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STIFTUNG**
NEW YORK OFFICE

ROSA LUXEMBURG'S ETHICAL FEMINISM

By Drucilla Cornell

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Published by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, New York Office, July 2018.

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With support from the German Foreign Office.

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Rosa Luxemburg's Ethical Feminism

By Drucilla Cornell

The great Jamaican philosopher Sylvia Wynter philosophically demonstrates that what she names Man1 and Man2 have completely eclipsed the practice of the human and are intertwined with imperial domination and colonialism.¹ Man1 for Wynter develops with a Christianity that is no longer waiting for the apocalypse to end the sinful Earth, but is instead one that promotes a loving God that enables human creatures to reach out to the world around them. That world becomes knowable and inspires the great imperial adventures to explore everything that is on our planet, and this involves of course the confrontation with those who are not within the Christian universe. Those who are outside of Man1 are rejected as human, and so we have famous debates about whether or not the dark-skinned peoples found in the Caribbean and in South America are in fact beings with souls who we could possibly

recognize as part of humanity. Man2, for Wynter, comes with the biological rating of different forms of being human, and once again people of color are always on the bottom, now rooted in so-called genetically based characteristics that define certain human beings as “more human” than others.

If there is a basic theme in Rosa Luxemburg, it is the rebellion against the domination of Man1 and Man2, what Wynter calls “genre trouble,” rather than “gender trouble.” Luxemburg’s contribution is that genre and gender trouble are inextricably tied together and therefore her thinking on how we might practice socialism is inseparable from what Wynter much later will call the challenge to Man1 and Man2 in the name of the practice of the human that would free the human from its connection to imperialism, colonialism, and, of course, capitalism.

Rosa Luxemburg as an Ethical Feminist

I am going to defend Luxemburg as an ethical feminist, in the sense that I have defined it, in that feminism is not simply about the struggle for the rights of women—as important as that is—but it is also about the challenges to Man that allow any one of us to be beyond the reach

of supposed humanity.² My central argument will be that Luxemburg’s debates on how we are to think of socialist transformation are both a challenge to Man1 and Man2 and the racism inherent in both. There are not two struggles, one feminist and one anti-racist, for they are tied together in the challenge to Man1 and Man2. Lux-

1 Wynter, Sylvia, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3 (3/2003).

2 Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, Nancy Fraser, *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange (Thinking Gender)*, New York: Routledge, 1994.

emburg was way ahead of her time in calling for solidarity with women in the Global South, which is not ultimately surprising since in *The Accumulation of Capital* she argues that imperialism is not the highest stage of capitalism; rather, it is simply at the very heart of how capitalism functions. But let us turn first to her writings on women.³

Luxemburg agrees with Charles Fourier, "A hundred years ago, the Frenchman Charles Fourier, one of the first great prophets of socialist ideals, wrote these memorable words: In any society, the degree of female emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation. This is completely true for our present society."⁴ She was a tireless advocate of universal suffrage, which would of course include suffrage for all women. She made class distinctions between women arguing that bourgeois women were primarily consumers and therefore, in a sense,

parasites. These were the women who had a class interest in voting against socialism. Even so, the proletarian women, who have during Luxemburg's lifetime gained the right to unionize and to assemble, had shown a political maturity which put them on the side of socialist politics. Their votes would outweigh those of bourgeois women. She was well aware that proletarian women would become immediately concerned with the absurd reality in capitalism that women's work in the home created no value for the capitalism system. To quote Luxemburg,

From this point of view, the music-hall dancer whose legs sweep profit into her employer's pocket is a productive worker, whereas all the toil of the proletarian women and mothers in the four walls of their homes is considered unproductive. This sounds brutal and insane, but corresponds exactly to the brutality and insanity of our present capitalist economy. And seeing this brutal reality clearly and sharply is the proletarian woman's first task.⁵

Domestic Labor, or: Women's Life Under Capitalism

Socialist feminists have long been associated with the demand to rectify the absurdity that domestic labor is viewed as having no value under capitalism. But, for example, the demand for wages for housework put forth by some socialist feminists would never have been accepted by Luxemburg. And why not? Such a demand would inevitably falter because of the laws of capitalism itself. When domestic labor is paid under capitalism, and certainly under neoliberal capitalism, it is one of the most poorly paid jobs in the informal economy. There have been serious attempts to unionize childcare workers and they too have been difficult given the privatiza-

tion of this kind of work. Indeed, I was involved in one such effort to unionize childcare workers in 2003 with an organization in Long Island called the Work Place Project.⁶ For Luxemburg, and this is particularly evident in her letters, it would not just follow that in socialism domestic labor would be socialized. The entire family structure, which inevitably includes the oppression of women, would have to be transformed. We will return to this point shortly but for Luxemburg socialism would demand radical transformation of all human relationships, including our relationships to other beings with which we share the world. And this is why as we will see she always insists that when a communist

3 Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, translated By Agnes Schwarzschild, Oxford: Benediction Classics, 2015.

4 *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, edited by Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson, New York; Monthly Review Press, 2004, p. 242.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 241.

6 Drucilla Cornell, *Between Women and Generations: Legacies of Dignity (Feminist Constructions)*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

party seizes power, it must implement the most sweeping forms of democracy that can be imagined. As a result, yes, there will be socialization of what is now privatized, but how and what that might look like would be part of the creativity of masses of people as they move to create a human world. Again, to quote Luxemburg:

As a modern female proletarian, the woman becomes a human being for the first time, since the [proletarian] struggle is the first to prepare human beings to make a contribution to culture, to the history of humanity. For the property-owning bourgeois woman, her house is the world. For the proletarian woman, the whole world is her house, the world with its sorrow and joy, with its cold cruelty and its raw size.⁷

Given Luxemburg's insistence on class difference, the debate between feminists in the 1990s and early 2000s over the relationship

between justice and care would have been off point. Luxemburg's own radicalism about the need for thoroughgoing erotic transformation would not have allowed her to idealize the values that come out of women's domestic labor under capitalism. There is as much abuse as there is care in women's domestic labor under capitalism, and Luxemburg oftentimes uses words to describe women's home life under capitalism as "stuffy, narrow, miserable, and petty."⁸ As anyone who walks down the streets of New York City knows, women of color, particularly new immigrants, often bear the burden of childcare for white women who have managed to enter the capitalist economy. As I have already indicated, I was involved in struggles against the brutal treatment of many of these women who take over the tasks of childcare and domestic labor so that bourgeois women could enter the economy.

Gender, Race, and Class

Class solidarity for Luxemburg always included uniting with women in the Global South whose oppression was integral to imperial domination. Given her insistence that imperialism is inevitable under capitalism, and therefore war also, it is not surprising for Luxemburg to emphasize this solidarity. To quote Luxemburg in full:

The workshop of the future requires many hands and hearts. A world of female misery is waiting for relief. The wife of the peasant moans as she nearly collapses under life's burdens. In German Africa, in the Kalahari Desert, the bones of defenseless Herero women are bleaching in the sun, those who were hunted down by a band of German soldiers and subjected to a horrific death of hunger and thirst. On the other side of the ocean, in the high cliffs of Putumayo, the death cries of martyred Indian women, ignored by the world fade away in the rubber plantations of the

international capitalists. Proletarian women, the poorest of the poor, the most disempowered of the disempowered, hurry to join the struggle for the emancipation of women and of humankind from the horrors of capitalist domination! Social Democracy has assigned to you a place of honor. Hurry to the front lines, into the trenches!⁹

The demand for peace can create solidarity between women who live in the metropole and women in the Global South. Luxemburg was one of the first then to recognize what Sylvia Wynter will later call genre trouble, that the oppression of black people, and people of color more generally, is not an aside to capitalism but is fundamental to class rule, as is militarism. Racism is then integral to capitalist class rule, and therefore there is no such being as a

⁷ *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, p. 243.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

woman who is not always already racialized. The debates about gender, race, and class, and which comes first, both miss Wynter's point that Man has stood in for the human in capitalist conditions of imperialist domination, and Luxemburg's fundamental argument that as long as there is capitalism there will be war, imperialism, and therefore the fight against militarism is always part of the socialist struggle.

Here we come back to why I have called Luxemburg an ethical feminist in that her anti-elitism is integral to her argument that there are not gold and silver people, including an oppressive hierarchy between nations. But she takes her anti-elitism into a critique of Trotsky and Lenin's idea of a vanguard party. The party, in order to lead, has to be deeply imbedded in the day-to-day struggles of the masses of people. Yes, she accepted the need for a party and indeed for leadership, but the party was not outside the struggle but inside it, and this was why she rejected Vladimir Lenin's own conception of centralization. To quote Luxemburg, "Let us speak plainly. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee."¹⁰ In more contemporary psychoanalytic terms, Luxemburg's criticism of Lenin and Trotsky and their notion of the party in relation to the masses is rooted in a phallic fantasy. The phallic fantasy is fairly obvious; a tiny group of men exercising supreme power to keep the messy movement from falling into opportunism and other forms of imperfection.

That fantasy of control is then both phallic, and of course masculine, and runs against the very complexity of an actual revolutionary movement. Again, to quote Luxemburg:

It follows that this movement can best advance by tacking betwixt and between the two dangers by which it is constantly being threatened. One is the loss of its mass character; the other, the abandonment of its goal. One is the danger of sinking back to the condition of a sect; the other, the danger of becoming a movement of bourgeois social reform. That is why it is illusory, and contrary to historic experience, to hope to fix, once for always, the direction of the revolutionary Socialist struggle with the aid of formal means, which are expected to secure the Labor movement against all possibilities of opportunist digression.¹¹

What Luxemburg understands is that there is no formula for protecting any movement against opportunism. This is why she emphasizes that it is the lessons of an actual movement which are much more valuable than the best thinking of revolutionary intellectuals, including Trotsky and Lenin. But this takes us back to her anti-elitism, which I am arguing throughout is inseparable from her ethical feminism. For Luxemburg, of course as a feminist and socialist there cannot be truly ethical relations between human beings under conditions of exploitation. I will return to this point shortly when I discuss Luxemburg's own embrace of what the great French philosopher Anne Dufourmantelle called the power of gentleness, which is also about the risk of trying to live well in a thoroughly unjust society.

Nationalism, Colonialism, Liberation

For now, I want to turn to Luxemburg's critique not only of Trotsky and Lenin's notion of par-

ty organization, but also their implementation of certain basic policies after the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917. The Bolsheviks famously

¹⁰ Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution and Other Writings*, Dover Publications, 2006, p. 97.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

supported a policy of national self-determination which Luxemburg forcefully criticized. Her point was that nationalism, certainly after the Bolsheviks seized power, was often a perfect way for the defeated bourgeoisie in those nations given the “right” to self-determination to come to power in such a way as to assert nationalist class rule against the new revolution. In language reminiscent of Frantz Fanon’s own critique of the nationalist bourgeoisie in the liberation struggles against colonization, the problem with the nationalist bourgeoisie was that they sought only to replace white leaders with themselves—which did not in any way challenge the basic conditions of capital exploitation and colonization.¹² National self-determination then became exactly the kind of empty façade that Luxemburg critiques, often with the former white male rulers remaining in economic

control of the means of production. The great South African economist Sampie Terreblanche in his foundational book *A History of Inequality in South Africa: 1652-2002* shows how the transformation of South Africa could not take place without thoroughgoing restructuring of the economy and democratic control over it.¹³

Of course, Luxemburg’s critique of the Bolsheviks party’s policy of national self-determination was done in part because this kind of nationalism for her was inseparable from imperial militarism. Ultimately, the task of socialism has to be an international one in which all nations would no longer oppress one another by creating new forms of federations that might ultimately and hopefully lead to a global transnational practice of governing. But this policy is by no means the only one that Luxemburg critiqued.

Freedom and Democracy

Famously in the months before their seizure of power the Bolsheviks had been at the forefront of the demand for an elected Constituent Assembly. The election took place after the Bolsheviks had come to power. There was no internet, no television, and communication between the countryside and the cities was slow indeed. So yes, many who voted did not even know that the Bolsheviks had seized power. As a result, the Bolsheviks did not achieve the hoped-for majority in the Constituent Assembly that was elected. Their response was to shut it down with military force. And so they did, under the slogan “All Power to the Soviets.” But then when the Soviets got too uppity, they shut them down too. As Luxemburg points out, their voting law made no sense at all under the conditions they were actually facing in Russia

right after the revolution. The only people who could vote were those who lived by their own labor. The problem was, given mass unemployment, many who would otherwise have been in the working class were disenfranchised. For Luxemburg, revolutionaries have to risk—and yes, it is a risk—universal suffrage even as she recognized that certain members of the ruling class might have to be disenfranchised for a certain period of time. But both Trotsky and Lenin ultimately concluded that the mechanism of democratic institutions should itself be called into question. Luxemburg summarizes Trotsky’s own view as follows:

Here we find the “mechanism of democratic institutions,” as such called into question. To this we

¹² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press, 1963.

¹³ John Saul and Patrick Bond, *South Africa: The Present as History*, Johannesburg: Jacana, 2014; Sampie Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa: 1652-2002*, Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2002.

must at once object that in such an estimate of representative institutions there lies a somewhat rigid and schematic conception which is expressly contradicted by the historical experience of every revolutionary epoch. According to Trotsky's theory, every elected assembly reflects once and for all only the mental composition, political maturity and mood of its electorate just at the moment when the latter goes to the polling place. According to that, a democratic body is the reflection of the masses at the end of the electoral period, much as the heavens of Herschel always show us the heavenly bodies not as they are when they are looking at them but as they were at the moment they sent out their light-messages to the earth from the measureless distances of space. Any living mental connection between the representatives, once they have been elected, and the electorate, any permanent interaction between one and the other, is hereby denied.¹⁴

But for Luxemburg the opposite is the case. After all, the Bolsheviks were the leaders of the struggle to have an elected Constituent Assembly. Now they shut it down with armed force simply because they did not get their way and win the majority. Luxemburg did not think that the current Constituent Assembly should stand, given that the Bolsheviks had achieved state power. But on the other hand, she did not agree with its dispersal by armed force, let alone Trotsky's sweeping conclusions about democratic institutions themselves. Instead she argued that they should call for a new election and spend the necessary organizational time to win workers and peasants over to the new dispensation. She argues that history has shown us the exact opposite of what Trotsky concluded and that, quite the contrary, masses of people involved in electoral politics can often lead to new forms of revolutionary consciousness. Suspicion of democracy and democratic institutions per se is a serious error and to not call for another election of the Constituent Assembly was worse. To quote Luxemburg against Trotsky's conclusions about the "mechanism of democratic institutions:"

Quite the contrary! It is precisely the revolution which creates by its glowing heat that delicate, vi-

brant, sensitive political atmosphere in which the waves of popular feeling, the pulse of life, work for the moment on the representative bodies in the most wonderful fashion. It is this very fact, to be sure, that the well-known moving scenes which invariably present themselves in the first stages of every revolution, scenes in which old reactionaries or extreme moderates, who have issued out of a Parliamentary election by limited suffrage under the old regime, suddenly become the heroic and stormy spokesmen of the uprising.¹⁵

Luxemburg's criticism of Trotsky and Lenin on the Constituent Assembly and more generally on democratic institutions goes beyond just that particular election and particular body. It takes us to her deepest understanding that we really have no idea of what socialism is and how radical the transformation would have to be in each one of us for us to be part of a socialist society. The powerful argument of Wynter is that we are materially immersed in Man1 and Man2 and all the forms of elitism, racism, and sexism that they manifest not as some outside ideology but in the materialization of the ways we live and work together. Lenin thought that it would be possible to take over the brutal disciplinary structure of the capitalist factory and use it to get the masses and workers to stay on a rigorous production schedule. But Luxemburg completely disagreed; work and the organization of the work place could not remain the same, families would not remain the same, how we even thought and talked to one another could not remain the same. Socialism, as she put it, is simply unknowable to those of us who grew up in a capitalist society. So, the only way forward is to create the greatest and most sweeping democratic forms possible so that we could begin to not only dream together but to realize new ways of being and living together. Without that, the revolution will be stifled by the very Central Committee that believes itself to be promoting a revolutionary program.

Famously, Lenin truly believed that the socialist state would simply be the capitalist state

¹⁴ Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*, pp. 208-209.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

turned on its head. The capitalist state oppressed the working class. The socialist state oppresses the bourgeoisie. This kind of inversion is exactly what Fanon warns against in his own writings against the nationalist bourgeoisie and even the greatest fighters of the liberation struggle—precisely because they had to engage in armed struggle, they might not be the best leaders in the new revolutionary order. Violence carries within it the danger of rephallicization; macho men strutting around with guns.

For Luxemburg, the basic democratic rights such as freedom of the press, freedom to assemble, freedom to unionize, are absolutely essential as we transform ourselves to beings that can live beyond relations of exploitation. For Luxemburg, a freedom that is only for those who support the communist party is not freedom at all and it blocks the imaginary and the effort to create new institutions and new forms of life that would be worthy of the name socialism. To quote Luxemburg:

Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party—however numerous they may be—is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of “justice” but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when “freedom” becomes a special privilege.¹⁶

There is a deeper point that needs to be emphasized behind Luxemburg's seeming insistence on what at first glance might look like traditional bourgeois rights, and that deeper point was that Luxemburg was well aware that all of us who have lived under capitalism have no real idea of what socialism can and will look like. What Luxemburg continuously emphasizes is the need for thoroughgoing transformation of all social relations including familial and erotic relation-

ships, and ultimately, as we will discuss shortly, our relationship with animals and all other beings we live with on our small planet Earth. We can repeat as a mantra that we need radical transformation of all social relationships, but what exactly does that entail? The bottom line is we simply cannot know in advance of the actual creative historical processes of the masses of people as they seek to undo the exploitation of capitalism. To quote Luxemburg:

The tacit assumption underlying the Lenin-Trotsky theory of the dictatorship is this: that the Socialist transformation is something for which a ready-made formula lies completed in the pocket of the revolutionary party, which needs only to be carried out energetically in practice. This is, unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately—not the case. Far from being a sum of ready-made prescriptions which have only to be applied, the practical realization of Socialism as an economic, social and juridical system is something which lies completely hidden in the mists of the future. What we possess in our program is nothing but a few main signposts which indicate the general direction in which to look for the necessary measures, and the indications are mainly negative in character at that. Thus, we know more or less what we must eliminate at the outset in order to free the road for a Socialist economy.¹⁷

As Luxemburg continues, the concept of dictatorship adapted by Lenin and Trotsky counterpoises dictatorship to democracy. The phrase “the dictatorship of the proletariat” was first used by Friedrich Engels in his writings on the Paris Commune. The Paris Commune of course had the most sweeping democratic institutions which included socialized child-care but under collective management of the women workers themselves. How they were run is as important as the fact that they were “socialized.” The Commune clearly unleashed the creativity of the masses of people who participated in its day-to-day activities. For its short life, it was indeed a permanent revolution, and Engels, perhaps ironically given the sweeping participatory democracy that was

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 214.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 215.

actually practiced, said of the Commune, and I paraphrase, "this is what the dictatorship of the proletariat looks like." So, for Luxemburg it is both a theoretical and practical mistake to counterpoise dictatorship to democracy. Indeed, for Luxemburg corruption results from the kind of centralization of the party in which loyalty to the party is the basis of favors and this ultimately creates hierarchies. So, unlike Lenin and Trotsky the solution could not be the increase of party control and measures such as the implementation of martial law. Instead, the revolution had to unleash the idealism of

the people and this could only happen if their creativity was respected as the very heartbeat of the revolution. We need to be clear here that Luxemburg was a great supporter of the bravery and indeed the daring of Lenin and Trotsky to seize state power when it seemed possible to do so. Her criticism was directed at two comrades. Her criticisms were not naïve. She knew the extreme difficulties that the Bolsheviks faced. At the heart of her argument was that the Bolsheviks had turned necessity into a virtue and a general theory into what was demanded by the transition to socialism.

Ethical Feminism and the Power of Gentleness

But the deeper question is why is her criticism of Lenin and Trotsky considered by me to be feminist? I have argued that she is what I have called an ethical feminist in that all forms of reinstating the division of gold and silver people, including through the rule of an elite party, throw some of us below the bar of humanity. In this sense, her trust in the masses is not only a socialist principle but a feminist principle. Her vision of socialism is one of endless transformation of all of us from the ego-driven creatures we have become under capitalism to the human beings who could live together in respect and what I am now going to call, following the philosopher Dufourmantelle, "the power of gentleness." To quote Dufourmantelle on gentleness, which in her writing is neither a philosophical construct nor a sociological relationality but rather an evocative notion that points to a different relationship between humans and the entire world in which we live:

Gentleness invents an expanded present. We talk about gentleness, acknowledging it, delivering it, collecting it, hoping for it. It is the name of an emotion of which we have lost the name, coming from a time when humanity was not dissociat-

*ed from the elements, from animals, from light, from spirits. At what point did the human race become aware of it? What was the gentleness opposed to when life and survival were merged?*¹⁸

Ethical feminism as I have originally defined it was about aspiring to a nonviolent relationship to the other. But Dufourmantelle is too sophisticated to simply endorse an ethics of nonviolence; sometimes violence is a tragic necessity as it has been in almost all colonial situations. But it should not be idealized, nor should it be seen as the work of a tiny sect of macho men whom Fanon long ago saw engaged in the process of rephallicization. The fantasy is that we will take the phallus from the white Man and seize "ownership" by the oppressed but male colonized. And it is just that: a fantasy. And one that often promotes counter-revolutionary politics.

Originally in *Feminist Contentions*, when I first defended ethical feminism, it was more lim-

¹⁸ Anne Dufourmantelle, *The Power of Gentleness: Meditations on the Risk of Living*, translated By Katherine Payne and Vincent Sallé, New York: Fordham University Press, 2018, p. 10.

itedly about relations between humans. But I would now include the power of gentleness as evoked by Dufourmantele. Indeed, gentleness is an important feminist answer to critiques of Marxism by the posthumanists. They have accused Marxism as being just another form of humanist hubris.¹⁹ Often, their criticism emphasizes, to paraphrase Marx, that “under socialism nature will be humanized and humans will be naturalized” or more precisely returned to a non-alienated engagement with their own individual and collective creativity. The alienation of capitalism would be overcome. But the focus is purportedly on human-to-human relations, and the dominion of humans over the rest of nature is not challenged. But in gentleness, understood as a power and indeed an exercise of power, we come to have a very different meaning that would reject, as Luxemburg clearly did, any notion of the dominion of humans over other forms of being, including animals. To quote Luxemburg:

I know that for every person, for every creature, one's own life is the only single possession one really has, and with every little fly that one carelessly swats and crushes, the entire world comes to an end, in the refracting eye of the little fly it is the same as if the end of the world had destroyed all life. No, the reason I tell you about other women is precisely so that you will not underestimate and disregard your own pain, so that you won't misunderstand yourself and have a distorted picture of who you are. Oh, how well I understand that for you every lovely melody, every flower, every spring day, every moonlit night represents a longing for, an allurements toward the greatest beauty the world has to offer.²⁰

I bring up insects, although Luxemburg has also written beautifully about oxen literally being worked to death as she saw them in the prison yard and embraced them. But many of us are afraid of insects and look very differently at killing them than we do in killing sentient beings like animals, but as we see with the example of

the fly, Luxemburg was different. To quote Luxemburg again:

*And now I have work to do, as I do every summer: I have to climb up on a chair and, however far up it is, reach to the upper windowpane, take hold of the wasp ever so carefully, and deliver it once to freedom, because otherwise it would torment itself against the glass until it was half dead. They don't do anything to me; out in the open they even land on my lips, and that's very ticklish; but I'm worried about doing harm **to the wasp** when I take hold of it. In the end it all worked out, and suddenly it's completely quiet here in the room. Yet in my ear and heart a sunny echo still keeps buzzing. Hän-schen, be cheerful and happy, after all life is so beautiful! The wasp said so again, and it knows what it's talking about. Best wishes to your old man and to your aunt. R.²¹*

In these two quotes, we see a stunning example of what Dufourmantele writes as the power of gentleness. And it is this gentleness that Luxemburg over and over again in her letters ascribes to the practice of being human, a practice we have to live out now even when living in the brutal reality of what Wynter called Man2. So, her ethical feminism is integral to all of her writings on nationalism, militarism, and her vision of socialism which challenges not only the barbarism of capitalism but also the elitism which inhered in the Bolsheviks policies in the Russian Revolution. Her feminism challenges us to think much more broadly about what feminism is and that it clearly goes way beyond the struggle for so-called formal equality and is part of the new practice of the human which can only be opened up through revolutionary struggle. Her biting remarks against bourgeois feminism should not be taken as a critique of feminism itself. Instead she should be read against the class, and yes race, privilege of women in the metropole. She did not live long enough to see the struggles of the transgendered, gays and lesbians, but the sweep of her vision would clearly be against anyone being thrown under the bar of humanity because of how they lived their life as erotic

¹⁹ Rosie Bradotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge: Polity, 2013.

²⁰ *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, edited by Georg Adler and Annelies Laschitzka, New York: Verso, 2013, p. 449.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

and sexuate beings. She was way ahead of her time in envisioning a new practice of the human beyond what Stephen Seely and I have called the dead ends of man. I leave Luxemburg with the last word on how we can, perhaps for the first time, practice the human rather than be entrapped by Man1 and Man2:

To be a human being means to joyfully toss your entire life "on the giant scales of fate" if it must be

so, and at the same time to rejoice in the brightness of every day and the beauty of every cloud. Oh, I don't know any recipe that can be written down on how to be a human being, I only know when a person is one, and you too always used to know when we walked together through the fields of Südende for hours at a time and the red glow of evening lay upon the stalks of grain. The world is so beautiful, with all its horrors, and would be even more beautiful if there were no weaklings or cowards in it.²²

22 Ibid., p. 363.

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