

Rory Castle

‘You alone will make
our family’s name famous’

Rosa Luxemburg, Her Family and the Origins
of her Polish-Jewish Identity*

The article explores Rosa Luxemburg’s background, youth and family and their influence on her Polish and Jewish identities, as well as on her views on the Polish and Jewish Questions. It examines the views of Luxemburg’s father and grandfather, as well as other relatives, in order to understand the origins of her own ideas about Jewish assimilation, Polish nationalism and other subjects. Addressing the lack of scholarship on this subject by Luxemburg’s biographers, the article uses recent studies, newly available archival material and extensive interviews with members of the Luxemburg family to offer a new interpretation of the origins of Rosa Luxemburg’s Polish-Jewish identity.

Key Words: Rosa Luxemburg, Family, Jewish Identity, Polish Identity, Zamość, Warsaw

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In a recent review, a leading historian of Poland has argued that the letters of Rosa Luxemburg 'reveal that the argument about Polish independence was as much or more political, even personal, than it was economic and ideological'.¹ While Luxemburg is remembered in Germany and elsewhere for her contribution to Marxist thought and for her role in the failed Spartacist Rising of 1919, she is remembered by Poles primarily as a proto-Communist, whose stubborn opposition to Polish independence has earned her a reputation as a national traitor.² One obvious consequence of her unpopularity in Poland is that Luxemburg's work in the Polish socialist movement has received relatively little attention when compared to her work in Germany.³ A second consequence, which is the focus of this study, is that biographical studies of Luxemburg have paid little attention to her early life, family and continuing connections with Poland after her emigration in 1889, at the age of eighteen.

Rosa Luxemburg's background has always been obscure. She was herself extremely reluctant to discuss her childhood, family or personal life and fiercely protected her privacy. Only her family and a privileged few were able to penetrate her defences, and they were not always willing

1 Timothy Snyder, 'Love and Death: Review of *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*', in *The New Republic*, 9 June 2011. Note: Although there are several spellings of the surname, I have used 'Luxemburg' throughout except when quoting directly from a source. Rosa's family tended to use Luxenburg, but also Luksenburg and other spellings, depending on the time and place. Contrary to the claims of some biographers, Rosa's use of Luxemburg was not an attempt to Germanize her name. In fact, the family probably moved to Poland from Germany in the eighteenth century and used the 'ks' spelling when necessary because the Polish alphabet does not have a letter 'x'. Rosa's nephew Kazimierz struggled with the Lithuanian authorities to keep the Luxemburg spelling and questioned why his aunt's works were published in Poland under the name Luksemburg. See Holger Pollit, 'Pan Kazimierz aus Vilnius' ['Sir Kazimierz of Vilnius'] in *Des Blättchens* 12. Jahrgang, XII, Berlin, 28 September 2009, Heft 20. For the accusation of Germanization, see Elżbieta Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg; A Life* (London & New York: Pandora, 1988), 42.

2 The Communist authorities in Poland tended to blame Luxemburg's opposition to Polish statehood on her Jewishness. This view is criticised in A. Walicki, 'Rosa Luxemburg and the Question of Nationalism in Polish Marxism, 1893- 1914' in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 61, no. 4, October 1983, 571.

3 An exception to this is the work on Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches over several decades by Professor Feliks Tych, formerly of the Institute for Party History in Warsaw and now a scholar at Poland's Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH), who has edited collections of Luxemburg's works and letters.

or able to share this information after Luxemburg's murder at the hands of right-wing soldiers in January 1919. From the 1920s onwards, her biographers have only been able to provide a brief description of her childhood and family, or to indulge in speculation.

Rosa Luxemburg's family, who attended her funeral in Berlin in 1919, suffered because of her political activities, both during her lifetime and after her death.⁴ As a result, her siblings were careful about what information they shared and with whom. Her brother Józef acted as arbiter of the family history and spoke only to Luise Kautsky, a close friend of Rosa's who was well acquainted with her family.⁵ The Second World War brought tragedy and suffering to the Luxemburg family, as well as to many of Rosa's friends, including Kautsky.⁶ After 1945, most of Luxemburg's surviving relatives were living under Communist regimes in Poland or the Soviet Union, where interest in Rosa Luxemburg was not enco-

4 Rosa's brother Dr. Józef Luxemburg and his son Kazimierz attended the funeral. Her brother Maksymilian may also have attended. See interview with Kazimierz Luxemburg: Maja Narbutt, 'Jeszcze jedno życie Czerwonej Róży' in *Kurier Wileński [Vilnius Courier]*, 21 August 2009. The family suffered arrest, house searches and constant suspicion because of their association with Rosa. If anything, this increased after her death, when she became known worldwide.

5 Although Paul Frölich did speak to or possibly meet Józef, it was regarding his sister's literary estate and there is no evidence that they discussed anything else. See Paul Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1940) When Rosa was in prison in Warsaw in 1906, her family were in contact with Luise Kautsky and she probably met them in Berlin. After Rosa's murder, Kautsky interviewed her siblings for her biography and remained in contact with Józef until his death. See Luise Kautsky, *Rosa Luxemburg; Ein Gedenkbuch* (Berlin: E. Laubsche Verlagsbuchhandlung G. m. b. H, 1929) and Luise Kautsky, 'Introduction' to Rosa Luxemburg, Louis P. Lochner (trans.), *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky* (New York: Gordon Press, 1975).

6 Luise Kautsky (1864- 1944) died at Auschwitz. Many members of the Luxemburg family died in concentration camps or were executed as members of the Polish Resistance during the Nazi occupation. Her nephew Dr. Jerzy Luxemburg was executed by the Soviets in the Katyń Massacre in 1940 and after 1945 many members of the family were exiled to Siberia as members of the bourgeoisie. Rosa's great niece Irene Borde has said that 'the surname Luxemburg disadvantaged us in the Soviet Union' because of Rosa's anti-Soviet style Communism. For a report of the interview in English see 'J'lem woman could help solve Rosa Luxemburg mystery' in *Haaretz*, 20 July 2009 and for the original see Wendelin Gabrysch 'Mit einer Locke von Grossnichte Irene Borde (79): Wird das Rätsel um die Leiche von Rosa Luxemburg gelöst?' [With a lock of hair from her great-niece Irene Borde (79): is the mystery surrounding the corpse of Rosa Luxemburg solved?'] in *Bild am Sonntag*, 19 July 2009.

uraged and association with her name was dangerous.⁷ The result was a lack of understanding of Luxemburg's youth, background and family.

Since the 1980s, a resurgence of interest in Rosa Luxemburg in the West has been accompanied by new interpretations of many aspects of her thought, as well as new biographical information. So far however, only one study has produced significant research on Luxemburg's family.⁸ The image of Luxemburg's background and family put forward by previous biographers can now be challenged with newly available archival sources, with new secondary literature and, crucially, with the generous assistance of Rosa Luxemburg's surviving relatives. This allows for a more accurate picture of Rosa's family, in particular her father and grandfather, and for an exploration of how they helped to shape her identity and views.

Part One: Abraham

Rosa's grandfather Abraham Luxemburg was a successful businessman with transnational connections, a supporter of the Jewish Enlightenment and a great believer in education. Married three times and a father of ten children, Abraham is believed to have set the Luxemburgs on the road to assimilation, breaking with Orthodox Judaism in favour of modernity and reform.

Despite the Luxemburg family's strong association with Zamość it is not clear that Rosa's grandfather was actually born in the city. In fact, he probably moved there from Warsaw in 1828 when he married Rosa's grandmother, Chana (Anna) Szlam. Little is known about his parents

7 Elżbieta Ettinger interviewed Rosa's niece Halina Luxemburg-Więckowska in the late 1970s in Warsaw and Annelies Laschitza interviewed Rosa's nephew Kazimierz Luxemburg in the 1980s. Apart from this, there was no contact between biographers and the family after 1945. See Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg; A Life*, 274 and Annelies Laschitza, *In Lebensrausch, Trotz Alledem: Rosa Luxemburg; Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1996), 632.

8 The study is Jack Jacobs 'A Familial Resemblance: Rosa Luxemburg, Polish *Maskilim*, and the Origins of Her Perspective' in Jack Jacobs, *On Socialists and the Jewish Question After Marx* (New York: New York University, 1992) Prior to this, the last important contribution was Ettinger's *Rosa Luxemburg; A Life* (London: Harrap, 1979). The later paperback edition included an appendix with 29 letters from Rosa's father and siblings from the period 1897- 1901, which were preserved by Luxemburg's secretary Mathilde Jacob and are now held in the Hoover Institute on War, Revolution and Peace in California. See Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg; A Life* (London & New York: Pandora, 1988).

(Rosa's great-grandparents) Elisza (Elijah) and Szayndla Luxemburg, but the evidence suggests that they lived in Warsaw.⁹ In the 1820s, Warsaw was recovering from the partitions of Poland (1772, 1793 and 1795) and the Napoleonic Wars, which saw the city (and the rest of Poland) fought over and occupied by the French, Prussians, Austrians and Russians. After a brief resurrection of independence under the Duchy of Warsaw (1807- 15), the city, along with most of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, became part of the Russian Empire, in which it remained until 1918. Under Russian occupation, Polish Jews suffered greatly as a result of official anti-Semitism, which restricted their rights concerning trade, residency and education. Like Warsaw, the small city of Zamość fell under Russian control in 1809. The city, which was built and dominated by the powerful Zamoyski family, was known for its Renaissance architecture, important trade links and rich cultural life. As in the rest of Poland, the Jewish community in Zamość suffered under Russian rule, yet they were able to maintain and develop a thriving cultural and religious life, giving the city a disproportionately important role in Polish-Jewish culture.¹⁰

It was in this atmosphere of repression and resilience that Abraham Luxemburg built a successful timber business, based in Zamość and Warsaw but with links as far away as Danzig, Leipzig, Berlin and Hamburg.¹¹ From humble origins, he became wealthy and used his money to provide his sons with an education, sending them to commercial schools in Berlin and Bromberg (Bydgoszcz), across the border in the German Empire.¹² Business was not Abraham's only concern though and he played an active role in the developing *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) move-

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9 A 'Szendla Luxemburg' is listed as a silk dealer in Warsaw in 1826. See *Przewodnik Warszawski- Le Guide de Varsovie [Warsaw Directory]* (Warsaw: nakł. i drukiem N. Glücksberga, 1826) and Abraham's marriage certificate lists him as living in Warsaw.

10 Zamość's Jewish population was quite small, making its influence even more impressive. In 1827, there were just 2,874 Jews in the city, compared to 2,540 Christians (mostly Poles, but also Greeks and others). See 'The Jewish Population of Zamosc' in *The YIVO Encyclopaedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* at: <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Zamosc> Retrieved 09.07.12

11 See Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 14; Luise Kautsky, *Rosa Luxemburg; Ein Gedenkbuch*, 22- 23; Y. Zudiker [I. Tsudiker], 'The She-Eagle that Flew Out of Zamość' in M. W. Bernstein (ed.) and J. S. Berger (trans.), *Pinkas Zamosc- The Zamość memorial book: a memorial book of a center of Jewish life destroyed by the Nazis: published at the fifteenth anniversary (1942- 1957) after the first slaughter of the Jews of Zamość* (Mahwah, New Jersey, 2004), 255- 65.

12 Kautsky, *Rosa Luxemburg; Ein Gedenkbuch*, 22- 23.

ment in Zamość, supporting cultural, educational and charitable efforts. He was one of a circle of *Maskilim* (supporters of the *Haskalah*) in the city whose number included Yehoshua Margolis (1805- 77), Aleksander Tsederbaum (1816- 93), Aryeh Leib Kinderfreud (1798- 1837) and Solomon Ettinger (1802- 56). Ever since Israel ben Moses ha-Levi Zamość (c. 1700- 72), teacher of the great Moses Mendelsohn, had studied in the city, Zamość had gained a reputation as a centre of enlightened Jewish learning. By the 1830s, the city was entering its 'golden age of the *Haskalah*', with Abraham Luxemburg one of its avid supporters. In 1840, he was listed as a financial contributor to a *Maskilic* novel by Feivel Schiffer entitled *Hazrot ha-Shir [Courts of Song]*. Several sources from Zamość mention Abraham as a prominent figure in the city's *Maskilic* group. The Polish-Jewish historian Yaakov Shatzky wrote of Abraham in his work on the *Haskalah* in Zamość, describing him as 'a merchant who dealt in forest products, had 14 children' and was an 'enlightened' man 'who often appeared in the printed lists of exponents of the one-time Hebrew books of the *Haskala*'.¹³

While Abraham's involvement in Jewish life in Zamość is certain, his views on Polish nationalism are less clear. When the November Rising against Russian rule began in 1830, Abraham was a young newlywed with a pregnant wife. There is no documentation of his personal involvement in the events in Zamość, but it is clear that the city's *Maskilim*, with whom he was associated, supported the insurrection. The Rising became a full-scale war between the rebellious Poles and the Imperial Russian army and, as in other cities, the Jews in Zamość played an active role in the revolt by joining with the Christians to form a city guard.¹⁴ The *Maskilim* were particularly keen to demonstrate their assimilation and loyalty to Poland and Yehoshua Margolis, with whom Abraham was closely linked, joined the guard.¹⁵ Denied assistance from the west and vastly outnumbered, the Polish forces eventually succumbed to defeat in October 1831, after almost a year of heavy fighting. Like other Polish cities, Zamość was put under siege by the Russians and endured both hunger and a cholera epidemic

13 Shatzky included 'the Luxembourgs, (Mottel, Abraham & Edouard)' as among the leading *Maskilim* in Zamość. Mottel was a brother of either Abraham or Edward. Shatzky, 'The *Haskala* in Zamość' in *Pinkas Zamość*, 127 and Yaakov Shatzky, 'The Zamosc Against the Zamosc Jews in 1870 and Illuminations from the Memoirs of Peretz' in *Pinkas Zamość*, 115.

14 Shatzky notes that in Zamość, unlike in Warsaw, there was no question of whether or not Jews should be allowed to join the city guard. Shatzky, 'The *Haskala* in Zamość' in *Pinkas Zamość*, 120.

15 *Ibid.*, 128.

and, when the city finally surrendered, the wealthiest Jewish families (possibly including the Luxemburgs) fled to Warsaw to escape the inevitable pogrom. The Russians 'destroyed and laid to waste' the Jewish quarter and gravestones in the Jewish cemetery were pulled down by desperate Polish defenders.¹⁶ One small consolation for the Zamość Jews was that, unlike elsewhere, their Christian neighbours ignored the attempts of the Russians to incite them into anti-Semitic attacks.¹⁷

Whatever Abraham's personal role in the November Rising, it seems likely that he shared the views of Margolis and his fellow *Maskilim*. Many assimilated Jewish families were enthusiastic in their support for the Rising, out of a desire to demonstrate their loyalty to Poland and because of resentment of anti-Semitic Russian rule. Like other assimilated Jews, Abraham spoke both Polish and Yiddish, ensuring that his children did the same. The Polish language was crucial for assimilation and it was one of the fundamental aims of the *Haskalah* to teach Jews the language of their Christian neighbours.

In the relative calm following the 1830-31 Rising, Abraham and Chana Luxemburg raised eight children, including Rosa's father Edward (born in 1830), before Chana's premature death in 1848.¹⁸ Abraham then married for a second time to Amalia Lewinsztajn (Löwenstein), a daughter of the Rabbi of Meseritz (Międzyrzec Podlaski), with whom he had two children before she too died, in 1861. A year after Amalia's death, Abraham married her younger sister Golda Löwenstein and appears to have left Zamość. The wedding was held in Meseritz and Abraham sold his house in Zamość at 54 Ogrodowa Street (now 7a Tadeusza Kościuszki Street) to his son Edward in 1862.¹⁹ However, Golda died after just one year of marriage, widowing Abraham for a third time, and he probably spent the rest of his life in Warsaw. According to the family, he died in the 1870s or 1880s in Berlin.²⁰

Rosa's grandfather was a prominent figure in the Jewish community of Zamość, who used his business success to raise his family's status in

16 Aleksandr Tsederbaum, 'Article by Erez (Alexander Zederbaum) in *Kol Mevasser*, 1869, PP. 47, 48, & 50' in *Pinkas Zamość*, 131.

17 See Shatzky, 'The *Haskala* in Zamosc' in *Pinkas Zamość*, 120.

18 His children were Edward (Eliasz) (b. 1830), Leyba Ber (b. 1833), Max (Aron Mordko) (1836-1906), Maier (b. 1838), Tema (b. 1842), Leonora (Laja) (1842-70) and Juljan (Joel) (1844-1906).

19 See Ewa Lorentz, 'Dom Róży Luxemburg w Zamościu; Prawda i mit' ['Rosa Luxemburg's House in Zamosc: Truth and Myth'] in *Archiwum Zamojski*, 2003, 17-22.

20 Kautsky, *Rosa Luxemburg; Ein Gedenkbuch*, 22-23.

their society and to support the reform of Jewish religion and life. Breaking away from orthodox Jewish life, Abraham encouraged his children to consider themselves Poles, to use the Polish language and, in the phrase of his great-grandson, to ‘regard the achievements of Polish culture as their own’.²¹ Many of Luxemburg’s biographers have written that her grandfather’s assimilation meant that the family had ‘little or no part’ in Jewish life in Zamość.²² In fact, Abraham and his fellow assimilationists played an immensely important role in Jewish life in the city. Whilst standing apart from the orthodox, they united with them against the *Hasidim* and or in defence against anti-Semitism. Unlike in other places, the *Maskilim* in Zamość did not break away from mainstream Jewish life and continued to worship in the city’s only Synagogue and to use the study house and other communal facilities.²³ Abraham Luxemburg was a wealthy businessman and member of the *Haskalah* circle, but remained firmly part of the Jewish community. He was an important enough figure in the city for the famous Jewish writer and Zamośćer, Isaac Leib Peretz, to write of him in his memoirs as ‘one of the richest men in Zamość, highly assimilated and an “Enlightener”’.²⁴ Abraham’s ideas about assimilation and commitment to the Polish nation, language and culture were reflected in the lives of his son Edward and granddaughter Rosa Luxemburg.

Part Two: Edward

Rosa’s father Edward Luxemburg was born in Zamość on 17 December 1830, two months in to the November Rising. His parents Abraham and Chana gave him the Polish name Edward and the Hebrew name Elisha (Elijah) after his grandfather, which he later altered to Elias.²⁵

21 Kazimierz Luxemburg, ‘biographical sketch of Jerzy Edward Luxemburg’ (unpublished), translated by Mrs. Olga Dyer.

22 J. P. Nettel, *Rosa Luxemburg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), vol. 1, 51- 52.

23 Shatzky, ‘The *Haskala* in Zamość’, in *Pinkas Zamość*, 123.

24 Isaac Leib Peretz (1852 Zamość – 1915 Warsaw) is considered one of the greatest Yiddish writers. Although a *Maskil*, Peretz had great respect for all Jews, including *Hasidim* and was an incredibly popular writer during his lifetime. See I. L. Peretz, ‘My Memoirs’ cited in Paul Kreingold, ‘I. L. Peretz, Father of the Yiddish Renaissance’ in *Fidelio*, vol. XII, no. 2, Summer 2003.

25 Although Rosa’s father is generally referred to as Elias in secondary literature, I have used Edward. This is based on the belief that this was the name

As described above, Edward was raised in an enlightened home, in which the family spoke both Polish and Yiddish. He was the eldest of ten (including two half-siblings) and the heir to the family timber business. Thanks to his father's commercial success, Edward was able to receive a good education at schools in Bromberg and Berlin, and it is likely that he was in Germany at the time of the 1848 Revolutions. His mother Chana (Anna) died when Edward was eighteen and it was through his step-mother Amalia that Edward met his future wife, her younger sister Lina Löwenstein. Lina and Amalia were the daughters of the Rabbi of Meseritz, Isaac Oser Löwenstein and their brother was the reform Rabbi of Lemberg (Lwow) Bernhard Löwenstein (1821- 89).²⁶ Edward and Lina married around 1853 and lived in Zamość, where Edward worked with his father.

Rosa Luxemburg's biographers have asserted that her family had 'no connections with the Jewish community' in Zamość because of their supposed assimilation.²⁷ It has been claimed that Edward 'did not have any special relationship to his Jewishness' or to Jews, took 'little or no part' in the Jewish community and 'did not lead a consciously Jewish life'.²⁸ Edward was in fact, just like his father, a leading member of the

commonly used by Edward himself as well as by his relatives. It is the name on his gravestone, the name used on official and commercial documents and the name given by his children on official documents, both during his lifetime and later. His name is Edward in the Okhrana report filed after Rosa's arrest in Warsaw during the 1905 Revolution. See Nettel, vol. 1, 52, footnote 2. His gravestone list Edward as dying at the age of 72, which would have made his birth year 1828. The official birth record however gives his birth year as 1830. We know Elias's birthday from one of Rosa Luxemburg's letters. Rosa Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches, 22 December 1898. Rosa Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Briefe*, Band 1 ([East] Berlin: Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, Dietz Verlag, 1982), 233.

26 Although Luise Kautsky mentioned that Lina's brother Bernhard was a Rabbi in her *Gedenkbuch*, later biographers did not conduct much research on him. Nettel wrote merely that '[Lina's] brother was said to have been a Rabbi' Nettel, *Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. 1, 53. Later, Ettinger wrote that 'as adults the brother and sister [Bernard and Lina] maintained no contact, perhaps an indication that Lina's family disapproved of her marriage outside the Orthodox faith.' See Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg; A Life* (1987), 5. In fact, Bernhard Löwenstein was a well-known reform Rabbi and leader of the Lemberg community. He and Rosa's mother remained in contact and there was no break from her family.

27 Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg; A Life*, 1.

28 'Rosa Luxembourg's father, Edouard Luxembourg, was an enlightened, assimilated Jew who did not have any special relationship to his Jewishness.' The family were 'assimilated... and at most, they thought of themselves as 'Poles of the Mosaic faith' because 'they 'did not have any relationship to Jews, despite the fact

reformist Jewish community in the city. He was religious and raised his family to be so. An indication of the family's views is that Edward studied at the Warsaw Rabbinical School, which was established by *Maskilim* to provide Jewish boys with a secular, modern education.²⁹ A modern historian describes the school as 'committed to breaking down the barriers of Poles and Jews' and rejecting 'the notion that Jewry was a nation'. Its staff and students 'had strong emotional ties to the Polish language, and disdained both the Yiddish language and East European Jewish manne-risms'. This description fits not only Edward Luxemburg, but also his father Abraham, who sent him to the school, and his daughter Rosa.³⁰

The education which Edward received in Warsaw echoed his father's beliefs and values, and Edward in turn passed these down to his own children; Anna (Chana) (1854-1925), Mikolaj (Nathan) (7.7.1855-23.3.1940), Maksymilian (7.4.1860-5.4.1943), Józef (29.10.1866-3.6.1934), and Rozalia (5.3.1871-15.1.1919). Following in his father's footsteps, Edward engaged in cultural and educational work, particularly in attempts to provide Polish-language education to Jewish children and to reform aspects of Jewish religion, traditions and customs. During the 1850s and 1860s, the *Haskalah* continued to thrive in Zamość, which remained its second most important centre in Poland, after Warsaw. Families like the Luxemburgs and Margolises considered themselves 'enlightened', spoke Polish and German as well as Yiddish and had con-

that they came from such a genuinely Jewish ambience' Tsudiker, 'The She-Eagle that Flew Out of Zamość' in *Pinkas Zamość*, 255-64; 'the Luxemburg family had little or no part in this [Jewish] life. They had already become assimilated in the time of Rosa's grandfather' and 'did not lead a consciously Jewish life' Nettel, *Rosa Luxemburg*, vol 1, 51. The views expressed by Luxemburg's biographers are echoed in shorter studies. For example, 'Her family exemplified the cosmopolitan cultured attitudes of 'enlightened' Jewry; they had no ties to the strong and cultured Jewish community' S.E. Bronner, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Revolutionary for our Times* (London: Pluto Press, 1981), 13 and they 'took no active interest in Jewish affairs' Robert Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg, Polish Socialism, and the Bund' in Robert Wistrich, *Laboratory for World Destruction: Germans and Jews in Central Europe* (USA: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 99.

29 Edward Luksemburg is listed as a former student in Jakob R. 'Synagogi postępowe w Warszawie. (Z Moich wspomnień).' In *Izraelita* (1906), 74, whilst another list has an 'Eliasz Luxemburg' but not Edward. It seems highly likely both sources refer to Rosa Luxemburg's father. See Jacobs, *A Familial Resemblance*, 198, 72-73. Tsudiker also writes that Rosa's father studied at the 'Teacher's Seminary in Warsaw'. Tsudiker, 'The She-Eagle that Flew Out of Zamość' in *Pinkas Zamość*, 257.

30 Regarding Judaism, they 'continued to accept certain Jewish religious tenets as valid, but they believed that Jews ought to practice a modernized form of the Jewish religion.' Jacobs, *A Familial Resemblance*, 72.

tacts with like-minded people around Poland, and in Austria and Germany. In Zamość, the reformers prayed alongside the orthodox in the Synagogue and studied with them in the study house, although the latter referred to them somewhat disparagingly as ‘Germans’.³¹

Edward supported the establishment of the Polish-Jewish newspaper *Jutrzenka* (*Morning Star*) in 1860, which dealt with ‘local issues, but also questions of Jewish education, economics and general reforms in Jewish life’.³² It was the organ of the Polish *Maskilim*, supported by the leading figures of the movement in both Warsaw and Zamość, including Yehoshua Margolis, Ephraim Fischelsohn, Josef Altberg and Y. Korngold. The paper’s editor, Daniel Neufeld (1814- 74), had to carefully navigate Tsarist censorship.³³ In 1861, Edward was listed in *Jutrzenka* alongside two other prominent Jews for his charitable efforts:

‘[T]his year, when news came about the expenditure on the part of the Warsaw (Jewish) residents of the amount of 9,200 gulden for Christians, the gentlemen: Y. Korngold, Max Kinderfreud and E. Luxembourg collected several hundred gulden in a matter of a few hours from the local (Jewish) residents, and distributed it among the needy Christians.’³⁴

Although usually described as a timber merchant, Edward Luxembourg is recorded in 1862 as a ‘provider of military supplies’ and ‘trader’ with business interests in both Zamość and Warsaw.³⁵ It was through this apparently new line of trade that Edward seems to have made a contribution to the January Rising of 1863 against Russian rule. According to Rosa’s nephew, Edward was ‘asked by Count Zamoyski to take part in the preparation of the insurrection of 1863 against the Polish occupants (Austria, Germany and Russia) by transporting weapons for the insurrection from Sweden to one of the ports in Lithuania’.³⁶ The circle of *Maskilim* who Edward was close to had been

31 See Shatzky, ‘The *Haskala* in Zamość’ in *Pinkas Zamość*, 121; Extract from Erez (Alexander Zederbaum) in *Kol Mevasser* (1869) in *Pinkas Zamość*, 131 and Y. Altberg, ‘The History of the Jewish Community of Zamość’ in *Jutrzenka*, no. 20 (Warsaw, 15 November 1861) in *Pinkas Zamość*, 165.

32 Shatzky, ‘The *Haskala* in Zamość’, in *Pinkas Zamosc*, 121.

33 *Ibid.*, 121.

34 *Ibid.*, 121 and Y. Altberg, ‘The History of the Jewish Community of Zamość’ in *Jutrzenka*, no. 20 (Warsaw, 15 November 1861) in *Pinkas Zamość*, 168.

35 See Lorentz, ‘Dom Róży Luxemburg w Zamościu; Prawda I mit’, 2003, 17-22.

36 Kazimierz Luxembourg, ‘biographical sketch of Jerzy Edward Luxembourg’ and Narbutt, ‘Jeszcze jedno życie Czerwonej Róży’, 21 August 2009.

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asserting their Polish-Jewish identity in *Jutrzenka* and saw the January Rising as a golden opportunity, both to demonstrate their loyalty to Poland and to throw off the repressive Tsarist regime and its accompanying anti-Semitic restrictions.

The traditional view of the January Rising as a time when both Christians and Jews in Poland came together is borne out by events in Zamość. One source describes how the Luxemburg family organised the collection of money for the Christian poor at the time of the Rising, whilst Yehoshua Margolis and Josef Altberg, 'took part in the Jewish delegation that went to a Polish patriotic demonstration' in 'a demonstration of brotherhood'.³⁷ I. L. Peretz, then a boy of eleven, described how the Jews of Zamość (and not only the *Maskilim*) considered themselves 'ardent Poles' and that during the Rising 'recited verses from the Psalms for the success of the Second Revolution'.³⁸

As in 1830, the superior might of the Russian army overwhelmed the Poles and their defeat brought repression involving not only the destruction of the last remnants of Polish autonomy and imposition of Russification policies, but the arrest, deportation and exile of tens of thousands of Poles. In Zamość, the city's fortress was turned into a political prison, with the Jews organising a committee to help the prisoners. *Jutrzenka* was banned and its editor Daniel Neufeld sent to Siberia.³⁹ One of Yehoshua Margolis's sons, who played a role in the Rising, 'vanished immediately after the 1863 rebellion'.⁴⁰ Like Neufeld, Margolis and countless others, Rosa's father was a target of the Tsarist police and was forced into hiding, leaving Zamość for Warsaw. His wife Lina and three children Anna, Mikolaj and Maksymilian, remained behind and their father was apparently unable to return to them until 1867 or 1868.⁴¹ It is likely that this, more than the reasons usually given by Luxemburg's biographers, was a primary reason for the family's move to Warsaw in 1873.⁴²

37 Shatzky, 'The *Haskala* in Zamość' in *Pinkas Zamość*, 128.

38 I. L. Peretz, quoted in Shatzky, 'The *Haskala* in Zamość' in *Pinkas Zamość*, 121-22.

39 Yaakov Shatzky 'Zamość Nearly a Century Ago (Two Documents)' in *Pinkas Zamosc*, 163.

40 Shatzky, 'The *Haskala* in Zamość' in *Pinkas Zamość*, 127.

41 Apparently he was only able to return after an amnesty. Personal conversation with Ms. Marie-Louise Luxemburg, 2012. See also Kazimierz Luxemburg, 'biographical sketch of Jerzy Edward Luxemburg' and Narbutt, 'Jeszcze jedno życie Czerwonej Róży'.

42 This view is expressed in Kazimierz Luxemburg, 'biographical sketch of Jerzy Edward Luxemburg' and Narbutt, 'Jeszcze jedno życie Czerwonej Róży'.

After the Rising, various Warsaw directories show that Edward owned or rented many properties in the city, most of which were on or around Grzybowska Street in the Jewish quarter. Business was not good for Edward in the late 1860s and 1870s and he moved premises frequently. He was at 151 Świętojerska Street and 45 Grzybowska Street in 1869, then at 4 Graniczna Street and as a 'trader' at 6 Twarda Street in 1870.⁴³ That year, Edward sold the family home at 45 Ogrodowa Street in Zamość (today 7a Tadeusza Kościuszki Street), keeping on a small apartment within the house where Lina gave birth to Rosa the following year and remained until 1873, when they joined Edward at 16 Złota Street in Warsaw, near to his commercial properties.⁴⁴ In 1876, Edward is listed at 25 Grzybowska Street and later, in 1885, at 4 and 11 Graniczna Street.⁴⁵ He was active in the Jewish Salesmen's Mutual Aid Association and was made an honorary member in 1876, his name appearing in its reports until 1889.⁴⁶

Edward Luxemburg was an educated, enlightened Polish-Jewish businessman. He evidently considered himself a Polish patriot and suffered in service of the cause of Polish independence. His main focus however appears to have been the education and assimilation of Polish Jews. He saw the future of Polish Jewry in integration into Polish national culture, including the adoption of the Polish language and the reform of Jewish religion and customs. However, this in no way meant a lack of sympathy for his fellow Jews or a lack of Jewish identity. In 1870, Edward Luxemburg and his brother-in-law Rabbi Bernhard Löwenstein played a key role in the rescue of several Jewish men from Zamość at risk of execution during the Zamość Libel Affair.⁴⁷

Sharing his father's views, Edward Luxemburg endeavoured above all to provide his children with the best possible education and to raise their aspirations. This ambition, combined with the decline of Zamość's

43 *Taryfa Domow Miasta Warszawzy I Przedmieścia Pragi [Warsaw and Praga Homeowner's Directory]* (Warszawa: W Drukarni Józefa Ungra, 1869) and *Przewodnik warszawski informacyjno-adresowy [Warsaw Address Directory]* (Warszawa, 1870).

44 See Ewa Lorentz, 'Dom Róży Luxemburg w Zamościu; Prawda I mit', 17- 22.

45 *Kalendarz Warszawski [Warsaw Calendar]* (Warszawa: W Drukarni Józefa Ungra, 1876) and *Kalendarz Warszawski [Warsaw Calendar]* (Warszawa: W Drukarni Józefa Ungra, 1885).

46 *Sprawozdanie Zarządu Stowarzyszenia Wzajemnej Pomocy Subiektów Handlowych Wyznania Mojżeszowego w Warszawie [Warsaw Jewish Salesmen's Mutual Aid Association Report]* (Warszawa: w drukarni S. Orgelbranda Synów) for the years 1876, 1878-1883 and 1886-1889.

47 See Yaakov Shatzky, 'The Libel Against the Zamosc Jews in 1870 and Illuminations from the Memoirs of Peretz' in *Pinkas Zamość*, 114- 15.

cultural and economic life and the threat of retribution for his role in the January Rising, persuaded him to move his family to Warsaw in 1873. His involvement in Jewish life, views on assimilation and participation in the 1863 Rising have not previously been understood by biographers of Rosa Luxemburg who, as a consequence, have only been able to present a limited view of her background and the origins of her identity as both a Jew and a Pole.

Part Three: Rosa

Rozalia Luxemburg was born on 5 March 1871 at 45 Ogrodowa Street (now 7a Kosciuzkó Street), Zamość.⁴⁸ As we have seen, her family was prominent among the enlightened, assimilated, reform Jewish community in the city. After their move to Warsaw in 1873, Rosa, the youngest child, enjoyed the attention of her parents and four siblings, Anna, Mikołaj, Maksymilian and Józef, especially after a hip problem confined her to bed for a year and gave her a permanent limp, which she tried hard to conceal in her adult life. Rosa exhibited intelligence and a natural spark early on, writing letters to her family and impressing her relatives with recitals of the poetry, including the Polish classic *Pan Tadeusz*.⁴⁹

Rosa's relationships with her parents and siblings have not been explored in depth by biographers. After she left Warsaw in 1889, it has often been assumed that Rosa's contact with her family was minimal. In particular, the letters from her father to Rosa during the last months of his life have often been cited to show her lack of concern for her family and prioritisation of 'the Cause'. Although Rosa was not at her parents' bedsides when they died, it was something she regretted bitterly for the rest of her life.⁵⁰ She did not sever ties with her siblings and in

Rosa exhibited intelligence and a natural spark early on, writing letters to her family and impressing her relatives with recitals of the poetry, including the Polish classic *Pan Tadeusz*.

48 Previously, it was believed that Rosa Luxemburg was born at 37 Staszica Street, Zamość, where a plaque stating this exists. However, a recent study has demonstrated that this is incorrect. See Lorentz, 'Dom Róży Luxemburg w Zamościu; Prawda I mit', 17- 22.

49 See Narbutt, 'Jeszcze jedno życie Czerwonej Róży'.

50 She wrote to her friend Hans Diefenbach, whose father was dying, in 1917: 'Later, one always blames oneself bitterly for every hour which one took away from the old people. I wasn't lucky enough even to have done as little as that. After all, I constantly had to look after the urgent business of humanity and make the world a happier place...In the meantime, the old gentleman wasn't able to wait any longer. Probably he said to himself that there would be no sense anyway in waiting, however long he waited; after all, I never did "have time" for

fact saw them regularly, whether in Berlin, London or in the spa towns of Prussian Poland. Many of her relatives spent time living in Berlin and she had many opportunities to meet with them whilst travelling Europe for meetings of the Socialist International and its bureau.

Although they did not share her political views, Rosa's siblings did everything possible to assist her when she was in trouble. When she was imprisoned in Zwickau-Berlin Prison in 1904 they visited and arranged her food.⁵¹ When she was arrested in Warsaw during the 1905 Revolution they worked tirelessly to secure her release and prevent exile to Siberia (Jogiches's fate, although he managed to escape) or worse, and paid a large sum to secure her release, without Rosa's knowledge and against her wishes.⁵² Later, during the war, when she was in prison in Breslau (Wrocław) and Wronke in Prussian Poland, her family sent supplies and messages through her secretary Mathilde Jacob.

Edward and Lina wanted their children to achieve great things and used all of their means to achieve this. The older boys, Mikolaj and Maksymilian, followed their father into business, while Anna spent the first forty years of her life caring for her siblings and parents, only marrying in her fifties. The younger children, benefiting from their family's improved financial situation, were more fortunate. Both Józef and Rosa left Poland to study at Zurich University. Józef studied medicine and became a world-renowned expert on contagious diseases and occupational health.⁵³ Rosa followed him there, but did not go with the intention of becoming a Marxist theoretician. At first, she studied zoology, only later switching to economics, philosophy and law.⁵⁴ To her parents, who were aware of her intellect and great potential, Rosa

him or myself- and he died... Now, of course, I would be much wiser, but one is usually wiser after it's too late. Anyway, if you possibly can, go to your old man and stay with him to the end.' Rosa Luxemburg to Hans Diefenbach, 27 August 1917 in S.E. Bronner, *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg* (USA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 227-28.

51 See Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Life* (1988), 117.

52 2,000 rubles were paid to 'bribe the guard' and 3,000 rubles for bail. The money was paid by Maksymilian Luxemburg, although it was probably supplied by the leadership of the SPD. Rosa was released at the end of June 1906 and left Warsaw for the last time on 31 July. See Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Life* (1988), 136-37.

53 Dr. Józef Luxenburg worked for the Polish Ministry of Health after 1918 and was a health expert at the League of Nations. A plaque in Warsaw commemorates his achievements. See Kazimierz Luxemburg, 'biographical sketch of Józef Luxemburg' (unpublished), translated from the Russian by Mrs Olga Dyer.

54 See Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Life* (1988), 43.

was the great star of the family who, in the words of her mother ‘will make our family’s name famous’.⁵⁵ They revelled in her triumphs, when Rosa was awarded her doctorate Lina ‘both laughed and wept’ wrote Anna, ‘refusing to part with your letter for a single moment, eager for the whole world to know how happy and proud she was’.⁵⁶ Yet her parents’ immense pride in her achievements was tinged with sadness that Rosa was so far away and, immersed in politics, did not have the time to dote on them like their other daughter. Edward wrote to Rosa in April 1900 that his only hope was that both she and Anna would marry before his death.⁵⁷ When he received no reply, he wrote again nine days later, that her attitude ‘reminds me of something I once read. An eagle soars so high that he loses all sight of the earth below. You are so busy with social causes that family affairs are not worth even a thought of yours’.⁵⁸ Whilst this letter clearly expressed the disappointment of an elderly, dying man, it ought not be used to argue that Rosa had no time for her family. In fact, it was not his ‘last letter’ and they continued to write to each other over the next five months until his death in September.⁵⁹ Rosa and her father had a close relationship and he devoted his life to supporting and encouraging her and her siblings. Many of Edward’s beliefs, values and attitudes were passed on to his daughter.

A Free Poland? Rosa Luxemburg and Polish Nationalism

One of the generation of Poles who grew up after the failure of the 1863 Rising, Rosa Luxemburg strongly believed that another insurrection against Russian rule would also be ‘bloodily suppressed’.⁶⁰ Yet, as she

55 Anna Luksenburg to Rosa Luxemburg, undated [after 30 September 1897], in ‘Appendix’ to Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Life* (1988), 307.

56 Anna Luksenburg to Rosa Luxemburg, 4 May [18]97, in ‘Appendix’ to Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Life* (1988), 291.

57 Edward Luxemburg to Rosa Luxemburg, 11 April [1]900, in ‘Appendix’ to Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Life* (1988), 321.

58 Edward Luxemburg to Rosa Luxemburg, 20 April [1]900 in ‘Appendix’ to Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Life* (1988), 323.

59 See letters from Rosa Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches, May, 18 May, early June, 18 June, 7 July, 11 July, 26 July and c. 9 August, 1900 in Rosa Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Briefe*, Band I ([East] Berlin: Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, Dietz Verlag, 1982), 473- 99.

60 R. Luxemburg, ‘The Polish Question at the International Congress’ in Davis (ed.), *The National Question*, 55.

wrote in an article for the 1896 International Socialist Congress in London, ‘if no rebellion is attempted, nothing at all can be done, since armed rebellion is the only way that Polish independence can be achieved’.⁶¹ Luxemburg’s conclusion was that the struggle for the restoration of the Polish state must be abandoned, and her opposition to the struggle for Polish independence was based on this belief which, as we have seen above, was almost certainly influenced by her own father’s role in 1863. Luxemburg argued that those who called for another rising were ‘utopians’ whose plans contradicted ‘any effective political struggle’.⁶² The repeated failure of the risings against Russia had demonstrated that the Poles had little to gain from armed struggle for national independence.⁶³ It was in this context, that she opposed the proposal put forward by the Foreign Union of Polish Socialists (part of the Polish Socialist Party- PPS) at the 1896 Congress, which called for the Socialist International to declare its support for Polish independence.⁶⁴

The PPS argued their case on both moral and practical grounds. Their proposal declared that ‘the subjugation of one nation by another can serve only the interests of capitalists and despots’ whilst also appealing to the delegates’ hostility to Tsarism by arguing that ‘Russian Tsardom... owes its internal strength and its external significance to the subjugation and partition of Poland’.⁶⁵ The downfall of the Tsarist regime was thus in the interests of all socialists, who remembered only too well the role Russia had played in the crushing of the 1848 Revolutions in Europe.

Rosa Luxemburg and her group denounced the PPS’s proposal as a naïve folly which would lead to bloodshed, damage the integrity of the International and encourage nationalism rather than the international solidarity which was preached by Marxists. Instead, she called for Polish workers to cooperate with the other nationalities in their respective empires; Austrians, Germans and Russians, towards the goal of

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61 *Ibid.*, 55.

62 *Ibid.*, 56.

63 The fullest expression of Luxemburg’s views on the Polish question is in her doctoral dissertation, Rosa Luxemburg, Tessa DeCarlo (trans.), *The Industrial Development of Poland* (New York: Campaigner Publications, 1977) Originally published as Rosa Luxemburg, *Die Industrielle Entwicklung Polens* Leipzig: Dunccker & Humblot, 1898).

64 For the PPS proposal and Luxemburg’s objections, see Timothy Snyder, *Nationalism, Marxism, and Modern Central Europe: A Biography of Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), chapter 2.

65 *Ibid.*, 50.

socialism. The London Congress came out in support for neither side, preferring a middle-way resolution, which affirmed the right to self-determination but did not mention Poland specifically.⁶⁶ It was typical of the debates which raged between Polish socialists, between the nationalists, led by Józef Piłsudski and Ignacy Daszyński, and internationalists, led by Luxemburg and Jogiches. Living in exile in the West, the Poles largely fought their battles in congresses of the International and only later, after 1905, in Poland itself.

Her views on Polish independence have tended to be considered in a somewhat sterile, academic setting, without taking into account or understanding Luxemburg's background. As a young girl Rosa Luxemburg would impress her family with recitals of Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*.⁶⁷ As we now know, her grandfather was a supporter of assimilation and Polish culture, while her father was active in the 1863 Rising. So how was it that by the age of eighteen, when she left for Zurich, Luxemburg had resolutely decided to oppose any struggle for independence, and refused to alter her views for anything, even after Polish independence was actually achieved in November 1918?

Luxemburg gave several reasons for her opposition to the struggle for Polish independence. She believed that, as in 1830 and 1863, national risings were doomed to fail and furthermore now had the support of only the lower-middle classes. Crucially, she argued consistently that the three areas of Poland had been integrated into the economies of the occupying empires and that any attempt to reverse this would stunt the growth of capitalism in Poland (and thus delay the eventual arrival of socialism). The PPS's attempts to create a united organisation across the three regions were described as an 'attempt... to impose on Polish socialism a program for the restoration of Poland' along 'nationalist lines', which was utterly 'utopian.' Luxemburg warned that the result would not be national liberation but the 'disintegration' of the socialist movement in Poland 'through a series of fruitless national struggles'.⁶⁸ National risings were a thing of the past and the future lay in the movement of the international working class. This belief was strengthened by the 1905 Revolution, which Luxemburg saw as the united action of the

66 A. Walicki, 'Rosa Luxemburg and the Question of Nationalism in Polish Marxism, 1893- 1914' in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 61, no. 4, October 1983, 567, footnote 9.

67 See Narbutt, 'Jeszcze jedno życie Czerwonej Róży'.

68 Luxemburg, 'The Polish Question at the International Congress' in Davis (ed.), *The National Question*, 56.

various nationalities of the Russian Empire (including Poles) against the Tsarist regime, downplaying nationalist motivations and attacking the activities of Piłsudski and other social-patriots.⁶⁹

As late as May 1917, Luxemburg refused to recognise the potential for Polish independence and the benefits it could bring for Polish workers. From her cell in Wronke Fortress in Prussian Poland, she wrote that the German occupation of ‘unfortunate “independent Poland”’ since 1916 was a ‘heavy blow’ against the Russian Revolution, which had occurred three months earlier. The proposed Kingdom of Poland, under German control and occupation, represented nothing but the transformation of Poland socially into a ‘graveyard’ and politically into a ‘German barracks’. Luxemburg described Poland as ‘one of the most explosive centres of the revolutionary movement’ which ‘in 1905 marched at the head of the Russian Revolution’ and undoubtedly saw the future of the Poles in a democratic, socialist federation with the other nationalities of the former Russian Empire.⁷⁰

Her opposition to the struggle for an independent Polish state was not accompanied by hostility towards Polish culture and language. On the contrary, Luxemburg identified herself firmly with both, in a way she never did with Jewish or German culture. While Poland was under foreign occupation (which it was for all but two months of her life), Luxemburg fought against all attempts at Russification and Germanisation. Both the Russian and German Empires sought, through various methods, to assimilate the Poles under their control by demeaning or destroying Polish language and culture. Although notorious in Russian Poland, these policies were also carried out in the German zone, applied through the law, the press and particularly through education.

69 Piłsudski and others attempted to transform the 1905 Revolution into a national uprising. Piłsudski tried to acquire weapons from the Japanese and train armed groups. The PPS split between Piłsudski’s nationalist faction (PPS-Revolutionary Faction) and the PPS-Left, which later joined with the SDKPiL to form the Communist Party of Poland (KPP). The leadership of the Communist Party was wiped out in the 1937- 1938 Purges and the Comintern officially dissolved the Party in 1938. The Polish Workers Party (and later Polish United Workers’ Party), which ruled Poland until 1989, was not the same organisation. See also Jie-Hyun Lim, ‘Rosa Luxemburg on the Dialectics of Proletarian Internationalism and Social Patriotism’ in *Science & Society*, vol. 59, no.4 (Winter, 1995-1996), 498-530.

70 Rosa Luxemburg, ‘The Old Mole’ in *Spartakusbriefe*, no. 5 (May 1917) in Rosa Luxemburg, Robert Looker (ed.), W.D. Graf (trans.), *Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings* (USA: Random House, 1972) at the Marxists Internet Archive: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1917/04/oldmole.htm> Retrieved 01.07.2012.

In 1900, after the latest attempt to reduce the status of the Polish language, Luxemburg penned an article entitled 'In Defence of Nationality' in which she set out her views.⁷¹ She argued that Germanisation meant that 'Poles are meant to forget that they were born Polish, and to transform themselves into Germans!' and attacked both the German government and the liberal opposition for failing to defend the Poles. Her call for 'the Polish people to shake off their apathy, give full reign to their fury, and go into battle against Germanisation... [in order] to defend our Polish identity' led to court proceedings against her.⁷² Although Luxemburg called for Polish workers to vote for the SPD, which was publicly opposed to Germanisation, she experienced equally bigoted attitudes within the party itself. Upon her arrival in 1898, she was told that 'one cannot do the Polish workers a greater favour than to Germanize them, but one may not say this publicly'.⁷³ Naturally, Luxemburg objected to these sentiments in private, but they were shared by many German socialists and she was either unwilling or felt unable to publicly criticise anti-Polish sentiments within the SPD.

Luxemburg recognised that people were driven not solely by material improvements and indeed saw socialism as something much greater than this. In another article, she wrote that "[t]he cause of nationalism in Poland is not alien to the working class- nor can it be' because they 'cannot be indifferent to the most intolerably barbaric oppression... against the spiritual culture of society'. 'To the credit of mankind' she wrote, 'history has universally established that even the most inhumane *materiel* oppression is not able to provoke such a wrathful, fanatical rebellion and rage as the suppression of spiritual life in general, that is as religious or national oppression'.⁷⁴

71 Rosa Luxemburg, Cecily Hastings (trans.), 'In Defence of Nationality' in *Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political and Literary Writings in Revolutionary History*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Pontypool, United Kingdom: Merlin Press, 2009), 33- 47. In 1900, the Prussian Minister of Education announced that the Polish language was banned for use in religious education. This was the last area of Polish-medium education in Prussian Poland. Luxemburg's article was originally published as *W obronie narodowości* (Poznań, 1900).

72 See Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 76 and Rosa Luxemburg, 'In Defence of Nationality' in *Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political and Literary Writings*, 34- 35.

73 Rosa Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches, 25 May 1898 in Georg Adler, Peter Hudis and Annelies Laschitzka (eds.), Georg Schriver (trans.), *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg* (London & New York: Verso, 2012), 52'.

74 Quoted in Walicki, 'Rosa Luxemburg and the Question of Nationalism in Polish Marxism, 1893- 1914', 565- 82.

The apparent contradiction between Luxemburg's strong opposition to Polish independence and her equally strong support for Polish culture and language can only be explained by the sharp distinction which she drew between the two. This was between 'nationalities', which had every right to exist with their language and culture, and 'nations', which had no such 'rights' to independent statehood.⁷⁵ Like Marx and Engels, Luxemburg considered the Poles, like the Germans and Russians to be 'historic' nationalities with the right to exist and to enjoy their own culture and language. These were contrasted with smaller, 'unhistorical' nations, including the Ukrainians, Baltic peoples, Czechs and, as we will see later, the Jews.⁷⁶ Where Luxemburg differed with the founders of Marxism was on the question of Polish independent statehood. Both Marx and Engels argued in favour of Polish independence, primarily as a bulwark against Tsarist autocracy. Luxemburg, of course, openly and passionately disagreed.

While Rosa Luxemburg may be criticised for her opposition to Polish independence, she ought not be viewed as someone who 'felt no special attachment to her native Poland'.⁷⁷ She strongly identified as a Pole and loved her native language and people, writing about them in a way in which she never spoke of Jews or Germans.⁷⁸ She defended herself and the SDKPiL against charges of a lack of patriotism and she saw the long-term future for Poles in a democratic, socialist federation which would eventually cover all of Europe.⁷⁹ Luxemburg's opposition to the PPS and Polish independence became so intense over the years that she became almost wilfully blind to the growing national feeling among Poles and, long after the 1905 Revolution, retained a deep faith in the Polish workers as the bastion of the all-Russian Revolution. Her vision of Poland's future was attractive to some, but was never able (or likely) to achieve widespread support amongst Poles, or even in her own party,

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75 *Ibid.*, 574.

76 *Ibid.*, 574.

77 Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 8.

78 For example, see letters from Rosa Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches, 5 April 1894 and 9 June 1898. Rosa Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Briefe*, Band 1 ([East] Berlin: Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, Dietz Verlag, 1982), 233 and 9 June 1898 in *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, 59- 63. See also Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg; A Life* (1988), 11- 12, 24- 26, 77- 78.

79 Rosa Luxemburg, 'Robotnicy a kultura narodowa' ['Workers and National Culture'] in *Młot*, no. 11, Warsaw, 15 October 1910) Quoted in Walicki, 'Rosa Luxemburg and the Question of Nationalism in Polish Marxism, 1893- 1914', 573.

which increasingly distanced itself from her anti-independence attitude.⁸⁰ In 1918, a few months before the restoration of an independent Polish state, Luxemburg was writing an introduction to her translation of *The Life of Korolenko* in her German prison cell. Her description of Korolenko's sense of national identity is strangely reminiscent of her own:

'Descended at once from Poland, Russia, and the Ukraine, Korolenko has to bear, even as a child, the brunt of the three "nationalisms", each one expecting him "to hate or persecute someone or other." He failed these expectations, however, thanks to his healthy common sense. The Polish traditions, with their dying breath of a historically vanquished past, touched him but vaguely.'⁸¹

'A Proud Polish Jew'? Rosa Luxemburg's Jewish Identity

In 1996, Annelies Laschitza wrote that 'in mentality and culture' Luxemburg 'remained, despite or rather because of her humanist cosmopolitanism and proletarian internationalism, a proud Polish Jew', thus challenging the views put forward by every previous biographer.⁸² Whilst it might be a step too far to say that Luxemburg was 'proud' of being a Jew, the stereotyped portrayal of her as the ultra-assimilated German, who had cut all ties to her Jewish background (and family) certainly deserves to be challenged.⁸³

Rosa Luxemburg was born into an assimilated, but religious, Polish-Jewish family. Her parents and grandparents sought to reform and modernise Judaism, whilst assimilating with Polish culture. Edward and Lina Luxemburg were religious and their children remained observant

80 See Walicki, 'Rosa Luxemburg and the Question of Nationalism in Polish Marxism, 1893- 1914', 574- 75.

81 Rosa Luxemburg, Frieda Mattick (trans.) 'Life of Korolenko' (July 1918) in *International Socialist Review*, vol. 30, no. 1, January-February 1959, 11- 31 at Marxists Internet Archive: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/06/korolenko.htm> Retrieved 05.08.2012.

82 As translated in Virve Manninen, Review of Annelies Laschitza, *In Lebensrausch, trotz alledem. Rosa Luxemburg, Eine Biographie* in *International Review of Social History*, vol. 44, 1, April 1999, 101- 103.

83 See footnote 28 Recently, Robert Wistrich has changed his views on Luxemburg somewhat, writing that:

'[t]he Jewish dimension to Luxemburg's background, outlook and legacy has usually been dealt with somewhat dismissively- at best treated as a marginal issue. This is regrettable.' Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist' 1-2.

of Jewish holidays and certain customs, at least until after her parents' deaths.⁸⁴ In order to better understand Luxemburg's identity as a Jew and her views on what was universally known as 'the Jewish Question', one must explore not only her letters and writings on the subject, but the history of her family and her background.

Rosa grew up not in Zamość, but in Warsaw, the bustling capital of Congress Poland and centre of Polish-Jewish business, culture and religious life. The family lived in a small house on Złota Street, then in a predominantly Jewish area of central Warsaw. Although barriers between Poles and Jews were being broken down by increasing assimilation, anti-Semitism remained a potent force. In 1881, when Rosa was ten, the city's Jewish quarter was shaken by a pogrom which raged for several days with the suspected acquiescence of the Tsarist authorities. Although Złota Street was affected by the violence, there is no evidence of how the Luxemburgs were personally affected. Rosa herself never wrote about it, except once, when she mistook the date.⁸⁵ Several writers have argued that the pogrom had a 'deeply repressed but profoundly significant' impact on the young Rosa and helped shape her Jewish identity. This view, which argues that the pogrom both encouraged Rosa to assimilate and gave her a lifelong fear of crowds, is not supported by any evidence in her writings or letters.⁸⁶ It is just as likely that the family were not in Warsaw at the time of the pogrom or were able to endure it in relative safety. One indication that it did not have any profound effect on the family is that, unlike other events including the 1863 Rising and 1905 Revolution, it has not entered into the family history.

Although she did not consider herself part of an official Jewish community in Germany and wrote disparagingly (in private) about unassimilated, orthodox Jews from Eastern Europe, Luxemburg spent her life surrounded by fellow assimilated Jews, with similar backgrounds to her

84 See Letters from Anna Luksenburg to Rosa Luxemburg, undated [after 30 September 1897] and undated [c. 28 October 1897]; Letter from Edward Luxemburg to Rosa Luxemburg, 30 October 1897; Letter from Józef Luxemburg to Rosa Luxemburg, 30 October 1897; Letter from Maksymilian Luksenburg to Rosa Luxemburg, 30 October [18]97 in Ettinger, 'Appendix' to *Rosa Luxemburg: A Life* (1988), 303-06, 307-09, 309-10, 310-14, 315-16.

85 This was in a 1911 article in the SDKPiL publication *Czerwony Sztandar [Red Flag]*. See Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Life*, 15.

86 See Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 6 and Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Life*, 14-15. Her fear of crowds could have come from any source, and was anyhow overstated by Luxemburg herself, who could be modest about her celebrated ability to speak in public.

Although she did not consider herself part of an official Jewish community in Germany and wrote disparagingly (in private) about unassimilated, orthodox Jews from Eastern Europe, Luxemburg spent her life surrounded by fellow assimilated Jews, with similar backgrounds to her own.

own. There was Leo Jogiches (1867- 1919), her lover from 1890 until 1906 and comrade until her death, who came from a wealthy, assimilated Jewish family in Vilnius. There was also the Jewish middle-class socialist Paul Levi (1883- 1930), whom Luxemburg had a brief but intense relationship with in 1914 and later led the Communist Party (KPD). The SDKPiL leadership was dominated by Jews, including not only Luxemburg and Jogiches but Adolf Warszawski (Warski) (1868- 1937) and in the SPD Luxemburg found an ally in Alexander Helphand (Parvus) (1867- 1924), a fellow Jewish émigré from Russia. Many of Luxemburg's closest friends also came from similar backgrounds to her own. Luise Kautsky (1864- 1944), Mathilde Jacob (1873- 1943) and Mathilde Wurm (1874- 1935) all came from assimilated Jewish families. Accusations that Rosa Luxemburg was a 'self-hating Jew' or 'hated Jews' are sheer nonsense.⁸⁷

Through her work in the German and international social-democratic movement, Luxemburg inevitably came into contact with other Jewish socialists, but it was in the Polish movement that 'the Jewish Question' really mattered. The SDKPiL sought to represent the workers of Poland and Lithuania, the two areas of the Russian Empire which held the majority of its Jewish population, most of whom lived in the towns and cities which were experiencing the effects of industrialisation. In the 1890s, Luxemburg and Jogiches worked with the Jewish Bund to spread socialist literature and propaganda in the Russian Empire, especially in Jogiches' hometown Vilnius, which was the centre of Bundist activity.⁸⁸ In 1892, the couple published a collection of May Day speeches made by Jewish workers in Vilnius, with accompanying articles expressing their own views on the Jewish question. Condemning the Tsarist authorities, they described how 'the poor, persecuted Jewish proletarians' were doubly persecuted as both Jews and workers.⁸⁹ They also used the speeches to attack Jewish nationalism, writing that 'our comrades understand that

87 A veteran Bundist said that 'Luxemburg hated Jews. And even more than Jews she hated Yiddish. This is a characteristic of many assimilated types.' Jacob S. Hertz in an interview on 23 April 1973. Quoted in Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 12.

88 The General Jewish Labour Bund in Lithuania, Poland and Russia, known as 'the Bund' was a secular socialist organisation founded in Vilnius in 1897 to represent Jewish workers in the Russian Empire.

89 L. Jogichesa-Tyszka, 'Nowi towarzysze' ['New Companions'] [*Sprawa Robotnicza*, January 1894], in H. Buczek and F[eliks] Tych (eds.), *Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy. Materiały y Dokumenty*, vol. I, 1893- 1897 (Warsaw, 1957), 146- 152. Quoted in translation in Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 14.

the rebuilding of their own [Jewish] State will not destroy capitalism' because they would 'continue to be the exploited and persecuted class'. As with the Poles, the goal should not be *national* freedom, but 'political freedom', which was 'indispensable for the improvement of the workers' welfare and for the struggle against capitalism.' Keen to stress the solidly Marxist and internationalist attitudes of Vilnius' Jewish workers, they concluded that '[t]he Jewish comrades understand clearly that this [political freedom], not the rebuilding of a utopian Jewish state, is their goal'.⁹⁰

Rosa Luxemburg prescribed assimilation of the Jewish workers with the Christians. In 1892, she and Jogiches believed that this was already taking place as Jewish workers were 'decisively breaking away' from the 'narrow traditions and views of the Jewish people' in order to 'unite with the great internationalist labour army'.⁹¹ Despite recognising that Jews were 'the most deprived of rights and the most enslaved of all the subjects of the Tsar' they declared that the Jews had no 'special tasks', only those 'common to the workers of all countries and all peoples'.⁹² Both from middle-class backgrounds, neither Luxemburg nor Jogiches had much understanding of the lives of working-class, Yiddish speaking Jews. Their calls for assimilation were not met with great enthusiasm and, rather than join the SDKPiL, most Jewish workers joined the Bund, which stood up for Jews and recognised them as a nationality which was especially persecuted. Although Luxemburg worked with the Bund in the 1890s, its leaders were frequently bewildered by her fervent opposition to Jewish national feeling. One leader, not unsympathetic to her, remembered her 'furious criticism' of nationalists within the Bund, whom she labelled 'one hundred per cent separatist.' Luxemburg told him, '[w]hat we needed' was 'not Yiddish and various Jewish organisations but the language of the surrounding people' and 'unity with the Christian proletariat' because 'any other [policy] would only lead us into a nationalist swamp'.⁹³

Although Luxemburg recognised that there was a 'Jewish nationality', she firmly opposed Jewish nationalism and believed that the future for

⁹⁰ Ibid., 14.

⁹¹ *Pervoe Maia 1892 goda: chetyre rechi evreiskikh rabochikh* [introduction by L. Yogikhes to 'Four Speeches by Jewish Workers', Geneva, 1893.] (A publication of the Research Project in the Jewish Labour Movement, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1967), 24. Quoted in Jonathon Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862- 1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 195.

⁹² Ibid., 195.

⁹³ John Mill, *Pionern un boyer [Pioneers and Bulilders]*, vol 1 of 2 (New York, 1946- 49), 98. Quoted in Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, 198.

the Jews lay in assimilation and a future socialist state in which anti-Semitism would disappear.⁹⁴ As capitalism developed, she saw assimilation as inevitable because '[t]he separateness of the Jewish nationality' in both Russia and Poland was caused by 'socially backward... petty commerce', small town life and 'close links with the religious', all of which would be destroyed by industrialisation.⁹⁵ Luxemburg did not believe that a modern Jewish culture would emerge, dismissing the efforts to make Yiddish into a language of culture by writers like I. L. Peretz as 'futile' and referring to Yiddish as 'jargon'.⁹⁶ In 1908, she predicted that '[t]he only manifestation of a truly modern culture on a Jewish foundation is the Social Democratic movement of the Jewish proletariat.' For Luxemburg, the future of the Jewish people lay in its liberation through assimilation and socialism.

Luxemburg's supposed distance from Jewish life in no way lessened the negative attention she received for her Jewishness in Poland and Germany alike, where she faced frequent anti-Semitic attacks from her political opponents and even from members of her own party. Previously, it has been claimed that Luxemburg wrote almost nothing about anti-Semitism, but recent scholarship has shown this to be incorrect. When faced with anti-Semitic attacks, Luxemburg responded with articles (often anonymous or written by political friends) condemning anti-Semitism and praising the good sense of workers who ignored it. Luxemburg's analysis of the phenomenon of anti-Semitism can appear optimistic, almost delusional, at times. Her writings suggested that socialism would destroy anti-Semitism, as all inequalities, although whether Luxemburg truly believed this or not is open to debate. In their campaigns against anti-Semitism, Luxemburg and the SDKPiL were eager to highlight examples of Polish workers ignoring provocation and demonstrating solidarity with Jews. In their press, they praised workers in Łódź for 'class solidarity

94 Her dismissive attitude towards Jewish nationalism and Zionism did not change; she wrote in 1918 that 'Zionists are already establishing their Palestinian ghetto, for the present in Philadelphia [Zionisten errichten schon ihr Palästina-Ghetto, vorläufig in Philadelphia]' Rosa Luxemburg, 'Fragment über Krieg, nationale Frage und Revolution' ['Fragment on War, the national question and Revolution'] in Rosa Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Werke [Collected Works]* ([East] Berlin: Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, Dietz Verlag, 1974), Band 4, 367- 68.

95 Rosa Luxemburg, 'The National Question and Autonomy' in *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny* (December 1908), quoted in Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 18.

96 Rosa Luxemburg, 'The National Question and Autonomy' in *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny* (December 1908), quoted in Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 18.

with the Jewish proletariat' and having 'no prejudices of racial hatred'.⁹⁷ After the Kishinev pogrom in 1903, the party issued a proclamation denouncing anti-Semitism and calling on Polish workers 'to defend the Jewish population'.⁹⁸

In October 1910, Luxemburg was attacked by Polish nationalist 'free-thinker' Andrzej Niemojewski and Julian Unszlicht (Sedecki) as an 'enemy of Poland' and for 'Jewish subversion', while her family were slandered as 'brandy merchants'.⁹⁹ Niemojewski wrote in his newspaper: '[a]s all Jews hate non-Jews, so Luxemburg's Social Democrats have a passionate hatred for Poland'.¹⁰⁰ Luxemburg and the SDKPiL responded with a press campaign against anti-Semitism. She received support from colleagues in the international socialist movement, including Emil Vandervelde, Jean Jaurés and Franz Mehring, whose contributions were published in the SDKPiL's paper *Młot* [*Hammer*] alongside Luxemburg's own. In one of her articles entitled 'After the Pogrom', Luxemburg expressed her view that 'anti-semitism has become... the common banner of political backwardness and cultural barbarism'.¹⁰¹

In Germany, where Luxemburg lived from 1898, anti-Semitism did not express itself in pogroms but in the growth of political anti-Semitism and in widely held anti-Semitic attitudes, which were shared by many in the SPD.¹⁰² At the 1901 Party Congress, which Luxemburg did not

97 Robert Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg, Polish Socialism, and the Bund' in Robert Wistrich, *Laboratory for World Destruction: Germans and Jews in Central Europe*, 103.

98 See letter from Adolf Warski to Karl Kautsky. Quoted in Wistrich, Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 16. In 1903, Luxemburg wrote an article on anti-Semitism entitled 'Kto Winien?' ['Who Is To Blame?'] which was published anonymously in *Czerwony Sztandar* [*Red Flag*]. The article can be found online at the website of *Praktyka Teoretyczna*: <http://www.praktykateoretyczna.pl/index.php/roza-luksemburg-kto-winien/>. Retrieved 11.10.2012.

99 See Julian Unszlicht (Sedecki), *O program Ludu Polskiego rola socjallitwactwa w niedawnej rewolucji* (Krakow, 1919) and Julian Unszlicht (Sedecki), *Social-litwactwo w Polsce z teorii i praktyki SDKPiL* (Krakow, n.d.) Quoted and cited in Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 20.

100 Andrzej Niemojewski, in *Mysl Niepodlegla* [*Independent Thought*] Quoted in Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 20.

101 Rosa Luxemburg, 'Po Pogromie' ('After the Pogrom'), *Młot* (*Hammer*), 8 October 1910, 10.

102 See Lars Fischer, *The Socialist Response to Antisemitism in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

At the 1901 Party Congress, which Luxemburg did not attend, her opponents on the right-wing of the party expressed their frustration and disbelief at the behaviour of east European Jewish émigré's.

Clearly referring to Luxemburg and Parvus.

attend, her opponents on the right-wing of the party expressed their frustration and disbelief at the behaviour of east European Jewish émigré's. Clearly referring to Luxemburg and Parvus. Wolfgang Heine told the delegates that the ingratitude of such immigrants 'made the struggle against anti-semitism more difficult' because they were acting like guests who 'come to us and spit in our parlour'.¹⁰³ Tellingly, only Rosa's friend Clara Zetkin defended them.¹⁰⁴ Karl Kautsky, also a close friend of Luxemburg, remained silent and even refused to allow her to respond in the pages of his socialist journal *Neue Zeit*. The leader of the SPD August Bebel had written to Kautsky shortly before the Congress that '[y]ou cannot imagine the animosity against Parvus and also La Rosa in the Party, and even if I am not of the opinion that we should be guided by such prejudices, we cannot at the same time afford to ignore them completely'.¹⁰⁵ A leading figure at the party newspaper *Vorwärts* (*Forwards*) described the 'new arrivals from the East' as 'literary ruffians'.¹⁰⁶ Decades later, reflecting on the influence of Luxemburg and other east European Jews on the SPD, Gustav Noske wrote that they had been 'transforming socialism into a dogma and... articles of faith' and turning Marxism into a 'secret science' which was 'incomprehensible to the German workers'.¹⁰⁷

103 Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands [Minutes of the Proceedings of the Congress of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany] (22- 28 September 1901) (Berlin, 1901), 191. Quoted and cited in Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 25.

104 Zetkin described them as 'party comrades' who 'stand with us for the same programme and share our struggles' Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands [Minutes of the Proceedings of the Congress of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany] (22- 28 September 1901) (Berlin, 1901), 202. Quoted and cited in Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 25.

105 Letter from August Bebel to Karl Kautsky, 4 September 1901 Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel mit August Bebel und Karl Kautsky* [Correspondence with August Bebel and Karl Kautsky] (Vienna, 1954), 137 Quoted in Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 25.

106 Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands [Minutes of the Proceedings of the Congress of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany] (22- 28 September 1901) (Berlin, 1901), 191. Quoted and cited in Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 25.

107 Gustav Noske, *Erlebtes aus Aufstieg und Niedergang einer Demokratie* [Experiences from the Rise and Fall of Democracy] (Offenbach-am-Main, 1947), 27. Quoted in Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 26

In January 1919, Noske was the Defence Minister who led the suppression of the Spartacist Rising, during which Luxemburg was arrested and murdered.

Whilst opposing anti-Semitism in practice, Luxemburg also sought an explanation for its existence on a theoretical basis. When anti-Semites claimed that Marx's writings supported their views, Luxemburg defended him, writing that his work 'for the first time removed the Jewish question from the religious and racial sphere and given it a *social* foundation'.¹⁰⁸ She followed the orthodox Marxist position on anti-Semitism, that it was a bourgeois disorder resulting from capitalist society.¹⁰⁹ Luxemburg quite deliberately sought to defend the writings of Marx and Engels on anti-Semitism and the Jews and to elaborate on them herself. Luxemburg's views on anti-Semitism were relatively straightforward. Writing in 1910, she explained that: for Marxists '*the Jewish question as such does not exist, just as the "Negro question" or the "Yellow Peril" does not exist*'. It was 'a question of racial hatred as a symptom of social reaction' which was 'to a certain extent' inevitable in 'societies based on class antagonism'.¹¹⁰

Combatting anti-Semitism was not a distinct, special problem, but 'one of a thousand social tasks' resulting from the inequalities of class society.¹¹¹ Luxemburg expressed the same view in 1917, writing to a Jewish friend who sent her a novel by the Jewish writer Spinoza:

'What do you want with this "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... Oh that "sublime stillness of eternity," in which so many cries of anguish have faded away *unheard*, they resound with me so strongly that I have no special place in my heart for the ghetto. I feel at home in the entire world, wherever there are clouds and birds and human tears.'¹¹²

108 Rosa Luxemburg, 'Dyskusja' ['Discussion'] in *Młot [Hammer]*, no. 14, 5 November 1910, 5-7 [Polish] Translated and quoted in Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 19.

109 '...she undoubtedly shared the central Marxist premise that assimilation was the only progressive solution to the Jewish national problem in eastern Europe.' Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 17.

110 R. Luxemburg, 'Dyskusja' ['Discussion'] in *Młot [Hammer]*, no. 14, 5 November 1910, 5-7. Translated and quoted Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 18.

111 Quoted in Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 20.

112 Rosa Luxemburg to Mathilde Wurm, Wronke Fortress, Posen, 16 February 1917 in *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, 373-77.

Her family was a closely knitted support network, even when its members were spread out across Europe. This solid foundation, which supported and encouraged her at every step, gave Luxemburg the intellectual and personal confidence to go out and attempt to change the world.

Defining herself as an internationalist, Luxemburg would not countenance any suggestion that she, as a Jew, ought to be more attuned to Jewish suffering than the suffering of other groups. This does not mean that she was uninterested in Jewish suffering and anti-Semitism, which she herself experienced and understood only too well. She saw Jewish persecution, as she saw the lack of rights for women and other inequalities, as a consequence of the capitalist system and firmly believed that its overthrow and the coming of socialism would bring an end to anti-Semitism. Her optimism convinced her that anti-Semitism was *declining*, rather than growing. In 1906, she wrote that pogroms were now 'useless' as a weapon of the Tsarist regime, because the 'enlightened and revolutionary workers' made them an 'impossibility'. When pogroms did occur, it was only in backwards, rural areas.¹¹³ Later, in 1917, she wrote to a concerned Russian friend that reports of pogroms in southern Russian must be 'directly fabricated' because the workers and socialism were 'much too strong for all that'. The growth of the labour movement in Russia meant that 'a new Kishinev' had become impossible. 'I can sooner imagine' she wrote 'pogroms against Jews here in Germany'.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

Rosa Luxemburg gained a lot more from her family than has previously been understood by her biographers. Not only in terms of her education, financial support and assistance during her frequent incarcerations, but also in terms of her identity and politics. Her family was a closely knitted support network, even when its members were spread out across Europe. This solid foundation, which supported and encouraged her at every step, gave Luxemburg the intellectual and personal confidence to go out and attempt to change the world. Not only this, but her family gave her the basis of her value system and political beliefs. From her grandfather and father she inherited the belief that she was a Pole first and a Jew second, her passionate opposition to Tsarism and her emotional connection to Polish language and culture. Although her parents were religious, they did not consider themselves to be Jewish by natio-

113 Róża Luksemburg, 'Co Dalej?' ['What Next?'] (Warsaw, 1906) Quoted in Wistrich, 'Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist', 22.

114 Rosa Luxemburg to Sophie Liebknecht, before 24 December 1917, Breslau in *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, 453.

nality, rather ‘Poles of the Mosaic persuasion’.¹¹⁵ They devoted all of their energy and time to the education and wellbeing of their children, instilling in them not only culture and values, but the belief that ‘blood is thicker than water’ and that family always ‘sticks together’.¹¹⁶ Perhaps that is why, despite their lack of sympathy for her politics and the suffering endured by the family as a result of her activities, Luxemburg’s relatives remain proud of her achievements and proudly tell journalists that ‘everyone in our family is very loved’.¹¹⁷

Rosa Luxemburg’s identity as a Polish Jew, like her views on the Polish and Jewish questions, did not develop in a vacuum. They were born out of her upbringing and the experiences of herself and her family in nineteenth-century Poland. The partitions and the 1830 and 1863 Risings, Tsarist anti-Semitism and the *Haskalah*, industrialisation and the growth of the Polish labour movement. These are what shaped Luxemburg’s views as she grew up in Tsarist Warsaw, and continued to do so long after she went into exile. If we want to understand her ideas, we must try to understand her life and the times in which she lived.

It is significant that in her last article, written in hiding in Berlin the night before her murder at the hands of proto-fascist soldiers, Luxemburg began by comparing the doomed Spartacist Rising, of which she was a reluctant leader, with the Polish November Rising of 1830- 31:

“Order reigns in Warsaw,” Minister Sebastiani informed the Paris Chamber of Deputies in 1831, when, after fearfully storming the suburb of Praga, Paskiewitsch’s rabble troops had marched into the Polish capital and begun their hangman’s work on the rebels. “Order reigns in Berlin” is the triumphant announcement of the bourgeois press, of Ebert and Noske, and of the officers of the “victorious troops”... “Order reigns in Berlin!” You stupid lackeys! Your “order” is built on sand. The revolution will “raise itself up again clashing,” and to your horror it will proclaim to the sound of trumpets: *I was, I am, I shall be*.¹¹⁸

115 The phrase comes from Ezra Mendelsohn and is used by Jacobs in his study of Rosa Luxemburg. See Jacobs, *A Familial Resemblance*, 73.

116 Anna Luksenburg to Rosa Luxemburg, 23 September [1]901 in ‘Appendix’ to Ettinger, *Rosa Luxemburg; A Life* (1988), 323- 25.

117 See Narbutt, ‘Jeszcze jedno życie Czerwonej Róży’.

118 Rosa Luxemburg, ‘Order Reigns in Berlin’ in *Die Rote Fahne [The Red Flag]*, 14 January 1919. English translation by Peggy Fallen Wright in Peter Hudis & Kevin B. Anderson (eds.), *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 373- 78.

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Rory Castle jest doktorantem ostatniego roku na Uniwersytecie w Swansea. Studiował tam historię nowoczesną zanim podjął staż w Fundacji Róży Luksemburg w Berlinie. Napisał szereg artykułów oraz przeprowadził rozmowę i prowadził dyskusję o Róży Luksemburg z prof. Jacqueline Rose (Queen Mary, London University) oraz krewną Róży Luksemburg Marie-Louise Luxembourg. Przedmiotem jego badań są młodość Róży Luksemburg, jej pochodzenie i rodzina, polska oraz żydowska tożsamość oraz próba odpowiedzi na pytanie dlaczego zagadnienia te nie były dotychczas wystarczająco badane i nie zostały w pełni zrozumiane. Prowadzi blog www.rosaluxemburgblog.wordpress.com.

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Abstrakt: Niniejszy artykuł omawia pochodzenie społeczne Róży Luksemburg, jej młodość i atmosferę panującą w rodzinnym domu, w kontekście ich wpływu na kształtowanie się jej polsko-żydowskiej tożsamości, a także jej późniejszych poglądów na kwestie polską i żydowską. W celu zrozumienia źródeł jej koncepcji asymilacji

Żydów oraz stanowiska wobec polskiego nacjonalizmu analizuje poglądy ojca oraz dziadka Luksemburg, a także innych członków rodziny. Wobec braku zainteresowania dotychczasowych biografów Luksemburg tą problematyką, artykuł oparty został na najnowszych pracach, udostępnionych niedawno archiwaliach oraz obszernych wywiadach z członkami rodziny Luksemburg. Proponuje on nową interpretację źródeł polsko-żydowskiej tożsamości Róży Luksemburg.

Słowa kluczowe: Róża Luksemburg, rodzina, tożsamość żydowska, tożsamość polska, Zamość, Warszawa