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# Editing Rosa: Luxemburg, the Revolution, and the Politics of Infantilization

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## Abstract

*Rosa Luxemburg is not a marginal, but a marginalized protagonist in the history of 20th-century political thought. In this essay, strategies of marginalization employed by Luxemburg's editors in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in their 1951 edition Rosa Luxemburg, Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften (Rosa Luxemburg, Selected Speeches and Writings), published by the Marx-Engels-Lenin-Institut beim ZK der SED in Berlin are revisited and deconstructed. A bold strategy of infantilization was employed in order to marginalize this political thinker and save only the historical icon, a female patron saint of the revolution, for collective memory. Whilst the GDR struggled hard to come to terms with Luxemburg's legacy, she was almost forgotten in the Bundesrepublik. Only when her incisive comment about the freedom of dissent from 'The Russian Revolution' was reappropriated as the slogan of the Eastern German Civil Rights Movement did Luxemburg re-enter public memory in the West. The revival of scholarly interest in Rosa Luxemburg that we currently see holds promise not only for radical thinkers, but also for international lawyers and historians. But, in a strange continuation of patterns of historical bias, her marginalization continues – this time from a transnational perspective. A fresh engagement with Luxemburg requires and allows for a more nuanced image of a theorist of revolution.*

The revival of scholarly interest in Rosa Luxemburg that we currently see holds promise not only for radical thinkers but also for international lawyers and historians. Deborah Whitehall's insightful and original analysis of Luxemburg's 1915

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*Juniusbroschüre*, reconsidering the relationship between historical and legal time, illustrates the potentials and possibilities of a renewed engagement with Luxemburg's writings.<sup>1</sup> For a long time, Luxemburg's thought has been appropriated exclusively and in rather diverse ways by a small group of political theorists and leftist activists. As a communist icon, she was venerated by socialist party leaders – some had been her interlocutors and students, some later became her critical editors and commentators. But her intellectual voice was silenced, and her trajectory as an orthodox Marxist questioned. Luxemburg became an author for the few, the subversive potential of her writings carefully suppressed by the powers that be.

She was, however, not as minor a person as Deborah Whitehall characterizes her. Growing up as a Jew in Poland, Luxemburg experienced stigmatization. However, she also experienced 'a childhood in which mutual respect and unconditional trust, a universal humanity and a genuine, almost naïve contempt for social and ethnic distinctions were taken for granted'.<sup>2</sup> In the small town of Zamość, a centre of Jewish enlightenment (*Haskalah*) and rabbinical learning, which was famous for its libraries, and later in Warsaw, she grew up in a firm and reliable family network and a Polish–Jewish 'peer group' that provided for her entire life a firm transnational grounding, nurturing her remarkable independence and self-reliability, a 'movable home' that 'did not coincide with any fatherland'.<sup>3</sup> Upon her graduation from the University of Zurich in 1897, with an excellent doctoral thesis in economics that earned her a doctor juris degree, Luxemburg almost immediately headed to Berlin – to write and work for the socialist cause at the centre of the European left as a member of the German Social Democratic Party (SDP), which was at the time the most powerful and influential leftist party in the world. Luxemburg not only became a published author, but she also emerged swiftly as one of the star writers in the party's influential press and media empire, which had evolved under Bismarckian persecution as part of the powerful parallel structures that the party had established in all areas of social life.

The old lions of the party, be it Bebel in Germany or Lenin in Russia, engaged with her writing, even if it was often antagonizing and prompted strong criticism. Luxemburg can be rightly characterized as 'both vanguard and outsider', but, in her lifetime, she was an influential and respected voice in European socialist circles.<sup>4</sup> It was only after the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht, when, as Hannah Arendt writes, 'the split of the European Left into Socialist and Communist parties had become irrevocable', that 'a curious shift in her reputation took place'.<sup>5</sup>

Rosa Luxemburg is not a marginal but, rather, a marginalized, protagonist in the history of 20th-century political thought. Even in the current revival of scholarly interest in her work, we sometimes see the marginalization strategies of her former

<sup>1</sup> D. Whitehall, 'A Rival History of Self-Determination', in this issue, 719–743.

<sup>2</sup> 'Hannah Arendt: A Heroine of Revolution', *New York Review of Books* (6 October 1966), which is a review essay on J.P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg* (1966).

<sup>3</sup> 'Hannah Arendt: A Heroine of Revolution', *supra* note 2.

<sup>4</sup> Whitehall, *supra* note 1.

<sup>5</sup> 'Hannah Arendt: A Heroine of Revolution', *supra* note 2.

editors and biographers recurring, in a strange continuation of patterns of historical bias. In this review essay, I will revisit and deconstruct strategies of marginalization employed by Luxemburg's editors in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in their 1951 edition *Rosa Luxemburg, Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften* (Rosa Luxemburg, *Selected Speeches and Writings*), which was published by the Marx-Engels-Lenin-Institut beim ZK der SED (Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute at the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany [SED]) in Berlin.<sup>6</sup> To a large extent, the editors' position and perspective on Luxemburg's scholarship was shaped and determined by earlier disputes on her writings on the Russian Revolution (which remained unpublished in the GDR until 1974). The background and main argument of these controversial reflections also offer a glimpse into the life of a political activist who spent a considerable time of her career in German prisons (the first part of this review). Despite his disagreement with Luxemburg's observations and her strong plea for a socialist democracy beyond dictatorial party structures, Lenin encouraged a complete edition of Luxemburg's works (the second part of this review), but his demand remained unheard by the ideological vanguard of the Communist Party in Eastern Germany when they published two volumes of selected speeches and writings of Rosa Luxemburg in 1951 (the third part of this review).

In the carefully arranged and critically commented edition, 'The Russian Revolution' is missing, and, instead, we find in the first volume a strange assemblage of pictures of young Rosa. A bold strategy of infantilization was employed in order to marginalize the political thinker and save only the historical icon – a female patron saint of the revolution – for collective memory (the fourth part of this review) While the GDR struggled hard to come to terms with Luxemburg's legacy, she was almost forgotten in the *Bundesrepublik*. Only when her incisive comment about the freedom of dissent from 'The Russian Revolution' was re-appropriated as the slogan of the Eastern German Civil Rights Movement did Luxemburg re-enter public memory in the West. But her marginalization continues, while a revival of scholarly interest in her work has begun, this time from a transnational perspective (the fifth part of this review).

## 1

Rosa Luxemburg experienced the Russian Revolution from the German prisons. Following her sudden arrest in Berlin in July 1916, she spent the first few gloomy weeks at the women's prison in the Barnimstrasse and then in the police headquarters on Alexanderplatz, before being transferred in October of the same year to the old fortress at Wronke (Wronki) in the province of Posen (Poznań), where she was detained in protective custody as a political prisoner. Confined in a 'slothful, comfortable, grass-infested' environment, Rosa Luxemburg 'had privacy, and the privilege of walking up and down the same battlements as the sentries'.<sup>7</sup> Special arrangements made with at least one member of the

<sup>6</sup> R. Luxemburg, *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, 2 vols, with a preface by Wilhelm Pieck (1951).

<sup>7</sup> Nettl, *supra* note 2, at 652; on her prison time in 1917–1918, see also 653–705. See also P. Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg: Gedanke und Tat* (1990), at 288–294.

staff allowed her to completely devote herself to extensive correspondence, reading and botanizing. In the meantime, information on the events unfolding in Russia remained sparse. As a prisoner, she could only rely on scanty reports gleaned from the newspapers, which were prohibited from publishing newsworthy information about the activities of the revolutionaries and the emerging political structures. Under no circumstances were German readers to receive any directives pertaining to a revolution.

At the same time, the prospects of the German proletariat launching a massive uprising appeared considerably slim. In her writings that began to be published from April 1917 onwards in the Spartacus League's 'Spartacus Letters,' Luxemburg emphatically underscored the notion that the success of the Russian Revolution depended on how revolutions in other countries progressed, particularly in Germany. Yet in her private correspondence, she had already conceded that revolutions demanded a great deal of perseverance and fortitude and that their momentum could not be diminished to merely a moment of tumult and upheaval brought about by party functionaries. In her view, the October Revolution, led by the Bolsheviks, was merely the logical consequence of the spontaneous February uprisings in St Petersburg, which she considered the real historical watershed moment. Her critical analysis of the historical events only exacerbated her conflict with the Russian communist party functionaries.

Upon her transfer to the prison in Breslau in July 1917, where she was subject to more severe detention conditions, Luxemburg sharply criticized the separate Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, characterizing it as capitulation to German imperialism while also conceding its inevitability: 'It's just the false logic of the objective situation: *any* socialist party that comes to power in Russia today *must* pursue a false logic so long as it, as a part of the international proletarian army, is bound to be abandoned by the majority in this army.'<sup>8</sup>

Even if the members of the Spartacus League supported Luxemburg's call to a mass uprising, they stopped short of agreeing with her analysis of the Bolshevik politics. No sooner had Rosa Luxemburg proclaimed her resolve to publish a pamphlet with her critique of the Russian Revolution than her former defence attorney, Paul Levi, travelled to Breslau to persuade her to refrain from pursuing a course that was being viewed by her faction as inopportune. While allowing herself to be persuaded that her opponents could misrepresent her statements, following Levi's departure, she immediately sat down to write a pamphlet, which she sent him in September 1918. Resorting to an uninhibited style characteristic of private correspondence, in a tone that is open and direct, she begins with wholehearted praise for the Bolshevik leadership but goes on to offer a sharp criticism of their agrarian policy and their handling of the national question, the abolition of the parliamentary institutions and processes as well as of the dictatorship instituted by Lenin.<sup>9</sup> Her writings, which decades later deeply influenced Hannah Arendt, represent an impassioned plea for a socialist democracy in which she envisioned the masses acting independently as subjects of the revolution – with the support of the party but not under its dominance which she rejected:

<sup>8</sup> 'Die russische Tragödie', in *Spartakusbriefe* (1958) 460, as quoted and translated into English in Nettl, *supra* note 2, at 664.

<sup>9</sup> Nettl, *supra* note 2, at 697–705.

Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a freedom struggle of opinion, life dies out in any public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains the active element. Public life gradually falls asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule. Among them, in reality, only a dozen outstanding heads do the leading and an elite of the working class is invited from time to time to ... applaud the speeches of the leaders, and to approve the proposed resolutions unanimously, at bottom, then, a clique affair.<sup>10</sup>

## 2

Even in the aftermath of her murder in January 1919, Luxemburg's pamphlet on *The Russian Revolution* remained unpublished. But her analysis, then, suddenly 'became live ammunition' in the conflict between the leaders of the Communist Party and Paul Levi, who was declared an outcast following a dispute with the party comrades.<sup>11</sup> In 1922, Levi published Luxemburg's notes,<sup>12</sup> which forced the German and Russian communists to take a clear stance on Rosa Luxemburg, whose role and significance had increasingly become ambivalent. Was this martyr of the revolution also a leading theorist? To what extent did her writings fit in with hierarchies and genealogies of the Communist Party?

As someone who always genuinely respected Luxemburg as a vanguard Marxist intellectual, Lenin responded with a clear statement in *Pravda*:

Paul Levi now wants to achieve popularity with the bourgeoisie by republishing precisely those works of Rosa Luxemburg's in which her errors appear. We answer this with a short extract from a good old Russian fable: an eagle can sometimes fly lower than a chicken, but a chicken can never rise to the same heights as an eagle. Rosa Luxemburg was mistaken over the question of Polish independence. She was mistaken in 1903 in her evaluation of Menshevism, she was mistaken when, with Plekhanov, Vandervelde, Kautsky and others, she stood for the unification of the Bolsheviks with the Mensheviks in July 1914. She was mistaken in her writings from prison in 1918 (although after leaving prison she largely corrected her mistakes at the end of 1918 and at the beginning of 1919). But in spite of these mistakes, she was and is an eagle, and not only will she be dear to the memory of Communists in the whole world, but her biography and the complete edition of her works ([in the publication of] which the German Communists are [falling] incredibly behind, and they can only partly be excused by the enormous sacrifices of their struggle) will be a very useful lesson in the education of many generations of Communists.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> R. Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, translated by Bertram D. Wolfe (1940), as quoted in H. Arendt, *On Revolution* (1963), at 324ff, n. 82. In the German edition of her book, Arendt (who often changed entire paragraphs when translating/rewriting her books in her German mother tongue) continues the quote with Luxemburg's pointed remark on Lenin's 'dictatorship of the proletariat': 'Not the dictatorship of the proletariat, rather the dictatorship of a handful of politicians.' H. Arendt, *Über die Revolution* (1965), at 340. In the book's original American edition, Arendt highlights the prophetic dimensions of Luxemburg's analysis: 'To be sure, she could not foresee the horrors of Stalin's totalitarian regime, but her prophetic words of warning against the suppression of political freedom and with it of public life read today like a realistic description of the Soviet Union under Khrushchev.' H. Arendt, *On Revolution* (1963), at 324, n. 82.

<sup>11</sup> Nettl, *supra* note 2, at 792.

<sup>12</sup> R. Luxemburg, *Die russische Revolution: Eine kritische Würdigung. Aus dem Nachlass herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Paul Levi* (1922).

<sup>13</sup> V.I. Lenin, 'Notes of a Publicist', *Pravda* (16 April 1924 [written in February 1922]), reprinted in 33 *Sochineniya* (1950) 184 (as quoted in Nettl, *supra* note 2, at 793, n. 1).

Much time had elapsed before the German communists at least partially fulfilled Lenin's command to publish the complete works of Rosa Luxemburg. Paul Frölich, once an opponent of Luxemburg and one of the notable theorists of the German Communist Party (KPD) in the 1920s, published three volumes of her complete works, while two other volumes were in preparation at the beginning of 1933.<sup>14</sup> The escalating conflicts within the KPD since 1924, especially on the question of preserving Luxemburg's theoretical legacy and the form a critical reappraisal would take, had significantly delayed the publication of the planned edition of the works. Following Lenin's critical remarks, even German associates, not least Luxemburg's close friend, Clara Zetkin, criticized Luxemburg's analyses and the conclusions she had drawn in her writings on the revolution. Frölich, who was released in 1934 following his arrest by the National Socialists in March 1933, emigrated first to the Czech Republic and then to France. He successfully escaped to the United States in 1941. The vast quantities of material Frölich had collected and compiled over many years to work on the *Gesammelte Werke* (*Collected Works*) of Rosa Luxemburg, in the meantime, were either scattered across different locations or not available to him. At the end of August 1939, his personal biography of Rosa Luxemburg, which included extensive research and editing work, was published in Paris. Viktor Gollancz's English translation was already published in the spring of 1940 in London, where it became fairly successful.<sup>15</sup> Towards the end of 1950, Frölich returned to Germany, became a member of the SPD and spent his last years as a writer in Frankfurt until he passed away in 1953.

### 3

There were others who fought over the ramifications of Rosa Luxemburg's legacy.<sup>16</sup> In commemoration of her 80th birthday in 1951, two volumes were published in East Berlin entitled *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften* (*Selected Speeches and Writings*),<sup>17</sup> accompanied by a critical biography written by Fred Oelßner, the chief ideologist of the East German SED Party.<sup>18</sup> In it, the 'champion of the revolution of the German workers' is inexorably demoted to the position of a misguided Marxist theorist: 'Much as we love Rosa for her relentless struggle for the workers' cause, we cannot forget

<sup>14</sup> Volume 6, *The Accumulation of Capital and the Anti-Critique*, was published in 1923; volume 3, *Writings against Revisionism*, was published in 1925; volume 4, *Writings on the Trade Unions and the Mass Strike*, was published in 1928. The publication of volume 3, *Writings on the Economy*, was delayed owing to a legal dispute with Paul Levi, who first published *Einführung in die Nationalökonomie* in 1925. In January 1933, the galley proof of volume 5, *Writings on Imperialism*, was still being revised. For a more extensive discussion, compare chapter 18 in Nettle, *supra* note 2, at 787ff.

<sup>15</sup> P. Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg: Gedanke und Tat* (1990).

<sup>16</sup> B. Könczöl, *Martyrer des Sozialismus: Die SED und das Gedenken an Rosa Luxemburg und Karl Liebknecht* (2008), at 143–168.

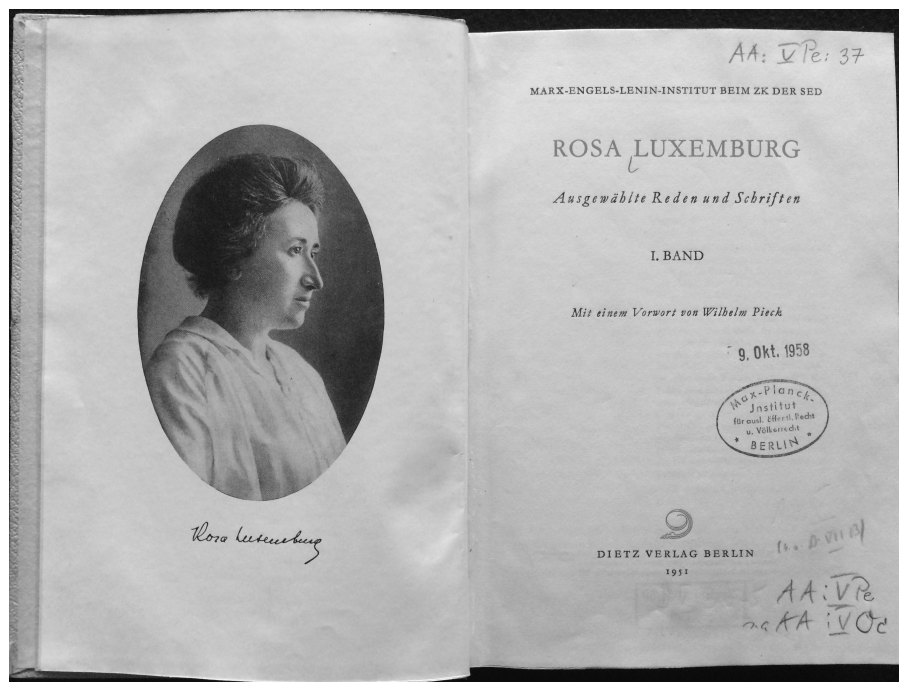
<sup>17</sup> Luxemburg, *supra* note 6.

<sup>18</sup> F. Oelßner, *Rosa Luxemburg: Eine kritische biographische Skizze* (1951). The book quickly 'lapsed into obscurity' because it became 'too "Stalinist"' Nettle, *supra* note 2, at 821, n. 2.

this: great were her faults and mistakes, which steered the German workers on to the wrong path.<sup>19</sup> While Rosa Luxemburg, along with Karl Liebknecht, was celebrated as a German martyr of socialism<sup>20</sup> and a communist icon (in retrospect, she is considered the most visually depicted woman in GDR history textbooks<sup>21</sup>), her image underwent a process of retouch and manipulation in the GDR. For publication, her writings were judiciously selected and critically reframed. To protect Luxemburg's legitimate legacy and save the socialist saint for posterity, editors and biographers must not let the '*petit bourgeois*' sentiment – *de mortuis nil nisi bene* – interfere with their paternalistic purge:

We are acting in the spirit of Rosa Luxemburg in not concealing her weaknesses and not exaggerating her positive attributes, but, rather, by speaking the truth, as we familiarize the reader with Rosa Luxemburg, the way she really was. Rosa Luxemburg was never the one to claim infallibility, for the education of the masses on the truth was always her greatest priority. In our attempt to do that, we do our best to honour the great warrior, whose name will always be associated with the revolutionary workers' movement.<sup>22</sup>

Luxemburg's alleged mistakes were construed by Oelßner as deriving from a 'defective system' – the so-called 'Luxemburgism' – which had to be remedied. For Oelßner,



**Photo 1:** Frontispiece of *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften* (1951), Vol. 1

<sup>19</sup> Oelßner, *supra* note 18, at 7 (translated by Gita Rajan).

<sup>20</sup> J. Kohlmann, *Der Marsch zu den Gräbern von Karl und Rosa: Geschichte eines Gedenktages* (2004).

<sup>21</sup> H. Schröter, *Geschichte ohne Frauen? Das Frauenbild in den Schulgeschichtsbüchern der BRD und der DDR von 1949 bis 1989* (2002), at 98–99. No picture of Rosa Luxemburg could be found in the West German textbooks used in the Federal Republic of Germany over the same time period.

<sup>22</sup> Oelßner, *supra* note 19, at 7 (translated by Gita Rajan).

Luxemburg's errors were rooted in her critique of Marx in *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals*, but encompassed also her concept of socialist democracy and her sharp criticism of Bolshevik party structures as shaped by the communist functionaries in the Russian Revolution.<sup>23</sup>

Both volumes of the selected works edition, which appeared around the same time as the biography authored by Oelßner, are diligently compiled and edited, with copious introductions and explanatory notes. In his preface, Wilhelm Pieck, the erstwhile president of the former GDR who between 1907 and 1908 had also been a student of Luxemburg at the central party school in Berlin, discloses that he would be remiss if he neglected to identify and analyse her failings – as he reasoned – in order to prevent her work from being appropriated by the so-called 'social-democratic necrophiliacs' and her errors from being instrumentalized in the 'malicious fight against the socialist Soviet Union, against the countries with people's democracy and against the Marxist-Leninist parties'.<sup>24</sup> Reiterating the official party narrative, Pieck claims that Luxemburg corrected her position under the influence of the October Revolution and drifted towards the Bolshevik idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat and that, with the founding of the KPD in December 1918, she had finally taken up arms against her own 'Luxemburgism', her own variant of Marxist revolutionary thinking.

To continue this corrective process, the editors introduced Luxemburg's significant pamphlet writings – *The Mass Strike, The Political Party and the Trade Unions* and *The Crisis of Social Democracy (Juniusbroschüre)* – and her book, *Introduction to Political Economy*, with prefatory texts authored by Lenin and Stalin, which offered a critical analysis of Luxemburg's views on the organization of a Marxist party, on the national and the colonial question and on the imperialist war as well as on Lenin's view of the German left. The editors affirm their didactic approach in declaring that the texts 'must not only [help the readers] to understand Rosa Luxemburg's great importance to the German and international socialist movement, but also give readers the means to navigate their way through her talks and writings in which her erroneous responses to a series of basic questions on Marxism are reproduced'.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, at 154–215; extensively described in Nettl, *supra* note 2, at 748–793. Nettl points out that Georg Lukács had already discussed Luxemburg's ideas in two essays that appeared in 1921 and 1922 as a coherent whole and referred to them as 'Luxemburgismus' *avant la lettre* (at 754, n. 14, 15). In 1925, to the displeasure of many party members, a party functionary, Ruth Fischer, compared the viral effect of Luxemburg's ideas to a syphilis bacillus. Fischer, 'Unsere wichtigste Aufgabe', 8(3) *Die Internationale* (1925) 105.

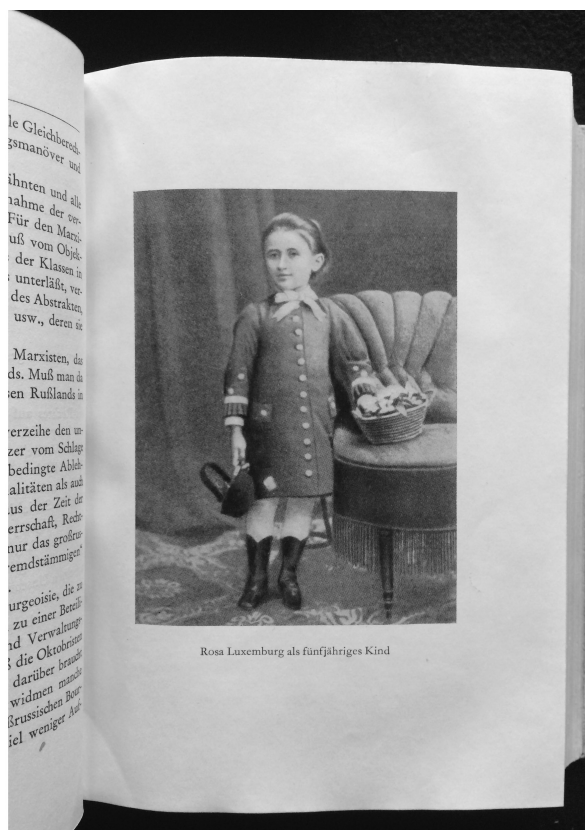
<sup>24</sup> In a cold war context, even research institutions in the West showed interest in the theoretical works of Rosa Luxemburg. In 1958, both volumes of her *Selected Works* were acquired for the library collection of the Berlin branch of the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law (based in Dahlem until 1960). For institutional history, cf. Lange 'Carl Bilfingers Entnazifizierung und die Entscheidung für Heidelberg: Die Gründungsgeschichte des völkerrechtlichen Max-Planck-Instituts nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg', 74 *Zeitschrift für ausländisches öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht* (2014) 697, 731. Upon its founding as Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in 1924, the institute acquired a remarkable collection on Marxist theory. Lukács' collection of essays, published in 1923 under the title *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* was already a part of the library collection in 1924, had then been relocated from the Berlin City Palace (Berliner Stadtschloss) to Uckermark during the bombing in the war, and today forms a part of the library holdings of the institute at Heidelberg.

<sup>25</sup> 'Vorbemerkung' (Preliminary Remarks), in Luxemburg, *supra* note 6, 17–19 (translated by Gita Rajan).



## 4

Still more curious than the paternalistic imposition of a stringent process of post-mortem correction of the author's position and argument, however, is the pictorial program – the selection of images included in the edition, particularly in the first volume. While the frontispiece features a rather unremarkable portrait of an adult Rosa Luxemburg, aged about 40 years (Photo 1), the first volume is replete with pictures of a young Rosa, as a child, a schoolgirl and as a university student.<sup>26</sup> Right in the middle of Lenin's critical response to Luxemburg's essay 'The National Question and the Autonomy', in which he expands on his understanding of the nations' right of self-determination, the reader turns to the next page to find the picture of a five-year-old Rosa posing in a photo studio in her riding habit, with a large collar band and polished buttons (Photo 2). Only a few pages into Lenin's article, a 12-year-old Rosa gazes at us – somewhat shy and insecure – wearing her hair loose, with a ribbon on her dark dress and holding two flowers in her hands (Photo 3).



Rosa Luxemburg als fünfjähriges Kind

**Photo 2:** Rosa Luxemburg as 5-year-old child

<sup>26</sup> Very different is the image of a grown up, serious Rosa Luxemburg in the first English edition of the Junius pamphlet that was published in 1919 in New York under the aegis of the Socialist Publication Society. I thank Deborah Whitehall for this reference. Cf. Whitehall, *supra* note 1.

The publication of Luxemburg's controversial text *The Crisis of Social Democracy* (*Juniusbroschüre*), in which she chastises the German social democrats for having voted in approval of the war loans is illustrated with a heavily retouched portrait of her as a 17-year-old schoolgirl, in which an otherwise vivacious Luxemburg wears a plain buttoned-up dress, hair tightly combed back, almost resembling a repentant, and returns the gaze of the reader with a deadpan expression. Some pages ahead, one again encounters a heavily retouched picture of her as a student, with dark eyes, an expressionless face and stiff collar around her neck. Caught in the stranglehold of the visual politics pursued by the SED-loyal editorial team, the shrewd, self-assured author and the revolutionary party leader who had impressed her contemporaries with her elegance and confident appearance falls to a perfidious strategy of infantilization. She stands diminished to an inconspicuous, shy and timid person that needed to be lectured by Stalin and by Lenin (with whom she had interacted on equal terms during her lifetime).<sup>27</sup>



Rosa Luxemburg im Alter von zwölf Jahren

**Photo 3:** Rosa Luxemburg at the age of 12 years

<sup>27</sup> As Barbara Könczöl points out, the conception of Oelßner's biography could hardly be less suggestive: 'No effort could be spared in unequivocally demonstrating to the reader that with this book Luxemburg's erroneous statements would once and for all have been consigned to the grave. For that reason, this volume contains an unusual picture in the midst of the explanations on her economic fallacies, namely of Rosa Luxemburg's grave slab.' B. Könczöl, *Märtyrer des Sozialismus* (2008), at 154.

While the editors open their preface to the volume with Lenin's parable on the eagle and the chicken, they do not heed his demand to publish an edition of Luxemburg's complete works. In fact, Luxemburg's essay on the Russian Revolution (to which Lenin had explicitly referred) is missing from the selected works – as is Luxemburg's controversial opus magnum, *The Accumulation of Capital*, a book that has been a foundational contribution to any debates on imperialism before the First World War and one that critiques Marx's theory of the 'primitive accumulation of capital'.

## 5

The writings on the revolution remained taboo.<sup>28</sup> The East German comrades responded with immense displeasure when Luxemburg's essay on the Russian Revolution was published in Poland in the spring of 1957 – with a preface authored by Julian Hochfeld, a sociologist, who recognized Luxemburg's contribution as a theorist and reiterated the cautionary note struck in her writings concerning the distorted accounts of socialist progress. Only in 1974 was her work entitled *On the Russian Revolution* published in the GDR. In 1963, Ossip K. Flechtheim published Levi's edition of Luxemburg's revolution essay in West Germany, in anticipation of his three-volume edition of her *Political Writings*, which appeared between 1966 and 1968. Luxemburg was not particularly popular in West Germany at that time. In fact, when Arendt intimated her intention to dedicate her 1958 essay on the Hungarian revolution to Rosa Luxemburg, her publisher, Klaus Piper, reacted with complete incomprehension. As Arendt wrote to her husband, Heinrich Blücher: 'Poor Rosa! She'll soon have been dead for forty years and continues to fall through the cracks.'<sup>29</sup> Her review of Peter Nettel's Luxemburg biography represents an impassioned plea for the marginalized 'heroine of revolution' – a heroine Arendt herself was often compared to by her American students, in a comparison that she apparently enjoyed and did not discourage.<sup>30</sup>

The GDR, on the other hand, struggled hard to come to terms with Luxemburg's legacy and her writings on the revolution. Her incisive comment about the freedom of dissent, which the editors of the 1974 edition of her complete works timidly concealed in a footnote, was re-appropriated as the slogan of the Eastern German civil rights movement.<sup>31</sup> Under the soft powers of official party propaganda and ideology,

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, at 160–168.

<sup>29</sup> H. Arendt and H. Blücher, *Briefe 1936–1968* (1996), at 485: 'Die arme Rosa! Nun ist sie bald vierzig Jahre tot und fällt immer noch zwischen alle Stühle.' For a more detailed account, see also Abel, 'Hannah Arendt über Rosa Luxemburg', in K. Kinner and H. Seidel (eds), *Rosa Luxemburg: Historische und aktuelle Dimensionen ihres theoretischen Werkes* (2002) 248.

<sup>30</sup> Arendt, 'Rosa Luxemburg', 20 *Der Monat* (1968) 30. The original English version is 'Hannah Arendt: A Heroine of Revolution', *supra* note 2.

<sup>31</sup> 'Freiheit nur für die Anhänger der Regierung, nur für die Mitglieder einer Partei – mögen sie noch so zahlreich sein – ist keine Freiheit. Freiheit ist immer Freiheit der Andersdenkenden'. Luxemburg, 'Zur Russischen Revolution', in Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 4 (1974) 332, at 359, n. 3 (English translation from 'The Problem of Dictatorship', in Luxemburg, *On the Russian Revolution* [www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/ch06.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/ch06.htm) (last visited 18 May 2016): '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 the freedom of those who think differently.'

the revolutionary becomes the archetype of the intelligent and wilful daughter of the party and the state, who must then be gently forced to conform to the norm. In Monika Maron's novel *Stille Zeile Sechs* (*Silent Close No. 6*), essentially a 'book about the entire German Democratic clique of fathers,'<sup>32</sup> the protagonist, Rosalind Polkowski, does not dare to object when the old party bigwig Beerenbaum addresses her by her first name while dictating his memoirs to her: '[O]r may I call you Rosalind, or better still, Rosa, like our Rosa, like our Rosa Luxemburg.'<sup>33</sup>

Biographers and other sympathizers still refer to 'our Rosa' on a first-name basis.<sup>34</sup> The image of this Marxist leader continues to be impacted by her representation in Margarethe von Trotta's emotional auteur film *Rosa Luxemburg*,<sup>35</sup> which unintentionally, but nonetheless perfectly, continues the marginalization strategies of those party comrades, who after her murder first published not Rosa Luxemburg's argumentative and analytically strong political writings but, rather, her colourful and emotional private prison letters and letters to her friends.<sup>36</sup> The thought of Luxemburg is on the verge of being critically appropriated again, this time from transnational perspectives.<sup>37</sup> The revival of scholarly interest in Luxemburg – a fresh engagement with her leftist transnationalism, her critique of imperialism, her understanding of socialist democracy and her contribution to the critique of political economy – requires and, at the same time, allows for a more nuanced image of a theorist of revolution.

<sup>32</sup> Radisch, 'Der Lurch muss sterben', *Die Zeit* (11 October 1991).

<sup>33</sup> M. Maron, *Silent Close No. 6*, translated by David Newton Marinelli (1993), at 121 (original German title: *Stille Zeile Sechs*, first published in 1991).

<sup>34</sup> This happens without fail, for instance, in M. Gallo, *Une Femme Rebelle: Vie et Mort de Rosa Luxemburg* (1992).

<sup>35</sup> The visual politics is not without irony in that Barbara Sukowa, who plays the role of the protagonist in Margarethe von Trotta's *Rosa Luxemburg* (1986) also plays the title role in von Trotta's biopic *Hannah Arendt* (2012).

<sup>36</sup> Deborah Whitehall points out that, beginning with the publication of her personal correspondence, even a current project to republish Luxemburg's collected works invites sentimentalism, thereby diminishing Luxemburg's stature as a serious thinker. Cf. Whitehall, *supra* note 1.

<sup>37</sup> Whitehall, *supra* note 1, with further references. Cf. also N. Fraser, 'The Significance of Rosa Luxemburg for Contemporary Social Theory' (March 2014), [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zK2VJAW\\_jHw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zK2VJAW_jHw) (last visited 18 May 2016). For a recent collection of German contributions, still somewhat rooted in a cold war framework, see M. Brie and F. Haug (eds), *Zwischen Klassenstaat und Selbstbefreiung: Zum Staatsverständnis von Rosa Luxemburg* (2011).