



# Post Rosa

Letters Against Barbarism



Hjalmar Jorge Joffre-Eichhorn (ed.)





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BOOKS

Post Rosa: Letters Against Barbarism  
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“Long live the revolution! Keep your spirits up and be joyful,  
or I’ll be seriously cross with you!”

“Write as often as you can, it brings me such solace.”

– Rosa Luxemburg



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May 13, 2021  
Mendoza, Argentina

Shamed, dishonored, wading in blood and dripping with filth, thus capitalist society stands. Not as we usually see it, playing the roles of peace and righteousness, of order, of philosophy, of ethics-but as a roaring beast, as an orgy of anarchy, as a pestilential breath, devastating culture and humanity-so it appears in all its hideous nakedness.

Rosa Luxemburg<sup>1</sup>

Quenida Hayde'e

I have been thinking a lot about Rosa these days, like someone who thinks of a beloved and close friend, *una amiga* I often turn to and consult when current affairs remind me of past events, and when I need someone with whom to think in ways simultaneously loving and unwavering, the way she used to think, agitate and write to her friends.

The horrifying news from Colombia, the open war waged against the *Guardia Indígena*, the violence and grief that President Duque and his henchmen are unleashing on those who dare to openly defy them or even just resist, remind me of Rosa's very relevant observations about the politics of the bourgeoisie, and the incompatibility between the most basic forms of democratic tolerance and the movement towards barbarism as represented by the capitalist economy.

We here on South American soil, from the Rio Bravo southwards, know all too well what this entails, thanks not only to the colonial experience – if that were not enough already – but also to the variety of forms and attempts at recolonizing the continent, both in the past and present. Down here in the *Cono Sur*, the savage wounds inflicted upon us by the military dictatorships of the 1960s and 70s are still wide open, whether in Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, Bolivia or Paraguay. As it were, our republican era is a vivid example of this bourgeois tendency to ride roughshod over the very same institutions it extols: in the past military coup d'états, today legal coups like those in Bolivia (2019), Honduras (2009) and Brazil (2016). Then there are the brutalities resulting from the reign of narcopolitics in Mexico and Colombia, as well as a pillaging neoliberalism burning the entrails of the people of Ecuador and blinding the eyes of hundreds of protestors in Chile.

The list is interminable, but the above examples alone leave no doubt that we urgently need to read and analyse our continental vicissitudes, our politics as feminists included, *en clave de Rosa*, that is to say, with and through Rosa Luxemburg. For instance, I am thinking about "*El violador eres tú*" ("The Rapist is You"), the wonderful resistance performance created by the feminist collective *Las Tesis* in Chile in response to the widespread use of sexual violence by the Chilean police in order to repress political dissent.<sup>2</sup> The song immediately resonated across the continent and then the rest of the world, spreading like a tidal wave of protest, performing a strategy of internationalism that we feminists have begun in the most diverse ways,

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<sup>1</sup> Luxemburg 2004: 313.

<sup>2</sup> Listen at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZN\\_QalUJj](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZN_QalUJj).

not just with songs, but also with marches and the international feminist strike. Who other than Rosa Luxemburg as our guest of honour in all these feminist debates and actions? Rosa and the general strike. So much for us to (still) think about.

As a matter of fact, Rosa and her reflections come up for me time and again when thinking about all that is happening on our unfortunate continent, what is happening with us women, subject to the most brutal violence. Her brilliant diagnosis: Capitalism cannot but advance over all land, relations and human beings by means of the most diverse types of violence and barbarism, including this most recent version of the extermination of women: the privatization of their bodies, their transformation into commodities and into new territories for the valorisation of Capital. How can we understand the ongoing *terricida* and femicide without the help of Rosa, my dear Haydeé?

I cannot stop pondering how she was able to combine her sound education as an economist and her sharp capacity to consider the political consequences of the capitalist economy, for example when realizing what would be the result of the necessity of the European countries and their economies to expand in space. One is reminded of her observations in *The Junius Pamphlet*:

Capitalist desire for imperialist expansion, as the expression of its highest maturity in the last period of its life, has the economic tendency to change the whole world into capitalistically producing nations, to sweep away all superannuated, precapitalistic methods of production and society, to subjugate all the riches of the earth and all means of production to capital, to turn the labouring masses of the peoples of all zones into wage slaves. In Africa and in Asia, from the most northern regions to the southernmost point of South America and in the South Seas, the remnants of old communistic social groups, of feudal society, of patriarchal systems, and of ancient handicraft production are destroyed and stamped out by capitalism. Whole peoples are destroyed, ancient civilizations are levelled to the ground, and in their place profiteering in its most modern forms is being established.<sup>3</sup>

I am also thinking about her articulating the advancement of capitalism and the destruction of existing social relations and of nature, exactly as it has been happening here on our continent. In Argentina, ongoing, multiple extractivist interventions are penetrating into areas hitherto peripheral, like the remaining jungles of Salta, Chaco and Formosa; the search for lithium in Puna, or the ongoing fracking activities in the Patagonian Plateau. The overall devastation and misery, the destruction of all forms of community relations, of nature and bodies, confirm in our everyday lives the connection Rosa saw between capitalism, the destruction of pre-existing social relations and the most extreme forms of violence.

What she calls “capitalist desire” continues to expand everywhere, and even more so in these pandemic times. The brutal consequences of a system in which people produce what they don’t need while lacking the most basic means for the reproduction of their own existence, are ever more crudely visible for anyone who wants to see them. It is just like Rosa said. We have become wage-earning slaves,

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<sup>3</sup> Luxemburg 2004: 338.

prisoners of multiple crises, from the overaccumulation of commodities to the massive laying-off of workers. This capitalist desire is such that it penetrates the very depths of our bodies, the very last corners of nature and even those spaces that the bourgeoisie once venerated under the pretext of privacy. Nothing is sacred in this predatory frenzy that destroys the old, impoverishes and makes precarious ever larger number of people and appropriates ever bigger chunks of free labour. Rosa points out precisely this in her lectures on political economy, given at the School of the German Social-Democratic Party (SPD) from 1907 onward when saying:

In this way, one continent after another comes inextricably under the rule of capital, and on every continent one territory after another, one race after another, with ever new and uncounted millions succumbing to proletarianization, enslavement, insecurity of existence, in short, immiseration. The establishment of the capitalist world economy brings in its wake the spread of ever greater misery, an unbearable burden of labour and a growing insecurity of existence across the whole globe, corresponding to the accumulation of capital in a few hands.<sup>4</sup>

This reflection of Rosa strikes me as absolutely key in understanding the current capitalist crisis, the impacts of the pandemic, but also those things that happen to us as women, i.e. the different ways capitalism affects us in our often proletarianized and/or un(der)employed existences, the unbearable and unsustainable quantities of free female labour that capital devours in the most diverse forms, among others, as a readily available workforce that becomes employable only if and when capital demands it, or for the free reproduction of human life wrapped in sugar-coated notions of love, care, etc. In other words, depredation and privatization are real, but they are made invisible once again by plain old mystification.

How accurately Rosa saw that capitalism advances by way of the cannibalization of other forms of social organization – devouring, incorporating and subordinating them – and the use of free labour made available thanks to the social, racial and sexual division of labour. Thus, the tight relation between capitalism and colonialism, obscured from view back then and still today. Thus, the intimate relation between capitalism and patriarchy, which continues to be so frequently sidestepped even among battle-hardened feminists. In short, this rapacious, profit-seeking machinery excretes and denies our human bodies, the very material nature of life and our connection with the most elemental and social needs of nourishment, rest, affect and relations with others.

This is what looking at the world *en clave de Rosa* allows us to see and comprehend: the logic of the accumulation of capital and its articulation through politics, the logic of capital and the exploitation of women and racialized people, the logic of capital and the devouring of free labour, the logic of capital and the long, never-ending, exhausting, unsustainable and un(der)paid working days of countless human beings. It is these growing levels of exploitation and extortion we face day after day – of course since long before the pandemic – but nowadays with an even greater loss of life and basic rights.

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<sup>4</sup> Luxemburg 2013a: 297.

Hence this deepest of affinities I feel in relation to Rosa: not only did she provide me and so many other feminists with the necessary tools to interpret the ties that bind together economics and politics, but she has gifted us with the wonderful example of her own life: her sharp sensitivity vis-à-vis the pulse of the times, her rigorous political ethics in times of defeat, her precious words of encouragement and gratitude towards other women, her deep sense of solidarity with nature, and her knowledge of those secret bonds of kinship we humans have with buffalos, birds, and yes, the numerous, precious wild plants she cultivated and encountered in many a prison courtyard.

It is Rosa's exemplary life, dearest Haydeé, that has instilled in me a deep desire to learn from her the key personal and political lessons that allow us to develop feminist friendships and appreciate their enormous importance for the sustenance of life, for making more liveable our ever so uncertain lives. To learn from her about the vibrant internationalism that resulted in strikes, marches, debates and incarcerations, and which recently found expression in our own feminist internationalism vibrating to the beat of "*Canción sin Miedo*,"<sup>5</sup> the beautiful song by Vivir Quintana, so personal, so political, so mobilizing in these difficult times.

Te abrazo (I embrace you)

atejandra  
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<sup>5</sup> Listen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-UgyLRjz3Oc>.

Avergonzada, deshonrada, chorreando  
mugre: así tenemos a la sociedad  
capitalista.<sup>6</sup>



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<sup>6</sup> "Shamed, dishonoured, wading in the blood and dripping with guilt, the capitalist society stands." (Luxemburg 2004: 313)

May 15, 2021  
Pedregal de Carrasco, South of Mexico City, Mexico

alejandra quenda,

After many work-related delays I am now finally able to write back to you. *Gracias*, first of all, for your beautiful letter. I should start off by recognizing that you are the expert in Rosa, or *Rosita*, as I lovingly call her, a name of which I am sure she would have approved since she herself so often used the diminutive in her communication with friends and comrades, from Sonja (Sophie Liebknecht), Tilde (Mathilde Wurm), Lulu (Luise Kautsky), Diudiu (Kostja Zetkin), Hänschen (Hans Diefenbach) and Mitek (Mieczysław Hartman) to Julek (Julian Marchlewski), Wład (Władysław Henrich), and her *gatita*, her beloved little cat, Mimi.

Similar to you, I feel *Rosita* very close to me, almost like a contemporary, in spite of our being a little over a century removed from her life. But really, what is time for an important figure like her? In fact, if we think of time as a vast, immeasurable entity, then Rosa's short life – just like other important historical events such as the Paris Commune; the Haitian, Mexican, Russian and Cuban revolutions; or the successful anti-colonial uprisings on the African continent (which others can you think of, ale?) – was of such intensity that it continues to illuminate our path like fireflies in the dark or like those kaleidoscopes through which one can always discern new and rich possibilities.

Wasn't Red Rosa admirable in every dimension of her life? A Marxist and inexhaustible fighter, *una luchadora incansable*, who was committed to the struggles of working-class women, a woman full of love and a polyglot educated in a variety of fields, because when in Zurich not only did she study philosophy, but also botany, zoology, mathematics and economics, and – this continues to amaze me – she obtained her PhD at only 27 years of age, at a time when very few women had the opportunity to do so!

The same Rosa who since early childhood confronted adversity with integrity and who, when she was 4-5 years old, was forced to spend all her time in bed without being able to move. The same Rosa who at age 15 was already politically active in the Polish socialist party "Proletariat," and who at age 18 began her nomadic existence, having to leave her native Poland for Zurich – apparently hiding in a cart full of straw – in order to avoid being caught by the police who would continue to hound her throughout her life, whether in Poland or Germany.

What's more, Rosita was not afraid of intimacy like many of the politicians-cum-marble statues far removed from all the human things that happen around them. On the contrary, her life, her work and her political commitment can be regarded as an early embodiment of what would soon become the flagship of the international feminist movement, i.e. "the personal is political," which Rosita would probably have expressed dialectically: and the political is personal as well. No doubt, her

capacity for tenderness was revolutionary, as was the great passion she brought to every task, leaving no one who ever met her indifferent: neither women, nor men and surely no other living beings either.

For me, Rosa's life, from beginning to end, was like a solar flare, which continues to burn brightly despite the more than hundred years that have passed since her assassination a few weeks before her 48th birthday. And even though we do not know with absolute certainty the date on which she opened her eyes for the first time, I want to believe that Rosa was indeed born in March, at the beginning of spring in the northern hemisphere, coming (in)to life with the same revolutionary fervour so palpably expressed by the people of the Paris Commune that very same March of 1871. Because spring is not only "*Le Temps des Cerises*,"<sup>7</sup> the season of flowering cherry trees, but also the time of the year when life itself undergoes a process of renewal and rejuvenation. In Mexico City, for example, it is the time when the Jacaranda trees explode in all their violet beauty, thereby playing an indispensable part in our annual feminist marches on International Women's Day. How I would love you to join us one day – as soon as the pandemic allows – for one of our marches against femicide and all other forms of violence against women. Wouldn't it be great if we could march arm-in-arm, together with the other women of my collective from the South of Mexico City, "*Las Sureñas Insurrectas*," just like Rosa and Clara Zetkin did in that emblematic 1910 image? That gesture has always fascinated me, as it expresses in such a dignified manner something that you mentioned in your letter: friendship between women, walking side-by-side, supporting one another, talking and sharing.

In April you told me by e-mail that you were going to the city of Rosario to finally meet one of your grandchildren, Emiliano, who you said received his name "because of Zapata." It made me very happy to learn that he was named in honour of our great Mexican revolutionary. Later I realized that both Luxemburg and Zapata were murdered in the same year, 1919. Rosa on January 15 and Emiliano on April 10. Zapata and Luxemburg, both with piercing dark eyes, an unyielding personality and hailing from the margins of the world-system – from the so-called forgotten people, the "*pueblos perdidos*": Anenecuilco in the state of Morelos, Mexico and Zamość, in the state of Lublin, Poland – can today be considered as among the world's most important historical figures, symbolizing "*la revolución del pueblo*" ("the people's revolution") against the power of the bourgeoisie and against capital, which, just as you emphasize in your letter, continues to devour everything in its way: land, bodies, relationships.

In his 1911 "*Plan de Ayala*," Zapata – "*el general*" or "*calpuleque*" (meaning "chief" in Náhuatl) – outlined something that I am sure Rosa would have approved of: the indispensable people's struggle for democracy, justice and freedom, denouncing the usurpation and monopoly of the "land, hills and waters," and decreeing the expropriation of all large estates and the restitution of the land to *ejidos*<sup>8</sup> and *comunidades*, i.e. collective land distribution. In a recent text published in the journal *Memoria. Revista de Crítica Militante*, which I am a part of, one of the great Zapata scholars, Francisco Pineda (1955-2019), describes how the ruling oligarchy first

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<sup>7</sup> Editor's Note: "*Le Temps de Cerises*" is a famous song closely associated with the days of the Paris Commune.

<sup>8</sup> *Ejido* is a communal form of landownership derived from indigenous communities in Mexico.



tried to kill Zapata and when that didn't work, attempted to denigrate him with various farcical accusations, resulting in "the leader of the Liberation Army thus identif[ying] the main forces of social confrontation: on one side, the honourable Mexican people, and on the other, the self-enrichment and ridiculous farce of the worthless and despicable [oligarchs]."<sup>9</sup> In this sense, it appears almost certain that Rosa would have supported Zapata's radical and irrevocable perspective, possibly with certain criticisms, but undoubtedly denouncing the reformist positions of people like Francisco I. Madero. In short, both Rosa and Emiliano remain highly emblematic figures, reborn with every insurrection and revolt.

So please tell me about Emiliano and the rest of your family. How was it to finally see him? And how was it to meet your children Martina, Valentín and Andrés after such a long break due to the pandemic? You know, I have not seen my own family – my mother, father, my niece Sofía, my nephew Tadeo and others – in more than six months. They all live in the place where I was born: in Matehuala, San Luis Potosí, in the middle of a semidesert, very close to Wirikuta. Have you heard of Wirikuta, *mi querida amiga*? It is one of the sacred places of the *wixárika* people, also known as *huicholes*, and the site where it is said that the sun rose for the very first time, thereby destabilizing the colonial cartography imposed on us for so long by the West.

Today, Wirikuta is being besieged by the voracity of international mining capital, with the support of successive neoliberal national governments who have generously granted concessions in over 40% of the national territory, up to a period of fifty years. One company in particular, Canadian *First Majestic*, is contaminating our waterways and territories through open-pit mining, in the process destroying the delicate social fabric, because they operate precisely in an area with an ever higher number of people passing through, trying to reach the United States with the goal of increasing their chances of physical survival and perhaps even obtaining a scrap of the so-called American Dream, which is fast becoming more and more of a nightmare. And so naturally some people say to themselves that "if the company gives me a few cents to do some weeding or to look after the scrub, well, then I prefer to stay." The problem is that this work is done merely to prepare the terrain for future mining operations, and recent history suggests that these companies bring nothing but further poverty, with an attendant increase in (organized) crime, which together have become one of the most hideous developments in the current phase of capitalism. In short, the communities increasingly begin to confront each other, and the result is not only a highly complex, explosive overall scenario but a situation in which both the present and future are at stake. To me, this appears to be very similar to what you describe in your letter about the different regions of Argentina, followed by your very pertinent suggestion to understand what is happening *en clave de Rosa*. Perhaps in your next letter you could give me some advice on which texts of hers to read in more detail? Do you see a connection with what Rosa called capitalist and non-capitalist strata, or the struggle of capital against the natural economy?

What else? Oh yes, you mentioned the composer and singer-songwriter Vivir Quintana, who by the way was born near the very same trail northwards frequented today by so many migrants from all over Central America. "*Canción sin miedo*," her powerful feminist song you shared, is one of my favourites and I continue to choke

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<sup>9</sup> See Pineda 2019.

up every time I listen to it, though eventually, thanks to the power I feel from the *compañeras* next to me, my chest opens up and I begin to sing. The version you sent is one of the first, from March 2020, performed with Chilean artist Mon Laferte and the El Palomar Choir at Zócalo square, in the heart of Mexico City-Tenochtitlan, just before the first Covid-related confinement began. Since then, countless women of all ages have made the song their own and there are now multiple versions out there, all of them extremely moving. Of course, the other song you mention, by *Las Tesis*, is also very popular within our movement and I have even performed it on various occasions. You are so right when you say that the feminism we are a part of is a direct descendent of Rosa and her “vibrant internationalism.”

Something else that caught my attention is the paragraph you cite about the advance of capital and how Rosa taught this at the SPD Party School. May 15 is Teachers’ Day here in Mexico and a little earlier today my partner Pepe Gandarilla, whom you know, reminded me of this crucial aspect of Rosa’s life, i.e. the absolutely essential work she did as a political educator for a number of years. Can you believe that even to be able to do this work she had to overcome all kinds of obstacles, because her colleagues, almost all of them men, wanted to give the job to Rudolf Hilferding?<sup>10</sup> But just like on so many other occasions Rosa fought (back) and achieved what she set out to do.

If there is one thing about Rosa, however, that has really left a lasting impression on me it is her straightforward and open commitment to living a full and dignified life, in which not a single detail is ever lost or disregarded, and where everything is joined and woven together. As you know, she was one of a kind in articulating the most complex concepts in any given situation, political or otherwise, thereby raising to the highest level of expression the Marxian method of relating the abstract to the concrete, all the while living out with such intensity her capacity to love – free of any type of puritanism – and constantly re-affirming her willingness to be fully involved, to understand and acknowledge what she was doing and feeling, and to grant her passions the necessary space to express themselves. As, for example, when she writes to her partner Leo Jogiches in March 1894 and criticizes him for never speaking about anything but the greater cause:

It really annoys me – the fact that whenever I take a letter in hand, whether from someone else or from you – everywhere it’s the same – it’s either the next issue, or it’s the pamphlet, or it’s this article or that one. That would all be fine if at least in addition to that, alongside of that, there was a bit of the human person, the soul, the individual to be seen. But from you there’s nothing, absolutely nothing. During this time have you had no impressions, have no thoughts occurred to you, have you read nothing, had no perceptions that you could share with me?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Editor’s note: Rudolf Hilferding (1877-1941) was an Austrian-German Marxist economist and one of the chief theoreticians of German Social-Democracy.

<sup>11</sup> Luxemburg 2013b: 10.

In this and so many other letters of hers – it really is astonishing how tireless she was; I wonder how she had time for everything – Rosa gives an early account of how capitalism gradually manages to invade all aspects of life, something we women understand all too well, now that this has in fact become one of its most potent mechanisms, as you so aptly describe.

Another facet I'd like to mention is what I believe to be the deep links between Rosa and one of the heroines of the Paris Commune, Louise Michel, a connection similar to that between trees and forests that happens underground: through, between and among the roots. Rosita's admiration for the Commune is of course well known, and I think what characterized both these revolutionary women was what we may call today an "ecological" understanding of the world, that is to say, that nature and culture must not be separated and that there exists an interdependent co-existence between humans and non-humans. Furthermore, both of them, in their very own ways, but nourished by the same organic, living humus, managed to sustain their sensibility in even the most difficult conditions, whether in prison or exile, as evidenced by their many beautiful drawings of plants and flowers. I am sending you a type of postcard that I made from these images.

What's more, neither of them would allow herself to be victimized in any way. Quite the opposite, how much resonance and similarities do we find between the "We will come back by all possible ways" spoken by Louise facing her persecutors before being sent into exile in New Caledonia, and those final published words of Rosa's just before her life was cut short:

"Order prevails in Berlin!" You foolish lackeys! Your "order" is built on sand. Tomorrow the revolution will "rise up again, clashing its weapons," and to your horror it will proclaim with trumpets blazing: I was, I am, I shall be!<sup>12</sup>

Finally, both of them developed and sustained a strong anticolonial perspective. Louise due to her time spent in exile and her support for the Kanak-led 1878 anti-imperial insurrection, and in the case of Rosa we can find this stance in her both terrifying and beautiful letter to her Jewish friend and party comrade Mathilde Wurm, written from Wronke Prison on February 16, 1917:

[...] above all one must at all times live as a complete human being. What do you want with this theme of the "special suffering of the Jews"? I am just as much concerned with the poor victims on the rubber plantations of Putumayo, the Blacks in Africa with whose corpses the Europeans play catch.<sup>13</sup>

Rosa continues with a quote by German General von Trotha who led the 1904-07 extermination campaign against the indigenous Herero and Nama people in the former *Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, today's Namibia: "And the death rattles of the dying, the demented cries of those driven mad by thirst faded away in the sublime stillness of eternity," to which Rosa responds emphatically:

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12 Luxemburg 2004: 378.

13 Luxemburg 2013b: 375.

Oh that “sublime stillness of eternity,” in which so many cries of anguish have faded away unheard, they resound within me so strongly that I have no special place in my heart for the [Jewish] ghetto. I feel at home in the entire world, wherever there are clouds and birds and human tears.<sup>14</sup>

Don't you think that Rosa would be on the side of the Palestinian people today, as they are once again under cruel and inhumane attack by the Israeli government?

...

To finish, you will not believe this, but perhaps due to the delay in writing my letter to you, I have even begun to dream of you and Rosa. Possibly it also had to do with the fact that these days, before going to bed – dead tired after so many e-meetings, classes and seminars, and having spent the whole day in front of the computer – I give myself the gift of reading a few pages of literature, such as the extraordinary sci-fi novel I just finished, *Women at the Edge of Time* by the US-American writer and critic Marge Piercy. Intriguingly, in the novel, one of the characters or “per”, short for person, is called Luxemburg. Other “pers” that appear in the book are Louise Michel and Simón Bolívar, as well as many other important beings and organic processes such as Dawn, Hawk, Bee and Luciente, the latter being the one who takes the novel's protagonist, Connie, a Mexican-American woman subjected to all kinds of injustices and misfortunes, into a future society free of all forms of oppression. In other words, Rosa is just one of many “pers” engaged in this time-travel, but still, what I love about the book is that she forms part of this imagined future, in which every “per” chooses their own name and where some of the most terrible and pain-inducing inventions humankind has come up with, such as the notion of “race” and “sex-gender assignment,” have finally ceased to exist.

And then I woke up at dawn that very same day of the dream, and the first thing I heard were the trills of the birds outside the window, as even here in the big city there exist a few spaces of revitalizing joy, just like Rosita always managed to find or, if necessary, create in even the most unlikely places. I have attached the audio for you, and I invite you to just close your eyes and imagine you are here, listening to their music.

Well, it is time to bring this first letter to a close. What an endless spring of inspiration our Rosa is. A tumultuous torrent from which to constantly drink and refresh ourselves. Well, there are still so many important issues in your letter I could respond to, and I hope to do so in our future correspondence, but for now

(I embrace you and wait for your next letter with great excitement),

Te abrazo y espero ya con ilusión  
tu próxima carta,  
Daydeé

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid: 376.

Reconocer que el caos es el elemento vital del capitalismo, es pronunciar su sentencia de muerte.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "To discover and confess that anarchy is the life element of the rule of capital means in the same breath to pronounce a death sentence." (Luxemburg 2013a: 134)

Querida Hayde'e:

Just now I am managing to sit down and respond to your beautiful letter. I sometimes catch myself thinking, especially when feeling overwhelmed by tiredness and bad news, that the times we live in are not propitious for writing, at least for this type of writing, more personal yet still deeply political in nature.

But then I think of Rosa and realize how endlessly small I am. I recall her capacity to enjoy every second and I remember those many powerful letters she wrote in conditions so much worse than mine, the university professor who spends endless hours in front of a computer, but in a pleasant and warm place, next to the marvellous red of the Santa Rita vine that adorns the window of the *casita* I live in, which used to belong to my mother. Outside, the little orange tree I planted only five years ago is beginning to bear fruit. It looks like this winter – in a few weeks' time – I will be eating my own oranges. I have become quite the lay gardener. Later I will send you some photos of my flowers and cacti, which I look after with great care.

But before I let myself be carried away too much, I am sending you the fragment of a letter Rosa wrote to Hanna-Elsbeth Stühmer on March 10, 1917. Rosa invites her interlocutor "to take a turn with me in this tiny realm of nature [the yard of Wronke prison]" and to "observe and read along with me – observe – and read along with me! [...] what abundance when you take a closer look!" Then she says:

Just here in the dewy grass, if you will bend down, dear lady! Do you see these masses of green clover leaves? Observe how strangely and faintly iridescent they are—bluish, rosy and mother-of-pearl. What causes it? Each little leaf is bedecked with tiny dewdrops in which the slanting morning light is refracted, giving the leaves their iridescent rainbow shimmer. Have you ever tried to tie together a little bouquet of such simple three-leaved clover stems? They look delightful in a small vase or glass. All seemingly the same, but when you look more closely, each little leaf is slightly different, just as a tree does not really have two leaves the same. Larger and smaller, lighter and darker, the little clover leaves with their elegant oval shape are a varied and lively sight. When I first sent a small bouquet of these clover leaves to the superintendent as a morning greeting, she asked afterwards with interest where I had picked it. The ladies have no idea what grows and flourishes in their own yard and every time I produced an attractive bouquet using the most modest means and a little skill, they asked in astonishment where it came from. Since then, the little clover bouquets have in fact become very fashionable and I was delighted to see on several mornings one or other of the ladies stooping in the yard and hurriedly collecting a handful of the three-leaved stems.<sup>16</sup>

I understand that this quote is rather long, but I just did not want to take anything

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<sup>16</sup> See Luxemburg 1917a.

away from Rosa's capacity for language, this really taking her time in expressing her thoughts and ideas, and the sense of solace these minute descriptions provide, all of which is encroached upon today by our ever more accelerated lives in pursuit of who knows what ephemeral illusion. Rosa wrote with such palpable joy and that is why I believe it is crucial that we not only take seriously her economic texts, but that we engage with her letters, her affects, her different loves and passions, her relationships with (female) friends, and also the subtleness of her writing, the sort of grounded patience her words express and which her more urgent texts sometimes lack. But then, how could they not be urgent since Rosa lived her life with such deep sense of urgency?

You asked me about my favourite revolutions, well, today is May 25, the anniversary of the 1810 May Revolution that took place in present-day Argentina. This uprising by *criollos*, *pardos* and *mestizos*, that is to say, racialized subjects, unleashed the revolutionary storms that swept across *Nuestramérica*<sup>17</sup> at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While this revolution has been interpreted by bourgeois historiography as a mere change of authority that benefitted the merchants of Buenos Aires, thereby following Tocqueville in erasing the capacity for subversion of the subaltern sectors, I do believe that what happened was a genuine revolution from below that shook the ruling classes and that nobody can take away from us. I suggest that next time you come to Argentina we go and look for the book by Andrés Rivera, *La Revolución es un sueño eterno* ("The Revolution is an eternal dream"), in which he tells the story of the revolution through the eyes of one of its protagonists, Juan José Castelli, aka the Orator of the Revolution, who belonged to the Jacobin wing of the revolutionary forces.

In more general terms, I am still passionately in love with what might be called the upward cycle of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century revolutions, up to 1824, and including the great Haitian revolution, which continues to be largely absent from our indo-afro-latino-american history as Afro-Brazilian historian Lélia González (1934-1994) liked to call it. 1824 really did mark a point of inflection. All we need to do is follow in the steps of Bolívar in order to realize when and how the downward cycle begins and the dominant classes return to order, in sync with a reinforced colonial logic, which had never been successfully expelled from inside ourselves. All of this is so complex, isn't it? How do we know if and when a revolution really manages to subvert the established order? How does it unfold from conditions not of our own choosing? What really is the relative weight of these conditions as opposed to the weight of the subjectivities constructed in the heat of class struggle? Subjectivities such as those of Toussaint L'Ouverture, Mariano Moreno, Juan José Castelli, Juana Azurduy, Remedios del Valle and later Emiliano Zapata, *el Che* Guevara and his *compañera* in Bolivia, Haydée Tamara Bunke (better known as Tania), of Camillo Torres and Salvador Allende, who is once again being championed today by the many young people at the forefront of the Chilean insurrection. And not to forget the protagonists of the struggles of the 1960s and 70s here in Argentina. So many people to name, so many powerful revolutionary subjectivities.

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17 Editor's note: *Nuestra América*, Our America, is an important text written by Cuban poet and politician José Martí in 1891. His eloquent insistence on the need for a genuinely independent and sovereign Latin American subcontinent, free of colonial and imperialist interference, has since become a rallying call of the Latin American Left.

In your letter you mention this final text of Rosa's "Order prevails in Berlin," which never ceases to resonate with us, especially in times of defeat. Just like Rosa I really believe that the current order "is built on sand" and that "tomorrow the revolution will rise up again, [... and] proclaim with trumpets blazing: I was, I am, I shall be!" In fact, isn't this happening again these days, right here on our continent, in such unexpected places as Chile and Colombia? You know, I was very young when the Allende-led *Unidad Popular* triumphed in Chile in the early 1970s and so I spent my youth in the company of the music of bands like Quilapayún, which once again today accompanies the struggle of the people of Chile, the *rotxs* and *pibas* as well as the indigenous Mapuches trying to regain their land and dignity. *El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido!* The people united will never be defeated! Which is precisely what so many young Colombians in Medellín are also singing these days, those who have nothing to lose but their chains: *El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido!*<sup>18</sup>

As someone whose political socialization began in those revolutionary 1970s, I cannot but think that the defeats of the emancipatory processes of the time have left us with a debt to pay. And in this sense, just as you affirmed, Rosa is indeed like a solar flare, which continues to illuminate our path more than a hundred years after her assassination and 150 years since her birth. Because she was a revolutionary and an internationalist. Because she knew and understood that even when we are defeated that does not change the fact that the bourgeois order is built on sand and that it will eventually be overthrown, or rather that we will demolish it stone by stone from its very foundations, which is really the only way to demolish anything. We will demolish it in its capitalist character, but also in its colonialism and racism, in its patriarchal horrors and in its heterosexism. And we will do so by cultivating the capacity for waiting that Rosa so masterfully achieved, a type of waiting that, mind you, is not the same as passivity. We will do so by devoting ourselves to transmitting her legacy, by learning from her, by finding and exploring our affinities, like the love for plants and music, and like the stubborn expectation and desire for a time of revolution and the transformation of *everything*.

Just now I re-read one of the letters she wrote to Diefenbach from jail. Rosa had just been transferred from Wronke to Breslau and found herself in a quite inhospitable place. So once again she looked out for the birds, from whom she learned the rare capacity to search for the inexhaustible sources of hope around her/us. She wrote:

Hänschen, do you know that in their autumnal flights to the south, large birds like cranes often carry on their backs an entire load of smaller birds, such as larks, swallows, gold crests, etc.?! This is not just some fairy story for children, but a scientifically verified observation. And the little ones cheerfully twitter and converse in their "seats on the bus"! ... Do you know that in these autumnal migrations it often happens that birds of prey – sparrow hawks, falcons, harrier hawks – will make the journey in a single flock together with little songbirds, which they normally feed upon, in other circumstances, but during this journey a kind of God's truce [*treuga Dei*], a general armistice, is in force? When I read something like this I am so thrilled and it puts me in such a mood of joie de vivre that I begin to consider even Breslau a place fit for humans to live in. I myself don't know why this affects me so; perhaps

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18 Listen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4imww8Ejs20>.



it's because I'm reminded again that life is indeed a beautiful story. Here at first I came close to forgetting that, but now it's coming back to me. I will not let things get me down.<sup>19</sup>

Isn't that It, *mi querida*?

Autumn is now fast advancing here in the South. The Liquidambar tree at the back of the house is turning all hues of red and yellow and the days are getting shorter. Yet, I am not losing hope that both the season and the generally stormy times we live in will soon change again and that we can meet on March 8 next year – whether in your beautiful Mexico full of flowers or here on my humble soil – in order to “march arm-in-arm, supporting one another, talking and sharing.” I would really like that.



Hopefully, if you manage to come, you can finally meet my grandchildren Amparo and Emiliano, both of whom are delightful. Perhaps you could even tell them stories about his namesake, Emiliano Zapata. I also wish that you can at long last return to your hometown of Matehuala, where I have never been, even though I did come across it many years ago when I studied the economic history of *Nuestramérica*. It was then that I learned about this other Potosí<sup>20</sup> and its relevance for the colonial system, but that was all really. Why don't you tell me a little bit more? I have seen a number of beautiful images, but I lack more concrete knowledge.

Speaking of economics and the colonial system, you asked me whether I think

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<sup>19</sup> Luxemburg 2013b: 439.

<sup>20</sup> Editor's note: In Latin America/Abya Yala there are two well-known cities named Potosí, one in Mexico, the other in modern-day Bolivia. The former was named after the latter, but both are historically important for their role in the colonial economy and the beginning of capitalism in Europe.

that what is currently happening in Mexico with the imperialist open-pit mining activities has something to do with the encroachment of capitalism over other economic relations. My short answer is a resounding yes, it certainly does. Rosa explains this meticulously in her economic writings, for example in her *Introduction to Political Economy* and in her magnum opus *The Accumulation of Capital*, both of which you can find online in Spanish at the Marxists Internet Archives. Flicking through the *Introduction to Political Economy* just now, I found the following, very illuminating quote:

We thus discover that one “commodity” is exported and imported today that was unknown in the time of King Nebuchadnezzar as well as in the whole of the antique and medieval periods: capital. And this commodity does not serve to fill “certain gaps” in other countries’ “national economies,” but quite the reverse – opening up gaps, rifts and splits in the edifice of traditional “national economies,” and acting like gunpowder to transform these “national economies” sooner or later into heaps of rubble. In this way, the “commodity” capital spreads still more remarkable “commodities” on an ever more massive scale from various old countries to the whole world: modern means of transport and the destruction of whole indigenous populations, money economy and an indebted peasantry, riches and poverty, proletariat and exploitation, insecurity of existence and crises, anarchy and revolutions. The European “national economies” extend their polyp-like tentacles to all countries and people of the earth, strangling them in a great net of capitalist exploitation.<sup>21</sup>

Substitute “Canadian” for “European” and you’ll find a very adequate explanation for what is happening: contamination, destruction of the social fabric, extreme impoverishment, the expansion and interiorization of capitalist values... You know, people think from where they stand, and the common ground for all of us are the many years of neoliberal politics and capitalist depredation, reinforced by highly efficient pedagogies of cruelty and individualism. And what they destroy is not only nature, our lands and the social relations we have created, but also our sense of community and our capacities for solidarity and the collective, *lo colectivo*.

I suppose this is why this dialogue with you and Rosa is so stimulating for me. It feels like we are wagering on our capacity to weave *lo colectivo*. It also feels like a commitment to our evolving friendship, which so far has been marked by a very few brief meetings, like for example when we met in Buenos Aires for the activities to commemorate the 100 years of Rosa’s murder. Unfortunately, due to family commitments – I have a very intense relationship to my children, perhaps because I am an intense person myself – I was unable to attend what you told me was a wonderful play dedicated to Rosa, *La conducta de los pájaros*, performed by Eliana Wassermann, but at least we managed to stroll around aimlessly a little, sharing food and drinking coffee.

Well, as I said, I will be waiting for your visit as soon as the pandemic allows. My partner Gustavo will do the cooking and then we can all go for a walk around the city together. It may not be as beautiful as your Mexico, but I am confident you

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<sup>21</sup> Luxemburg 2013: 115-116.

will enjoy the nearby mountains of the *cordillera*. I also promise that we shall drink a good local *vino*, produced right here by the sun-trapped, dry lands of Mendoza.

Last question, just out of curiosity: is there a nickname by which people call you, a diminutive?

Te abrazo a la espera de tu respuesta  
(I embrace you awaiting your next letter)

Alejandra



Fue solo porque analizo el capitalismo desde un punto de vista socialista... que Marx pudo descifrar los jeroglíficos de la economía capitalista.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "It is only because Marx looked at capitalism from the socialist's viewpoint, that is, from the historic viewpoint, that he was enabled to decipher the hieroglyphics of capitalist economy." (Luxemburg 2008: 79)

June 26

Tlalpan, in the vicinity of the Ajusco<sup>23</sup> mountain range,  
South of Mexico City, at 2480m of altitude

*Ale querida,*

I am so sorry it's taken me exactly a month to write back to you. Believe me, I was really hoping to do so earlier, but I was snowed under with endless work and so many events around me and hence the month simply passed in the blink of an eye.

I would like to start off by expressing my gratitude for your beautiful, rich and profound letter. I am not sure I will be able to do justice to all the different issues you raise, but I shall try anyway and at the very least our correspondence, from which I am learning so much, will continue. As a matter of fact, I feel that the two of us really resonate with each other and as a result this whole exchange has been for me like a fresh summer rain that makes one blossom, just like your oranges and the Santa Rita, or Bougainvillea as we call it here (by its colonial name), which excites and embellishes its surroundings when- and wherever it grows, in our case in spring. I have attached a photo for you from our communal garden in the housing unit where we live. What fascinates me about this plant is its history of travel, from Brazil to Europe and then across the planet, with all kinds of variations and adaptations emerging, such is the story of so many other plants. Here in Mexico, we drink its flowers as part of a tea with lemon and honey to cure coughs and colds and it works wonders.



Unfortunately, even though plants are such good companions, the fact that Pepe and I live in a flat means we have mostly ornamental plants like the “over-refined and decadent” orchids that Rosa admired with such “great resistance.”<sup>24</sup> How I wish I could transform our apartment into a jungle! But it delights me to know that you have a garden and that you have even planted your own fruit trees. Hopefully I can take you up on your invitation to visit you soon. The way you described it, it just

<sup>23</sup> Ajusco is originally a Náhuatl word and can be translated as “source of waters” or “watered grove”.

<sup>24</sup> See Luxemburg 1917b.

exudes hominess. In terms of you saying that Mendoza may not be as beautiful as Mexico, isn't it true that every place has its own beauty, its own *encanto*? Ideally, we can even visit each other, so we could talk and enjoy ourselves and I could show you around different places that I believe you might appreciate and then, every once in a while, we could take a break and watch the sky and "be good" together:

Just now the sun – I took a little break from writing, to observe the heavens – has dropped much lower behind the [men's prison] building, and high up in the sky, myriads of little clouds have silently assembled—God knows from where—their edges have a silvery sheen, but in the middle they are a soft grey, and with all their ragged outlines they are heading north. In this procession of clouds there is so much smiling unconcern that I have to smile along with them, just as I always go along with the rhythm of life around me. With the presence of a sky like this, how could one possibly be "bad" or petty? As long as you never forget to look around you, you will always be "good" without fail.<sup>25</sup>

In this sense and looking into the distance from the window of my study not far from the Ajusco mountain range, I agree with you about our smallness, because like yours, my general living conditions are infinitely better than Rosa's. Then again, I know that you are a woman of many battles, perhaps the main one being against the historical amnesia that the henchman of the military dictatorships and their descendants have been forever trying to impose on the people of Argentina. What greatness of heart you and Rosita have.

And it's in her letters, like some of the ones you shared, where one can really feel it. What moves me particularly is her sensitivity, which allowed her to find growing, pulsating life even in the most desolate prison yard, her love of life through all of her senses, and her need to share this love with others. I get emotional when I read how Rosa was able to communicate lovingly and full of hope with plants and flowers and how she kept spreading seeds of joy among other prisoners and even the female wardens; and what to say about her capacity to really see the smallest details, the most minimal changes of colour and form and how this became the basis of her understanding and weaving of interdependent friend- and comradeships, and even interdependent interspecies relations like when she talks so beautifully about the birds that at certain times carry other, smaller birds in order to *fly together* (!!!). What a great lesson for us humans to learn. Hers was a genuine *Aesthetics of Liberation*, to say it in the words of Enrique Dussel's 2018 text.

*Querida amiga*, you show great gentleness in your writing when you point out that Rosa was a female militant, a revolutionary, a loving thinker, a powerful theoretician and a woman of both patience and urgency all at once. I believe that what you mention is one of her biggest legacies: to learn how to slow down in order to extend the time of joy without losing sight of the utopian horizon of transformation, but rather nourishing it with these seemingly small but foundational moments.

Speaking of which, it was very meaningful for me that you wrote your letter on May 25, that you called my attention to the importance of the revolution, and the

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<sup>25</sup> Luxemburg 2013b: 432.

emphasis you gave to the many other uprisings that ignited the Independence Revolutions across the continent. In fact, what you invite us to do is to reclaim the very idea of Revolution itself, which is something I subscribe to, because I have been coming across more and more people with an historical revisionist attitude that denies the importance of the revolutions and who claim, as you say, that these were but mere changes of authority, or who evaluate them and their corollaries with the exclusive benefit of hindsight, all of which appear to me very unjust positions to take in relation to history and the people who made these revolutions with their dreams and ideals. By the way, in our library we have the book by Andrés Rivera you mention. My partner has spent quite a bit of time in Argentina, particularly in Buenos Aires, and since he is a great bibliophile, he once bought a copy, and thanks to your recommendation I now finally have the incentive to read it. In return, I recommend another book that attempts to connect the multiple uprisings, *En el espejo haitiano. Los indios del Bajío y el colapso del orden colonial en América Latina*, by the eminent Mexican historian Luis Fernando Granados.<sup>26</sup> Here is a quote from the book:

After the fuse was lit in May at the Río de la Plata, in September 1810, it was the turn of the “*indios, mestizos and castas, campesinos, mineros and artesanos pueblerinos* [...] to gather on the outskirts of the world’s capital of silver,” Guanajuato, to start the Independence revolution in Mexico.

Regarding your reference to Lélia Gonzalez, let me tell you that we literally just translated a short but very powerful texts of hers, “*Mujer negra, esa quilombola*,” originally published in November 1981, for the commemoration of the death of Zumbi dos Palmares, the great revolutionary leader of the first Slave resistance movement in Brazil in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> As you well know, Zumbi was decapitated, just like Tupac Amaru a century later in Peru, and both of them were accompanied in life and struggle – which are always one and the same thing, just as they were for Rosa – by important women: Dandara, mentioned by Lélia, and Micaela Bastidas. Today, Zumbi and Tupac Amaru form part of the deep roots of emancipation that continue to ground our struggles, and the mythical idea of their eventual return, which has been passed on from generation to generation, still serves as the insurgent seed that inspires multiple movements today.

In short, thanks to your letter, which gave me the feeling that we were on a journey together rediscovering the history of our continental uprisings and insurrections, I feel a renewed sense of confidence and courage in relation to our current struggles. And as I re-read your letter, I am listening to different versions of *El pueblo unido jamás será vencido*, which really was/is one of the official anthems of all the political and social movements in which I have participated, whether in the struggles for the democratization of the political system in my home state of San Luis Potosí, the support for the (Neo)Zapatistas in 1994, the many rallies against the privatization of our national oil resources, the defence of Wirikuta, the 2004/5 protests against the attempt to prevent current president Andrés Manuel López Obrador from running in the presidential elections, the protests against the fraudulent 2006 general elections,

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<sup>26</sup> Editor’s note: Unfortunately, on July 10 of this year, Luis Fernando Granados passed away from cancer at the age of 52. Rest in Power, Luis.

<sup>27</sup> November 20 has since become *El Día de la Conciencia Negra*, Black Consciousness Day, in Brazil.

or the countless Feminist marches over the years, among many other actions. I still get goosebumps every time I hear the song or when I witness other collective bodies singing it, everyone vibrating in unison, just as is happening now with the Colombian people in revolt. The repression is always the same: violent, sinister, irresponsible. In contrast, our protests are multi-coloured, kaleidoscopic, full of dancing, discussions, hugs, shared work ("*la minga*") and an immense rebellious energy, a joyful courage, again reminding us of Rosita who always gave her all in everything she did and who knew how to emerge stronger even from misfortune.

In one of her many letters to Luise Kautsky, this one from January 26, 1917, from Wronke Prison, Rosa demonstrates this strength of character, but also the value she gave to their friendship:

Now I am bright and lively again and in a good mood, and the only way you're failing me is that you're not here chitchatting and laughing as only the two of us understand how to do. I would very soon get you laughing again, even though your last few letters sounded disturbingly gloomy. You know, once when we were coming home from an evening at Bebel's and around midnight in the middle of the street three of us were putting on a regular frog's concert, you said that when we two were together you always felt a little tipsy, as though we had been drinking bubbly. That's exactly what I love about you, that I can always put you in a champagne mood, with life making our fingers tingle and us ready for any kind of foolishness. We can go without seeing each other for three years, and then within half an hour it's as though we'd seen each other only yesterday [...]<sup>28</sup>

Doesn't this type of profound connection over many years merit highlighting, particularly in light of what you said about capitalist values undermining our capacity for solidarity and maintaining social relations? A little further down she adds:

I can grieve or feel bad if Mimi is sick, or if you are not well. But when the whole world is out of joint, then I merely seek to understand what is going on and why, and then I have done my duty, and I am calm and in good spirits from then on. *Ultra posse nemo obligatur*. And then for me there still remains everything else that makes me happy: music and painting and clouds and doing botany in the spring and good books and Mimi and you and much more. In short, I am "stinking rich" and I'm thinking of staying that way to the end. This giving oneself up completely to the headaches and miseries of the day is completely incomprehensible and intolerable to me. See, for example, how Goethe stood above things with cool composure. [...] I don't ask that you be a poet like Goethe, but everyone can adopt for themselves his outlook on life-the universalism of interests, the inner harmony-or at least strive toward that. And if you say something like: but Goethe was not a political fighter, my opinion is this: a fighter is precisely a person who must strive to rise above things, otherwise one's nose will get stuck in every bit of nonsense.<sup>29</sup>

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28 Luxemburg 2013b: 365-366.

29 Ibid: 366-367.



So every time I get sad because of something that happens around me, like for example the surprising right-turn in the recent Mexican midterms – especially here in Mexico City, which since I arrived more than 25 years ago has always felt to me like a very libertarian, left and emancipatory city – I try to remind myself that history is full of reversals and setbacks and that we have to stay alert and find ways to confront things “with cool composure,” or perhaps with something akin to Rosa’s and Sonja Liebknecht’s inspiring “boisterous gales of laughter [...] – in spite of everything.” In that letter, Rosa tries to cheer up Sonja after the arrest of her husband Karl and she continues by saying:

[...] everything is part of life: sorrow and parting and longing. One must always take it as a whole, including everything, and find all of it beautiful and good. At least that is what I do. Not through some elaborately worked out form of wisdom, but simply “just so,” because of my very nature. I feel instinctively that this is the only correct way to take life, and therefore I really do feel happy in every situation. I also would not want to exclude anything from my life, nor have it be any way other than it was and is. If I could only bring you to this conception of life!<sup>30</sup>

To read Rosa really does give one strength - her words are like little dewdrops that splash vitality, imbue new life and restore one’s composure. Perhaps we should prescribe collective readings of Rosita whenever our goings get tough. You must already be doing this as part of your Rosa reading groups with the *Mujeres del Sur*?

As your days shorten, here they get longer. We just had the summer solstice, the longest day of the year and despite the usual rains and very little sun, Mexico City was illuminated until late in the day. This reminds me of a summer solstice I witnessed in Ushuaia, the so-called end of the world. I still have the stamp in my passport saying “*Las Malvinas son Argentinas*” (“The Falkland Islands belong to Argentina”). For sure, Rosita would be on the side of the Argentine people, that is to say, on our side. She who had the gaze of an eagle, as Lenin said of her (not without a certain masculine aftertaste). She, the perennial internationalist who paid attention to the struggles of so many people and places around the world.

You asked me about San Luis Potosí, the second Potosí. Well, together with Guanajuato (the cradle of independence) and Zacatecas, it was one of the three sites with the highest gold and silver production in colonial times, making Mexico (Nueva España) the biggest silver producer in the world in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (according to Humboldt). In fact, Rosa hints at this in her dissertation when she speaks of the “sudden influx of precious metals from the New World.”<sup>31</sup> San Luis was founded at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in 1592, in the region that is historically known as Gran Tunal, bordering on Gran Chichimeca, a territory originally inhabited by numerous nomad people who put up great resistance against the Spanish *conquistadores*. Generally speaking, today’s state of San Luis Potosí is very rich in cultural terms and with regards to its wide variety of landscapes. Oh how I wish to eventually show you its four very distinct regions: the *altiplano*, the high plateau, where I was born, with its spectacular night sky in the desert; the *región centro*, with the state

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30 Ibid: 399-400.

31 Muiña 2019: 158.

capital and one of the most important baroque churches in the country; the *zona media*, home to a series of incredible sites like the Media Luna Lagoon, and what to say of *La Huasteca region*, the rich intercultural area with its exuberance of tastes and colours. As you can imagine all these treasures have over the centuries provoked the voracity of Capital, but our people have put up stern resistance and therefore we continue to live our lives, day by day, with great integrity.

Thanks to your recommendation, I have (re-)read Rosa's posthumously published book *Introduction to Political Economy*, which addresses a series of important issues you raise in your letter. Rosa was very clear that colonialism was/is a necessary condition for capitalism and not, as has been claimed many times, an unfortunate anomaly. She also argues convincingly that the "non-capitalist strata" as she calls them in *The Accumulation of Capital* are fundamental for the dynamics of capital accumulation, that the unpaid (forced) labour extracted from its people fuels production and that it is precisely in these non-capitalist regions of the world that new markets are forced open and from which new resources are constantly appropriated.

I am sure you agree with me that the way she presents the issues is often astonishing in its clarity and sense of conviction, like when she chooses a title for the opening chapter in the form of a question – "What is Political Economy?" – and then immediately follows this with a great truth: "Political economy is a curious science. Difficulties and conflicting opinions arise at the very first step on its terrain [...]"<sup>32</sup> Next, she introduces the main ideas of some of the most renowned bourgeois scholars of the time and remarks bitingly: "What we're offered is precisely nothing but echoing phrases, hollow words screwed together [...] for ordinary mortals, this has the same numbing effect as a millwheel turning in the brain."<sup>33</sup> And then Rosa makes a remark that I believe we must collectively recover for our times, to make our analyses accessible:

[...] anyone who thinks clearly, and has a genuine mastery of his subject matter, also expresses himself clearly and understandably. [...] We shall go on to show that the obscure and confusing language of bourgeois scholars as to the nature of political economy is not accidental, but actually expresses two things: both the unclarity of these gentlemen themselves, and their tendentious, stubborn rejection of a real explanation of the question.<sup>34</sup>

For Rosa the Theoretician, the science of political economy implied the challenge of complexity, diagnosis and transformation, and "if it is the task and object of political economy to explain the laws of the origin, development and spread of the capitalist mode of production, it is an unavoidable consequence that it must as a further consequence also discover the laws of the decline of capitalism [...]"<sup>35</sup> For Rosita these laws are those of dialectical materialism, with the working class as its protagonist, female proletarians included, because "[t]he workshop of the future requires many hands and hearts. [...] so let's] hurry to join the struggle for the emancipation of women and of humankind from the horrors of capitalist domination!"<sup>36</sup>

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32 Luxemburg 2013a: 89.

33 Ibid: 91.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid: 141.

36 Luxemburg 2004: 244-245.

To conclude, ale, *camarada querida e intensa*, as you describe yourself and as I perceive you to be, I assume that you enjoy cooking, so I have an idea. Why don't we invent a dish in honour of Rosa, *una receta-homenaje*, and we can invite her to our table next to the stove just like she used to invite Sophie Liebknecht:

the cosy hours in my kitchen, where you and Mimi waited patiently at the little table with the white tablecloth to receive proof of my culinary skill. (Do you still remember the superb green beans in the Parisian style [haricots verts a la Parisienne]?) [...] I have the vivid memory that it was invariably hot sunny weather, and only in such weather does one have the proper joyous feeling of spring.<sup>37</sup>

Why not even invent a new slogan to chant during one of our future Feminist marches, inspired by the multiple *feminismos comunitarios* that understand that the cauldron is not only a place for cooking, but for many other things:

*Juntémonos en torno al fogón, que ahí también puede iniciar una revolución!*<sup>38</sup>

Finally, you asked me whether I had a nickname or diminutive, and the answer is yes, I have one. At home, people have called me Yeye since I was a child, which I sometimes spell in even shorter form: YY. Very close *amigas* and my partner Pepe call me by this name occasionally and what surprises me is how hearing them pronounce it feels like a caress, a factility of the soul, playful and sweet. Please feel free to call me this and please tell me what you are called, or which affectionate nickname you prefer.

Muchos cariños y un abrazo apretado,  
yy

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<sup>37</sup> Luxemburg 2013b: 400.

<sup>38</sup> Editor's note: Translated literally, "Let's gather around the stove, because it is (also) a place from which to start a revolution." In the Spanish original, the final words of each phrase (*fogón* and *revolución*) rhyme.

El taller del futuro  
necesita de muchas  
manos y corazones<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> "The workshop of the future requires many hands and hearts." (Luxemburg 2004: 244)

June 29, Mendoza

Mimuy querida Yeye:

I just read your long and splendid letter, but since for the purpose of this book project, we are meant to bring an end to our exchange, it will not be possible for me to do justice to everything you wrote. Hence, I will only pick up on a few ideas in relation to the legacy that Rosa has bequeathed us, her unforeseen heiresses, the pariahs and daughters of this beautiful and torn continent. Rosa, sower of revolutionary desire that fuses economy, politics, the body, nature, music and the delicate weft of affects and friendships, just like in those letters of hers you sent, to Luise Kautsky and Sophie Liebknecht, in which shared experiences, collective "champagne laughter" and intimate memories of time spent together in the kitchen blend. One can almost see and touch the white tablecloth, the *haricots verts* and Mimi waiting expectingly.

For those of us who come from a Marxist tradition, it is so important to establish this connection with Rosa in time and space, bringing together past and present, and exploring across the terrain of history the conditions of possibility for political transformation even when it does not seem to be very close on the horizon. I look to Rosa for this inspiration, this desire for kinship with the whole universe, this capacity to listen to the fluttering of plants, birds and other species, including the human one, even when what she has to hear is at times brutally cruel. I admire in her this mix of determination and gentleness, which I believe is so necessary in the current "moment(s) of danger," as Walter Benjamin may have called the times we live in.

Yeye, this may disappoint you, but at home the person responsible for cooking every day is my partner Gustavo, who loves to cook. He comes from an Italian tradition and both his mother and grandmother were great *cocineras*. Of course, in my family there has been a lot of cooking as well. My grandmother, the fairy of sweets; my mother with her sophisticated and exquisite cuisine; my sister whose almond cake regularly produces expressions of collective delight; and even my sons and my granddaughter Amparo enjoy cooking. As I said, I do not frequently cook, but I enjoy making salads and I occasionally make sweets such as crystallized oranges or what we call *mermelada inglesa*, with lemons, oranges and apples harvested from our own garden. I also prepare quite a delicious pudding with lemon and poppy seeds, which I will make for you when you visit me one day.

My dear, you told me by mail that you and Pepe will soon be going on vacation. Please enjoy your holiday. I hope you will be able to rest, go for walks, breathe, sit in the sun or perhaps watch the rain slowly dripping down the beautiful and intense summer green.

Un abrazo apretado

avita | aiusta | abex ,

como me devian en la infancia

Para la proletaria su casa  
es el mundo entero.<sup>40</sup>



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<sup>40</sup> "For the proletarian woman, the whole world is her house." (Luxemburg 2004: 243)

July 3,  
Talpan, in the vicinity of the Ajusco mountain range, Mexico City

Our organizations, however,  
they prove themselves in struggle,  
they can only exist in struggle,  
and they only grow in struggle.

Rosa Luxemburg<sup>41</sup>

Entañable alita

How I love it that they call(ed) you “little wing” and that I too can call you this. It sounds so warm and affectionate, and it connects wonderfully with Rosa’s love for birds. It also alludes to the polysemy of the word “wings”, the essential physical element that makes them able to fly. As you know, we here in Mexico use the diminutive quite a lot, for cultural reasons that have survived both the *Conquista* – the Spanish colonization of the Americas – and these moments of danger Benjamin refers to. By way of example, in the Náhuatl language the suffix “*tzin*” denotes respect and affection at the same time and therefore approximately corresponds to the Mexican Spanish ending “*ita-ito*.”

What I also loved is that you called us Rosa’s unforeseen heiresses, which makes me think of the vines Rosa kept in her herbarium,<sup>42</sup> those incredible plants that move from the ground up, that grow everywhere, unexpectedly, often unnoticed, but so persistently and tenaciously!

Other than that, I want you to know that nothing you say disappoints me, *alita querida*. On the contrary, I consider it an expression of great honesty when you acknowledge your division of labour with Gustavo. Thanks also for telling me about some of the great *cocineras* in your family. On my side, I have been very lucky to get to know my two great-grandmothers Mariquita and Esperanza and my grandmother, *mi abuelita*, Mama Nane, all three of whom were very good cooks. And then there was my great-grandfather José, who used to keep goats and whom as I child I witnessed preparing their meat in various ways.

So just like John Berger (2015) gifted Rosa a collection of matchboxes containing coloured engravings of different songbirds, I have been thinking a little bit more about the dish in homage to her, and I finally dreamed up a recipe with a combination of different flavours from my homeland. Here it is:

Given Rosa’s connection to flowers, the main ingredient will be *cabuches*, which are the flowers of the Biznaga cactus. They usually bloom in our spring, i.e. in March/April, and the people who harvest them are the workers, both male and female, of the semi-desert. In fact, the *cabuches* are quite difficult to pick between the many thorns. The way we commonly eat them is as part of

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<sup>41</sup> Luxemburgo 1978: 491.

<sup>42</sup> Editor’s note: The Spanish word for heiresses, “*herederas*,” is very similar to the word for vine, “*enredadera*.”

different salads and, in our case, I suggest we accompany them with a *salsa de pitayas*, or pitaya sauce, made of what is known as dragon fruit in other parts of the world. What is special about pitayas is that their colours are red, like the cause Rosa fought for, and white, to symbolize her pronounced sense of pacifism. Besides, they usually have an amazingly shiny pink (in Spanish “*rosa*”) peel and they are, like her, firm and vigorous on the outside and sweet and tender on the inside. Additional ingredients could include black beans with *epazote*, a herb that will add special aroma and flavour, *aguacate* (avocado) and *nopalitos*, the stems of the prickly pear cactus, which we eat very frequently here in Mexico. Finally, I am thinking of adding *cabrito a las brasas*, or barbecued goat meat, a local delicacy from my home region. In fact, we have a popular saying that goes “*las cabras tiran pa'l monte,*” in the sense of goats being indomitable and often walking up the steepest paths, which for me links powerfully with the search and struggle for freedom of the fugitives from colonial slavery, the *cimarronaje*. To top it all off, we could finish our meal with your special dessert: lemon pudding with poppy seeds, which represents the rebellious joy Rosa so beautifully embodied. And that’s it. *Listo nuestro menú luxemburguiano!* Bon appétit!

Speaking of sustenance, how much has Rosita nourished us with her life force, in which the personal and the political are one total, feminine experience in permanent revolutionary passion. What she bequeathed us with in her life and letters is an irrevocable dignity with which to continue weaving with red thread – no longer of blood and sacrifice, but of struggle and commitment – our own his- and herstory.

So, considering what’s happening on a planetary level today, with the brutal violence of capital (extractive *and* criminal at the same time) bringing us ever closer to the abyss, it is now more essential than ever to redouble her prophetic “Socialism or Barbarism,” and to inculcate ourselves with this Luxemburgian passion for emancipatory transformation, because passion and commitment to the truth are not forms of indoctrination, but something that is shared with others and passed on. In this sense, I send you the following speech Rosa gave in October 1910, in the German city of Hagen, at the General Assembly of the Union of Metalworkers:

Party comrades! Each lockout is one new nail in the coffin of the capitalist order, because it’s precisely the lockout method currently preferred—which fails to conquer the proletariat—which provides the best proof that the current ordering of society is no longer possible, but has indeed become untenable, and that it has to make way for a new ordering. And is not every mass strike a step forward to overcoming this old order? Party comrades, the famous *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels concludes with the words: “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.” We will only be armed for the great battle – which we’ll have to fight in the coming period – when every proletarian organized in a union has understood that their vocation is in the Social Democratic party, when every socialist proletarian has understood that they have a duty to internalize socialist educational literature, and when every worker active in and organized through a union is simultaneously a steadfast warrior for socialist liberation, conscious of their goals. It is only under this battle cry



that we'll be able to prove victorious in the coming battles, when the last proletarian has understood that they have only their chains to lose, but a whole world to win.<sup>43</sup>

To conclude, I subscribe to the words of the Mexican-Ecuadorian critical thinker Bolívar Echeverría, who in the prologue to Rosa's Spanish-language *Selected Works* stressed that "after Marx and Engels, no one more than Rosa Luxemburg has managed to define the total character, that is to say, the unitarily objective and subjective character, of the revolutionary situation."<sup>44</sup>

Red Rosa was, is and will be like an ardent ember, and even though more than a century has passed since a group of vile men cut her life short, her political ideas continue to irradiate and illuminate us.

alita, let us not say good-bye, but rather see you very soon. We are here waiting for you with open arms and hearts.

y firmando como nuestra Rosita,  
tuja y de la causa socialista,  
ryy

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43 Editor's note: Translation by Henry Holland. The full translation of the entire article will be available in *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg, Volume 5* (Verso, forthcoming).

44 Echeverría in Luxemburgo 1978: 15.



**Receta-Homenaje a Rosa Luxemburgo**

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*Translation from the original Argentine and Mexican Spanish: Hjalmar Jorge Joffre-Eichhorn.*

y sonrío en la oscuridad a la vida  
como si supiera un secreto  
prodigioso que niega todo lo  
malvado, todo lo triste, y lo  
transforma en alegría y felicidad  
(...) creo que el secreto no es  
otra cosa que la vida misma <sup>45</sup>

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45 "And in the dark I smile at life, as if I knew some sort of magical secret that gives the lie to everything evil and sad and changes it into pure light and happiness. And all the while I'm searching within myself for some reason for this joy, I find nothing and must smile to myself again-and laugh at myself I believe that the secret is nothing other than life itself." (Luxemburg 2013b: 455)