordinary tenacity and stability...elasticity and adaptability'. (Luxemburg 2004b, 102) At a time when European commentators, Marxists included, emphasized the 'backwardness' and 'inferiority' of such cultures, she paid careful attention to their *positive* features. She wrote: 'Communist ownership of the means of production afforded, as the basis of a rigorously organised economy, the most productive social labour process and the best assurance of its continuity and development for many epochs' (Luxemburg 2004b, 103).

At the same time, she was not uncritical of such communal forms. She focused on the internal factors that promote their *dissolution*, such the emergence of differentiations of rank *within* the community. In her analysis of the German mark she especially singled out the tendency of the village mayor or *centener* to become a hereditary position. From that point, she argued, 'it was only a small step before this office could be sold, or for the land to be given over as a fiefdom' (Luxemburg 2004b, 74). A similar process, she showed, occurred in Incan society. Whereas at first the communal lands could not be sold or given away, over time the village leader became a hereditary position, thereby accelerating the

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. Narihiko Ito discovered these manuscripts and has published one of them, on slavery in ancient Greece and Rome. (Ito, 2002) For an English translation of a portion of this manuscript, see Luxemburg 2004c. The five other manuscripts, which have yet to be published anywhere, are: 'Mittelalter. Feudalismus, Entwicklung der Städte'; 'Praktische Nationalökonomie. Über 2. Band des "Kapital" von Marx'; 'Praktische Nationalökonomie. Über 3. Band des "Kapital" von Marx'. 'Geschichte der Nationalökonomie'; 'Über die Lohnfondstheorie'. These will all appear in English translation in the projected 14-volume *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* (forthcoming, Verso Books).

differentiations of rank within the commune. Military domination of one community by another further enabled 'inequality to make rapid progress...for the communist cohesion to weaken, and for private property to enter with its division of rich and poor' (Luxemburg 2004b, 81). She paid special attention to this dynamic in discussing conditions in sub-Saharan Africa: 'Primitive communist society, through its own internal development, leads to the formation of inequality and despotism...Such societies...sooner or later succumb to foreign occupation and then undergo a more or less wide-ranging social reorganization' (Luxemburg 2004b, 109).

Luxemburg is renowned for her independent intellect and spirit, which led her to take issue not only with the opportunist elements within the Second International but also with Marx's analysis of expanded reproduction in Volume Two of *Capital*. Less known or appreciated is her sharp criticism of Marx's closest colleague and follower, Frederick Engels, over his analysis of pre-capitalist societies. Luxemburg's emphasis on the *internal* factors fostering the dissolution of the agrarian commune led her to take issue with Engels, whose *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* tended to view social hierarchy and class differentiation as arising from *outside* the communal forms. In Engels' portrayal, communal formations tend to collapse under *external* pressures, which in turn become the basis for private property relations and class society. Luxemburg saw matters differently. In a 1907 manuscript on Greek and Roman slavery that has only recently come to light, she wrote: 'Engels says in *Anti-Duhring* that after the emergence of private property, the opportunity to employ foreign labour arose...This explanation cannot, strictly speaking, satisfy us...It is necessary that one trace out the manner in which slavery emerged out of the mark and the gentile constitution'. The thrust of her argument was that 'unlike Engels, we do not need to place exploitation after the emergence of private property. The mark itself allows for exploitation and servitude...there was already a certain aristocracy within the mark' (Luxemburg 2004c, 111-112).

Luxemburg's critique of Engels' view of slavery is of considerable importance, because it touches on the role played by periods of *transition*. Engels' analysis of 'primitive' society in his *Origin of the Family* 'always seems to have antagonisms only at the end, as if class society came in nearly full blown *after* the communal form was destroyed and private property was established' (Dunayevskaya 2001, 180). In contrast, Luxemburg's studies indicated that the emergence of internal differentiations of rank and property occur *during* the transition period

from one social order to another. She wrote, 'The gates have indeed already been opened to future inequality by the inheritability of property...the division of labor in the heart of the primitive society unavoidably leads, sooner or later, to the breakup of political and economic equality from inside' (Luxemburg 2004b, 104, 105). Whereas Engels tied the rise of social hierarchies (including between men and women) to the emergence of private property that *follows* the dissolution and breakup of the commune, Luxemburg (2004c, 114) argued, 'Slavery accelerates the dissolution of the communist association and goes hand in hand with the rise of private property. This stands in contrast to Engels, who saw slavery as arising only *after* the introduction of private property'.

### **Luxemburg, Engels, and Marx on Dualities within the Communal Form**

Luxemburg's critique of Engels is remarkable for many reasons—not the least because it resonates with aspects of Marx's writings on the primitive commune, even though she did not have access to most of his writings on this subject from the last decade of his life (1872-83). Luxemburg was aware that Marx studied the work of the Russian sociologist Maxim Kovalevsky, and she made use of Kovalevsky's studies of communal forms in *The Accumulation of Capital* and *Introduction to Political Economy*. However, although she was invited to participate in the process of sorting out Marx's unpublished manuscripts, there is no evidence that she read Marx's lengthy 'Notebooks on Kovalevsky'.<sup>2</sup> Nor is there evidence that she knew about the vast bulk of Marx's other writings on pre-capitalist formations, such as his *Ethnological Notebooks* on Native American societies.

Marx's late writings on the non-Western world not only remained unknown for decades after Marx's death; they still remain largely unknown today. To the extent that Marx's writings on the non-Western world are mentioned, what is usually cited is his 1853 writings on India, which endorsed aspects of British colonial rule on the subcontinent as 'progressive.' Even Marx's most sympathetic readers tend to overlook the fact that Marx radically revised this initial view by the 1860s. For example, Negri and Hardt argue in *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000, 120) that Marx's

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<sup>2</sup> Franz Mehring asked Luxemburg to help in sorting out Marx's manuscripts, but she declined to do so. J.P. Nettl noted in his biography of Luxemburg that in the period when she prepared her lectures for the party school that became *Introduction to Political Economy*, she was 're-reading Marx and Engels' literary remains' (Nettl 1969, 176). However, there is no evidence that she knew of much of Marx's work on the non-Western world from his last decade.

writings on India and the ‘Asiatic mode of production’ efface the ‘conception of difference in Indian society’ in favor of a unilinear concept of historical ‘progress’ that emanates from Europe. They write, ‘The central issue is that Marx can conceive of history outside of Europe only as moving strictly along the path already traveled by Europe itself...India can progress only by being transformed into a Western society...Marx’s Eurocentrism is in the end not so different’ from that of the supporters of capitalism.

What is remarkable about this statement is that it ignores the bulk of Marx’s writings on non-Western societies—not only those composed from 1872-83, but also the *Grundrisse*, which was composed much earlier (1858).<sup>3</sup> By the late 1870’s Marx made a comprehensive study of the Muslim rule of northern India, communal land formations in Algeria, and the Hanafi School of Islamic jurisprudence in his notebooks on the work of Maxim Kovalevsky, who focused on communal land formations in northern India and North Africa. Marx’s ‘Notebooks on Kovalevsky’ demonstrates that he engaged in a number of careful studies of Indian history as well as Islamic culture and civilization—an issue that especially attracted his interest in the last months of his life, when he lived in Algiers.<sup>4</sup> Marx’s ‘Notebooks on Kovalevsky’ also analyzed indigenous communal property forms in pre-Colombian Incan civilization. The German historian Hans-Peter Harstick, who first published Marx’s ‘Notebooks on Kovalevsky,’ argued that in them Marx’s gaze turned from the European scene...toward Asia, Latin America, and North Africa’. (Harstick 1977, 2)

Between 1879 and 1883 Marx composed many other notebooks on non-Western and pre-capitalist societies. These include an analysis of Indian history and culture, such as his October 1880 notes on Indian history from 664 CE to 1858; notes on Dutch colonialism in Indonesia, such as his critical commentary on the work of J.W.B. Money; an analysis of British colonial rule in Egypt; and a 1,700 page manuscript on world history, written in late 1881, which has yet be published. This is in addition to his 400-page *Ethnological Notebooks* on Native American and Australian aboriginal societies (originally composed in 1880-81) and his draft letters to Vera Zasulich from the same period on the Russian village commune, both of which have been widely available for several decades.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The irony is that Negri himself considers the *Grundrisse* Marx’s most important work and the “secret” to his distinctive analysis of capitalism. However, he downplays the importance of its section on ‘Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations’ (See Negri 1991).

<sup>4</sup> For Marx’s studies on Islam, see Hudis 2004 and Vesper 1995.

<sup>5</sup> See Anderson 2010 for a discussion of many of these writings.

Much of Marx's late writings on pre-capitalist and non-Western societies are now in the process being published in the Marx-Engels *Gesamtausgabe* by the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. The appearance of several thousand pages of heretofore unpublished writings by Marx on the non-Western world will help provide a more well-rounded and comprehensive understanding of his thought. It is only now, with these late writings about to appear in print, that it may be possible to evaluate his legacy as a totality.<sup>6</sup>

What becomes clear from a study of Marx's late writings that have so far appeared is that Luxemburg's analysis in the *Introduction to Political Economy* and the related manuscripts of 1907 are remarkably close to Marx's perspective on several points. Marx also emphasized the *internal* process of dissolution of communal in his studies of pre-capitalist society. This is especially evident in his *Ethnological Notebooks* on Native American societies. In these *Notebooks* Marx focused on the *dualism* that characterized indigenous communal formations. On the one hand, he held, these formations provide a basis for collective interaction and reciprocity that are not only valid in their own right, but which could become a foundation for a future socialist society. On the other hand, he held that these formations are also afflicted with an array of social inequities and incipient hierarchies—especially between men and women. Unlike Engels, who tended to uncritically glorify the communal forms in "primitive" society in his *Origin of the Family*, Marx pointed to the formation of class, caste, and hierarchical social relations that existed *within* them. Though Marx emphasized the superiority of Iroquois society as compared with contemporary European cultures when it came to gender relations, he did not assume that the communal ownership of land automatically provided women with sexual equality. In his *Ethnological Notebooks* he noted that even though women had access to political decisions their votes were often only *consultative*.

This is indicated by Marx's manner of underlining and emphasizing phrases and expressions from his *Notebooks* on the work of Henry Lewis Morgan, which constitutes a large section of his *Ethnological Notebooks*: "The women allowed to express their wishes and opinions through an orator of their own election. Decision *given by the council*. Unanimity was a

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<sup>6</sup> These late writings on Marx do not only consist of writings on the non-Western world. One of Marx's very last writings, composed only weeks before his death, was notes on the impact of racism on the US labour movement, as seen in the efforts to restrict Chinese immigration. These notes have not yet been published anywhere, to my knowledge.



fundamental law of its action among the Iroquois. Military questions *usually left to the action of the voluntary principle*' (Marx 1972, 162). Marx's approach of singling out the importance of communal forms while not uncritically glorifying them is most evident in his studies of the Russian peasant commune. In direct opposition to the 'Marxists' of the time and afterwards, Marx did not assume that communal formations in rural Russia were doomed to be destroyed by capitalism. Nor did he view them as some archaic formation that held back the development of capitalism in Russia. Marx befriended and corresponded with leading members of the Russian Populist movement, who translated *Capital* into Russian—largely because he was interested (as they were) in the emancipatory potential of the Russian agrarian commune.

Marx did not, however, romanticize the Russian village commune—much as he sought to find revolutionary potential within it. As he wrote in his draft letters to Vera Zasulich, while the commune had many positive features 'it also bore within its own breast the elements that were poisoning its life' (Marx 1983a, 120). If the communal element won out over the incipient relations of hierarchy and patriarchy, then it was possible, Marx held, for it to serve as the basis for socialism—provided that there was also a proletarian revolution in the West. However, if the communal element fell victim to its incipient relations of hierarchy and patriarchy, either due to external factors (like imperialism) or internal ones (like the repression of women's freedom by the 'indigenous' community) then it would not and could not serve as a basis for a future socialist society. 'Everything depends on the historical context in which it finds itself', he wrote (Marx 1983a, 110). And by 'historical context' Marx did not mean only 'material conditions' or abstract 'laws of history' but *social revolution*—the conscious intervention of the human subject that tries to resolve social contradictions.

Even today, when Marx's late writings on non-Western societies have finally begun to be published, few have singled out the difference between Engels and Marx's views on the primitive commune. That Luxemburg detected problems in Engels' approach, even without having access to most of Marx's work on the subject, testifies to the power and independence of her intellect.

### Differences Between Luxemburg's and Marx's Views Toward the Non-Western World

Although there are striking similarities between Marx and Luxemburg's analyses of pre-capitalist societies, there are also some major differences. This comes into focus when comparing Marx and Luxemburg's reading of Kovalevsky. In both *The Accumulation of Capital* and the *Introduction to Political Economy*, Luxemburg made considerable use of Kovalevsky's work—even though she was apparently unaware of how extensively Marx had studied him a generation earlier. Both greatly appreciated Kovalevsky because of his firm opposition to imperialism and the sensitivity with which he analyzed conditions in the non-Western world.

However, a critical issue on which Luxemburg diverged from Marx concerned the issue of 'Asiatic feudalism.' Relying directly on Kovalevsky, Luxemburg argued in her discussion of Sub-Saharan Africa in *Introduction to Political Economy* that the conquest of North Africa and the Middle East by 'nomadic Mohammedan peoples' brought about 'the feudalization of the land'. As she saw it, 'the spread of Islam implemented a profound change in the general conditions of existence of primitive societies' by introducing feudalism. This was not Marx's view. His 'Notebooks on Kovalevsky' took issue with Kovalevsky's claim that feudalism arose from the Muslim conquest of North African and northern India: 'Because "benefices," "farming out of offices" (but this is not at all feudal, as Rome attests) and commendation are founded in India, Kovalevsky here finds feudalism in the Western European sense. Kovalevsky forgets, among other things, *serfdom*, which is not in India, and which is an essential moment' (Marx 1975, 383). Marx also noted that inheritance does not work in the same way in Indian society as in feudalism: "According to Indian law the ruling power is not subject to division among the sons; thereby a great source of European feudalism [is] obstructed." Marx also took issue with Kovalevsky's view that the Ottoman Turks introduced feudalism during their conquest of North Africa: "There is no trace of the transformation of the entire conquered land into "domanial property." The lousy "Orientalists" etc. refer vainly to the places in the Qu'ran where the earth is spoken of as belonging "to the property of God"' (Marx 1975, 370). Marx objected to using European categories like 'feudalism' to define non-Western societies; as one Marx scholar put it, for Marx 'the course of Indian history is to be explained by indigenous, not imported categories' (Krader 1975, 406).

Luxemburg also had a different view from Marx on the Russian commune, the *mir*. In the *Introduction to Political Economy* she argued that

Russia was a special case, since 'the state did not seek to destroy the communal property of the peasants through force, but on the contrary, attempted to rescue and preserve it with all the means at its disposal' (Luxemburg 2004, 95). She based this view on the fact that when the serfs were freed in the 1860s the 'land was not, as in Prussia, assigned to individual peasant families as private property, but to whole communities as inalienable and unmortgageable communal property. The entire community took responsibility for debt repayment' (Luxemburg 2004b, 96). However, Luxemburg's own discussion tends to undermine her claim that the state 'attempted to rescue and preserve' the commune 'with *all* the means at its disposal' (Luxemburg 2004b, 100). As she noted, the heavy tax burden imposed by the state on the village communities meant that 'the dissolution of the mark community could no longer be prevented' since many peasants fled the land while those who remained on it sought to escape the onerous tax burdens by disassociating themselves from the *mir*.<sup>7</sup>

As we can now see from his draft letters to Zasulich in 1881 (a work that was not published until the 1920s and which Luxemburg was unaware of), Marx instead argued that 'a certain type of capitalism, fostered by the state at the peasants' expense, has risen up against the commune and found an interest in stifling it...What threatens the life of the Russian commune is neither a historical inevitability nor a theory; it is the state oppression' (Marx 1983a, 104-105). He added, 'After the so-called emancipation of the peasantry, the state placed the Russian commune in abnormal economic conditions; and since that time, it has never ceased to weigh it down with the social force concentrated in its hands....This oppression from without unleashed the conflict of interests already present at the heart of the commune, rapidly developing the seeds of its disintegration' (Marx 1983a, 114). He concluded: 'It is no longer a question of a problem to be solved, but simply of an enemy to be beaten. To save the Russian commune, there must be a Russian revolution...If the revolution takes place in time, if it concentrates...the intelligent part of Russian society...to ensure the unfettered rise of the rural commune, the latter will soon develop as a regenerating element of Russian society and an element

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<sup>7</sup> The case was different in the East Indies, where the Dutch authorities tried to preserve communal forms through state control as a way to enforce their colonial rule. Engels addressed this in a letter to Karl Kautsky of February 16, 1884, in which he called Dutch rule in the East Indies an example of oppressive 'state socialism' (Engels 1967, 109)

of superiority over the countries enslaved by the capitalist regime' (Marx 1983a, 115-16).

The difference between Luxemburg and Marx's views on the Russian state reveals a divide in their evaluation of pre-capitalist communal forms as a whole. Although Luxemburg pointed to the positive dimensions of communal forms, she never questioned the assumption that they must dissolve before a society can be ready for socialism. Russia, she held, was belated in its capitalist development largely because the state worked to *maintain* the communal forms. In her view, Tsarism was blocking the 'progressive', unilinear historic movement from agrarian communalism to capitalist private property and henceforth to socialism. She therefore held that the task of dissolving the communal forms in Russia falls not to the bourgeoisie, which was weakened by compromises with Tsarism, but to the proletariat, by having it lead a bourgeois-democratic revolution that grants the peasants private property. She wrote, 'The proletarian revolution [of 1905], even in its first, inconclusive phase, had already destroyed...the last remainder of bondage and the mark community, which had been artificially preserved by Tsarism' (Luxemburg 2004b, 102). Only after this is achieved, she held, can the proletariat grow in strength and numbers to the point of putting forth strictly socialist demands.<sup>8</sup> In sum, by arguing that the Russian state preserved the communal forms, Luxemburg was able to argue that the 'leading role' in the Russian revolution falls not to the bourgeoisie but to the proletariat without having to question the unilinear view of historical development that characterized post-Marx Marxism.

Marx, on the other hand, argued that a proletarian revolution was needed to 'save' the Russian commune. He held that the co-existence of communal forms in Russia and capitalism in the West provided Russia with an opportunity to create a socialist society that bypassed capitalist industrialization—but only so long as certain historic conditions were met. *If* the state's approach toward the *mir* continues, he held, it will probably disappear and Russia will lose the finest chance to avoid the vicissitudes of a capitalist regime. Yet *if* the state's intrusive actions were halted through a

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<sup>8</sup> Luxemburg spelled out the leading role of the proletariat in her address to London Conference of the Russian Social-Democratic Party in 1907 (Luxemburg 1974, 213). This did not mean that she thought that Russia in 1907 was ready for a purely proletarian socialist revolution. As Nettl notes, her position at the time was close to that of the Bolsheviks in that she advocated 'autonomous advance-guard action by the proletariat to achieve what was essentially a bourgeois revolution'. (Nettl 1969, 229)

peasant uprising, it was possible that Russia could move toward socialism without experiencing capitalist industrialization. Most important of all, *if* a social uprising of the Russian peasantry was supported by proletarian revolution in the West, Marx argued, the positive contributions of the *mir* could be salvaged in a socialist context. Marx approached his subject matter with an assortment of conditionals—an approach that does not readily fit into any tendency toward formulaic thinking.

In a word, Marx was much more cautious and careful than Luxemburg about drawing conclusions about the ‘inevitability’ of any social outcome. Marx painstakingly analyzed conditions in Russia, India, North Africa and elsewhere, and was adverse to drawing conclusions about the future course of development in those lands on the basis of abstract generalizations. It is not without reason that he insisted in this period that his greatest theoretical work, Volume One of *Capital*, does *not* contain a universal theory of history. Its discussion of the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation, he insisted, applies to West Europe and West Europe *alone* (Marx 1983b, 136). Marx was extremely reluctant to claim apodictic knowledge of ‘historical laws’, especially when it came to parts of the world that he was only in the process of becoming acquainted with.

This also becomes evident by comparing Marx’s discussion of pre-capitalist relations in *Capital* with Luxemburg’s approach. A number of scholars have argued that one reason that Marx delayed the publication of Volumes Two and Three of *Capital* is that he wanted to make the analysis of conditions in the non-Western world as integral to those volumes as the discussion of historical developments in England is to Volume One.<sup>9</sup> That Marx worked hard to integrate material on the non-Western world into Volume Two is evident from the published text. Volume Two contains numerous discussions of conditions in India, China, pre-Colombian Peru, Arab civilization, and Russia. Marx was especially interested in the conditions that produce the dissolution of communal formations in such societies as they come into increasing contact with Western capitalism.

In Part I of Volume Two, Marx calls the existence of a class of wage labourers ‘the indispensable condition without which M-C, the transformation of money into commodities, cannot take the form of the transformation of money capital into productive capital’ (Marx 1981, 117). Two conditions are needed for a class of wage labourers to arise. One is the separation of the labourers from the objective conditions of production: ‘The means of production, the objective portion of productive capital, must

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<sup>9</sup> See especially Smith 2002.

thus already face the worker as such, as capital, before the act of M-L can become general throughout society' (Marx 1981, 116). Without the separation or alienation of the labourers from the production process, capital accumulation and wage-labour cannot arise. This is not all that is needed, however. As Marx notes in his draft letters to Zasulich, the eviction of the Roman peasants from the land during the Second Punic War did not create a class of 'free' wage labourers, nor did it lead to capitalism. Instead, the disenfranchised peasants constituted a dispossessed but non-wage earning class that lived on the margins of society. A similar process occurred in the seventh and eighth centuries when the Christian and Jewish peasantry was displaced from the land as a result of the Arab conquest of the Levant. Marx writes in Volume Two that the reason for this is that there is also 'another side' to what is needed for capitalism to emerge: 'For capital to be formed and to take hold of production, trade must have developed to a certain level, hence also commodity circulation and, with that, commodity production' (Marx 1981, 117). Marx shows that *the manner* in which the separation of the labourers from the conditions of production converge with the rise of a money economy will determine whether or not capitalism arises. He presents no abstract schema or social necessity here, but only a *tendency* given the existence of specific, contingent historical conditions. On these grounds he denies that Russia is inevitably fated to fall prey to capitalism: 'This is because the Russian agricultural worker, owing to the common ownership of the soil by the village community, is not yet fully separated from his means of production' (Marx 1981, 117).

This is a very different emphasis than found in Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital*, which presents the absorption of non-capitalist strata by capitalism as a virtual historical inevitability. Luxemburg even acknowledges that sooner or later all non-capitalist strata will be consumed by imperialism—unless a proletarian revolution *in the West* first emerges to put a stop to the process. This not only tends to introduce a note of historical inevitability not found in Marx; it also leaves the masses of the non-Western world as bystanders to their own emancipation.<sup>10</sup>

Luxemburg was an outstanding figure for (among other reasons) paying attention to parts of the world that the 'Marxists' of her generation ignored. While that is definitely to her credit, her reading of pre-capitalist societies, as is true of her reading of Kovalevsky's work, is not as nuanced

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<sup>10</sup> That Luxemburg consistently denied that struggles for national self-determination could be revolutionary hardly helped matters in this regard.

and subtle as Marx's. This is no cause for condemnation; few thinkers in world history have been as nuanced and subtle as Marx.<sup>11</sup> However, the difference between their two approaches does have important ramifications, since Luxemburg more readily accommodated to the unilinear evolutionism that characterized not only the Second International but also established Marxism as a whole. As a result, her relentless dedication to spontaneous revolt and mass action from below sits uneasily with her theory of accumulation, which tends to be economistic.

There was no difference between Marx and Luxemburg insofar as the centrality of revolution was concerned. Rosa never wavered from her view that 'revolution is everything, all else is bilge' (Luxemburg 1982, 259). Where they differed was on the ability of revolution to carve out a multilinear path that avoids the stage of capitalist industrialization. Unlike his followers, Marx was not wedded to a unilinear view of history. He envisioned the possibility of an alternative path of development for Russia and other non-Western countries that avoids the unilinear sequence of feudalism to capitalism to socialism. This flowed from his profound anti-determinism, his grasp of historic contingency, and his sensitivity to the struggles of the human subject for liberation.

Tragically, the depth of Marx's philosophy of 'revolution in permanence' was unknown to the Marxists of Luxemburg's generation. Indeed, it remained unknown long afterward. As a result, the possibility of achieving socialism without undergoing the horrors of capitalist industrialization receded from view.

Nevertheless, Luxemburg's firm opposition to imperialism, her appreciation of pre-capitalist communal forms, and her openness to forces of liberation—not just the proletariat but women as well<sup>12</sup>—can inspire our generation to explore anew the *depth* of Marx's Marxism, of which she

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<sup>11</sup> Although many writers use the term "dialectics" as if it provides some ready-made golden key to resolve any and every problem, Marx understood—as did Hegel before him—that *thinking dialectically* is no facile matter but is in fact *exceedingly rare*. This is most of all because dialectics is not an applied science. As Marx put it, 'He will discover to his cost that it is one thing for a critique to take a science to the point at which it admits of a dialectical presentation, and quite another to apply an abstract, ready-made system of logic to vague presentiments of just such a system'. (Marx 1983c, 261)

<sup>12</sup> Though it has long been claimed that Luxemburg paid little or no attention to women's concerns, recent research has pointed to a neglected feminist dimension of her thought. See especially Dunayevskaya 1981 and F. Haug 1988.

could have but the faintest intimation. Our generation is the first to have *all* of Marx's writings pried from the archives—from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* to the *Grundrisse* to his writings on the 'Asiatic Mode of Production' to the original drafts of his three volumes of *Capital*, to the many writings from his last decade on India, China, Russia, Indonesia, Native Americans, and others. When Luxemburg's passionate determination to achieve genuine human liberation is combined with a determination to absorb the depth of Marx's thought that our generation is the first to have full access to, new mental—and practical—horizons can open up before us. To do justice to Luxemburg's profound commitment to human liberation calls on us to do no less.

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