

## Culture as Resistance: A Study of the Warsaw and Łódź Ghettos

This research aims to prompt a reconceptualization of resistance, foremost challenge the simplistic approach to studying resistance in the ghettos wherein armed revolt is the only relevant method considered. Although it is undeniable that culture in its many forms did exist prominently in the ghetto, whether that was simply whistling Beethoven during work or attending a theatrical performance, it requires a deeper analysis to understand and place it within the sphere of resistance.<sup>1</sup> Supported by previous scholarly definitions, a definition of resistance will be formulated on the basis of Nazi policy in regards to the Jewish people. This step is integral to placing culture within the narrative of resistance and thus, achieving a more nuanced perspective. As Rebecca Rovit proposes in her article about theatre in the ghettos and camps, “because performance took place under various conditions, we cannot generalize about these contexts nor can we assert a single reason why an inmate created art under such circumstances.”<sup>2</sup> This quote refers to the camps in particular; nonetheless, it is equally applicable to the ghettos. With this in mind, it is not insufficient to identify trends that point towards an explanation of causation.

In studying a selection of sources from the ghettos of Warsaw and Łódź, it can be concluded that culture fulfilled three main roles within the ghetto, all of which fall under the umbrella of resistance to Nazi occupation. They are as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Heda Margolius Kovaly, *Under a Cruel Star: A Life in Prague 1941-1968*, (New York: Holmes & Meier: 1986), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Rovit, “Cultural Ghettoization and Theatre during the Holocaust: Performance as a Link to Community,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19, no. 3 (2005): 476.

- 1) The production of culture as a method of physical survival, for example playing music on the street to get money or food.
- 2) Culture as a vehicle of expression, whether that being an abhorrence of the occupying forces and Jewish Police, daily struggles within the ghetto, or positively expressing connections to Jewish tradition and hope.
- 3) The role of culture as psychological relief, a metaphysical escape from the depressive atmosphere and a return to normalcy.

This three-tiered approach is not to oversimplify the role of culture in the ghetto. Rather, it acknowledges its complexities while sacrificing some of the nuance in order to provide a clear presentation that can be of use to both those familiar and unfamiliar with the topic.

For the purposes of this paper both art and intellectual culture will be considered. These are often studied as separate entities however, the overlap in participation within these categories as well as clear unity of intent for which they were practised cannot be overlooked. In the larger ghettos of the Generalgouvernement, the practise of music, education, theatre and the like, took place within an interrelated clandestine or formal system. There are exceptions, such as the individual street singers or small clandestine education groups. Nonetheless, the prevalence of webs connecting art and intellectual culture in the Warsaw and Łódź ghettos render their simultaneous study warranted.

It is imperative to note, before delving into the details of culture in the ghetto, that a certain segment of the population is missing from the narrative. Primary documents from the ghettos, such as a concert poster from the Warsaw ghetto that advertises a concert taking place on a Saturday demonstrate that for some, culture overrode religious tradition in the ghetto. Saturday

is the Sabbath, a day of rest, yet in the ghetto cultural activities took place regardless of the religious calendar. Those who actively practised Judaism in the ghettos faced a distinct set of issues in addition to those faced by the population at large. While the meagre rations were a problem for many, since the meat available was horse meat or other meats not prepared according to *kashrut*, orthodox Jews would have the choice to disregard their traditions or find a way of illegally procuring a substitute on the black market. Little documented evidence exists concerning how religious Jews fared in the ghetto, since so few survived. This is one of the shortcomings of studying culture in the ghettos; while a substantial segment of the population can be accounted for, there are inherent limits to research.

A substantial basis of historiography exists upon culture in the ghettos that provided a reference point. The majority of these works take a microscopic approach; addressing a single aspect of culture and analyzing its place within the ghetto. This includes a tendency to romanticize culture in the ghettos.<sup>3</sup> While this metaphysical relationship with culture did exist and will be addressed over the course of this paper, the primary documents prove it to be not as prominent or all-consuming as often presented in the literature. Another shortcoming of the literature is to present cultural resistance as a product of the Jewish intelligentsia alone. Culture in the formal sector, for example musical and theatrical performances held indoors, did constitute mainly of the intelligentsia in result of the admission fee. However, street performances and other mediums of informal culture represented the full breadth of society. This is necessary to mention since many scholars seem to marginalize culture on the basis that it is a production of

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<sup>3</sup> See Eliyana R. Adler, "No Raisins, No Almonds: Singing as Spiritual Resistance to the Holocaust," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 24, no. 4 (2006): 50-66., as well as Joanna Michlic-Coren, "Battling Against the Odds: Culture, Education and the Jewish Intelligentsia in the Warsaw Ghetto, 1940-1942," *East European Jewish Affairs* 27, no. 2 (2008): 77-92. doi: 10.1080/13501679708577860.

the intelligentsia alone. Furthermore, there is a considerable lack of scholarship that tackles culture as a method of resisting physical oppression. If culture as physical survival is included, such as in Susan M. Kardos' article on clandestine schooling as resistance in the Warsaw ghetto, it is minute in scope and dealt with as an aside.

Two books in particular move astray from these patterns and acted both as inspiration and a source of primary material for this research. Gila Flam's *Singing for Survival* and Shirli Gilbert's *Music in the Holocaust Ghettos and Camps*, despite their differences, challenge the over-represented viewpoint that culture acted as psychological resistance alone. This research supports this perspective and goes further by classifying culture as one of the common methods of resisting the occupying regime not only in the psychological spheres, but physical as well. In order to justify this statement, a set of boundaries for what can be qualified as resistance are needed.

Scholars seem to agree upon certain characteristics of resistance, including that it must occur within the context of oppression and can be loosely defined as "opposition to the perpetrators," as stated by Raul Hilberg.<sup>4</sup> Hilberg expands upon this definition to explain that actions such as smuggling or any other attempt at survival cannot be categorized as resistance since they did not necessarily thwart the perpetrators. This led him to conclude in *The Destruction of the European Jews* that the Jews responded to Nazi persecution with little resistance. They reacted to decrees and orders with automatic compliance, failing to oppose the perpetrator in any form.<sup>5</sup> This fails to hold true in the context of cultural decrees. Although

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<sup>4</sup> Roger S. Gottlieb, "The Concept of Resistance: Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust," *Social Theory and Practise* (1983): 32.

<sup>5</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jewry* (London: Holmes & Meier, 1985), 293.

armed revolt in the ghettos and camps was limited in sphere and success, this conclusion excludes 'passive' or everyday resistance.

The goals of the Nazi regime in regards to European Jews must be examined to arrive at a definition of resistance that properly includes 'passive' resistance within its boundaries. Following the functionalist line of thought, at an undefinable point during the invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 the Nazis formulated and begun to initiate the Final Solution, which aimed for complete physical eradication of the Jewish people and their cultural-religious traditions. This is reflected in the treatment of the Jews compared with other persecuted groups, as stated by Emil Fackenheim: "There were those whose crime was a doing - political opponents, common criminals, Jehovah Witnesses, some clergymen... And there were those whose crime was a being."<sup>6</sup>

Although complete annihilation was not necessarily a policy until sometime during the late summer of 1941, the conditions established by the Germans within the ghetto from the outset were detrimental to both physical and psychological well-being. Resistance in the ghettos therefore constituted of any effort undertaken to protest, through physical or verbal means, the Germany policies including ghettoization itself, the ration allotments, as well as cultural and religious regulations. This definition of resistance properly includes attempts made to physically survive the ghetto, maintain a sense of identity, as well as armed resistance, all methods of challenging the perpetrators. Scholars who do include cultural resistance within their definition of resistance, often deal with it as a marginal issue. Yet diaries from the period demonstrate that culture as a form of resistance was not a rare occurrence.

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<sup>6</sup> Emil Fackenheim, "The Spectrum of Resistance During the Holocaust: An Essay in Description and Definition," *Modern Judaism* 2 (1982): 119.

Michael Marrus puts forth in his historiography of resistance that the definition in the context of the Holocaust must be broad due to the diversity of circumstance. This diversity of circumstance is best illustrated in Susan M. Kardos' article on clandestine schooling and resistance in Warsaw:

The Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto faced multiple struggles. There was the personal daily struggle against hunger, disease, poverty, overcrowding, and the possibility of deportation, which was intensified by the struggle to maintain a sense of dignity, normalcy, and hope in the face of brutal inhumanity. Then there was the community's struggle to stay organized and cohesive and to maintain social services, political organization, religious life, and governance within the Ghetto walls. Finally there was the broader struggle against historical and cultural eradication and, ultimately, against complete, collective annihilation.<sup>7</sup>

It is first essential to understand that policy on cultural activity was not uniform within the ghettos of the Generalgouvernement, but was instead left up to the individual German authorities to decide. In Warsaw education was illegal until October 1941, making clandestine and semi-clandestine institutions widespread in the ghetto.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, in Łódź the chair of the Judenrat Chaim Rumkowski created a legal and extensive network of schooling from primary years to university.<sup>9</sup> Although these two ghettos are being used as case studies in this research, they were very different in terms of cultural structure. A declaration by Heinz Auerswald on April 30th 1942, stated that in Warsaw Aryan literary, art, or musical work was forbidden to be performed by ghetto cafés or theatres, an order that had existed for almost a year according to Chaim Kaplan, but was only enforced upon this decree in 1942.<sup>10</sup> In Łódź the orchestra played

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<sup>7</sup> Susan M. Kardos, "'Not Bread Alone': Clandestine Schooling and Resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto during the Holocaust," *Harvard Educational Review* 72, no. 1 (2002): 36.

<sup>8</sup> Barbara Engelking, *The Warsaw Ghetto: A Guide to the Perished City*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 538.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon J. Horwitz, *Ghettostadt: Lodz and the Making of a Nazi City*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2008), 80.

<sup>10</sup> Chaim A. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony: The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 322.

works by Beethoven and other Aryan composers, suggesting that no such ban existed or it was not enforced. Since the Germans allowed more freedoms in Łódź, more of the cultural institutions were run by the Judenrat and under direct supervision by the authorities compared to Warsaw.<sup>11</sup>

Cultural institutions and outlets existed in Warsaw and Łódź, establishing the concept of cultural webs discussed earlier. In Warsaw, YIKOR was an illegal organization created to promote the Yiddish language in the ghetto. A similar organization was created to spread the Hebrew language, Tkuma.<sup>12</sup> These groups, independent from the Judenrat and German authorities, organized many events such as lectures and meetings mainly directed at young people. Adam Czerniakow, the chair of the Judenrat, also took extensive efforts to create cultural life within the ghetto. Besides from creating an orchestra within the Order Services, a topic which will be addressed later as an contentious issue independent of ‘ordinary’ culture in the ghettos, he attempted to legalize the ghetto symphony orchestra when it became illegal in 1942 and also organized various performances.<sup>13</sup>

The web of cultural activity in Łódź was centred in Marysin, an agricultural area where youth took part in organized schooling and productions at the House of Culture. In Łódź the system was quite different as cultural productions most often took place under the watchful eye of Rumkowski. Nonetheless, there were similarities between cultural life in the two ghettos. In the performance sector, music and theatre, both ghettos had a legal symphony orchestra as well

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendices for geographical context of the Warsaw and Łódź ghettos

<sup>12</sup> For more information on these groups see Barbara Engelking, *The Warsaw Ghetto*, 6, 538.

<sup>13</sup> Adam Czerniakow, *The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniakow*. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), 358.

as theatre troops. A broad informal cultural network also existed. In the evening and at night after curfew, groups gathered at individual homes to exchange ideas, teach, read poetry, and more.

Whether formal or informal, culture had a practical value for a number of ghetto inhabitants. To alleviate the hunger or simply the lack of money within the ghetto, those who possessed cultural talents used their skills as a sort of income. The success of these attempts varied case to case, dependent not only on the skill of the artist but also the venue and time period. As previously established, due to the nature of the occupation as an assault on all aspects of Jewish life - physical, cultural and psychological - these actions can be considered a form of resistance.

Culture as a mode of physical survival was most commonly seen in the sectors of education, music and visual arts. In Łódź, many young students wrote in their diaries that one, if not the only, reason they attended school was to receive their daily allocation of soup. Dawid Sierakowiak, a young diarist from Łódź, did not dwell upon the daily meal as his central reason for attending school, but mentioned its benefits nonetheless: “At school our studying proceeds at a rapid pace. The soup they cook for us here, though not too rich or thick because of the general lack of potatoes in the ghetto, provides an excellent shot of energy during classes. After all, the long trip to Marysin wears us down terribly.”<sup>14</sup>

Sara Zyskind, another student in the Łódź ghetto, made use of the ghetto schooling system as a source of food alone. In contrast to Dawid, classes are not mentioned as a source of relief from psychological stress of the ghetto. Being entirely dependent on the rations received, during the summer vacation her and her cousin Salek, “looked forward eagerly to the beginning

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<sup>14</sup> Dawid Sierakowiak, *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak: Five Notebooks from the Lodz Ghetto*, ed. Alan Adelson, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 87.

of the new school year, when [they] would again have enough to eat.”<sup>15</sup> When her father fell ill, she snuck the allotted soup and meat patty out of the school, although it was forbidden, to provide for him after her mother’s death.<sup>16</sup> Sonya, one of the teachers from the Łódź ghetto, confirmed in an interview that also for the teachers an objective of these schooling operations was to give the students safety from the streets of the ghetto and provide them with a single meal a day.<sup>17</sup>

In the fall of 1941, when primary schooling for children up to the age of eleven was legalized in the Warsaw ghetto, thousands of children made use of the breakfast system offered at these schools.<sup>18</sup> Limited primary evidence exists on the use of schooling as a source of food in Warsaw, since this legalized system took place for a limited time and as primary students the children who took part were quite young. In Warsaw clandestine schooling was more prominent, and no sources suggest that students were offered anything concrete for participating. This can explain the divergence between Warsaw and Łódź, in terms of students who studied for practical gain versus psychological relief. However, teachers in the Warsaw ghetto did at one point receive a loaf of bread for teaching small groups of four to eight children in various homes.<sup>19</sup>

As suggested above, educators were likewise motivated by the income and food they could potentially receive from their occupation. Dawid Sierakowiak was dually a student and educator in the Łódź ghetto, who tutored many students in the ghetto for pay. His justification for

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<sup>15</sup> Anna Eilenberg-Eibeshitz, *Preserved Evidence Ghetto Lodz, Volume II*, (Israel: H. Eibeshitz Institute for Holocaust Studies Haifa, 2000), 561.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 556.

<sup>17</sup> Jutta Bendremer, “Female Survivors of the Holocaust: Heroines All.” *Educational Gerontology* 17, no. 2 (1991): 87.

<sup>18</sup> Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Bystanders, Victims: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945*, New York: (Harper Collins, 1992), 144.

<sup>19</sup> Isaiah Trunk, *Lodz Ghetto: A History*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 179.

taking up this endeavour in addition to his regular school work and manual labour was that “cash is cash, and the main thing is to have something to eat and to survive.”<sup>20</sup> He bartered families for better prices, sometimes refusing to take on a student because he didn’t believe it was worth the amount they were offering to pay: “All they would give me is 1.50 RM for six lessons a week. I want a minimum of 40 pf an hour, and I'm not going to give up even a single pfennig. I still value the little remaining energy that I have.”<sup>21</sup> Music teachers also relied upon their craft as a source of income in the ghetto. Władysław Szpilman and ‘Professor Kellerman,’ as he is called in Mary Berg’s diary, are two examples of highly qualified musicians who took to offering lessons in order to survive.

Artists and intellectuals who could not attend organized schools such as those in Łódź, took their craft to the ghetto streets hoping to supplement food rations or buy other necessary products. The situation for artists and intellectuals was particularly difficult following ghettoization since, especially in Warsaw where no established cultural venues were opened at the outset, they had lost their livelihoods.<sup>22</sup> This forced them to pursue their craft in any way that would enable them to make a sort of living. The above mentioned Professor Kellerman, a violinist previously of the Leipzig Conservatory, played his violin outdoors and received pieces of bread and coins from his listeners. In conjunct with well-paid lessons, his violin managed to physically sustain him and his wife during a period of the ghetto.<sup>23</sup>

Musicians also played in cafés and restaurants for wages, to an audience of mainly the ghetto intelligentsia. The Warsaw pianist Władysław Szpilman was one of such musicians,

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<sup>20</sup> Sierakowiak, *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak*, 115.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>22</sup> Engelking, *The Warsaw Ghetto*, 531.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Berg, *The Diary of Mary Berg*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications Limited, 2006), 63.

whose prewar career of performing in concert halls and on the Polish Radio was no longer once the occupation began. He played at venues such as Café Nowoczesna on Nowolipki street out of the practical necessity to support himself and his family, adapting his livelihood to suit to the ghetto circumstances: “Life, although so unimportant, had none the less forced me to overcome my apathy and seek some way of earning a living.”<sup>24</sup> Also in the sector of formal culture was adult choirs. Although no primary documentation could be found recalling the motives of the members, in Warsaw they received benefits such as free meals and the conductor a salary of 300 złoty per month.<sup>25</sup>

In his *Notes From the Warsaw Ghetto*, Emmanuel Ringelblum captures the commonality of singing in the streets for money. From the spring of 1941 to 1942, he described multiple sightings of musicians singing in the streets alongside their children, who collected the coins.<sup>26</sup> In Łódź, Yankele Herszkowitz was the most popular street performer and as a result, one of the few who managed to achieve enough profit through this profession to survive upon. He was known after every song to cry out “a new song for ten Pfennig and no more” thus, earning an income.<sup>27</sup>

Visual art, a difficult topic to research as little evidence exists of its production in the ghetto, was also produced for practical means. Its rarity within the ghetto most likely stems from its material demand. To produce paintings, at the minimum brushes, paint, and a canvas were needed, and most of these tools could not be reused. Janina Bauman, a young girl who managed

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<sup>24</sup> Władysław Szpilman, *The Pianist: The Extraordinary Story of One Man's Survival in Warsaw, 1939-1945*, (London: Orion Books Ltd, 2002), 11.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Kermish, *To Live With Honor, To Die With Honor*, (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1999), 355.

<sup>26</sup> Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*, (New York: ibooks inc., 2006), 283.

<sup>27</sup> Gila Flam, *Singing for Survival: Songs of the Lodz Ghetto, 1940-1945*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 25.

to escape the Warsaw ghetto, recalled her family's escape being facilitated by her aunt's paintings.<sup>28</sup> They had to patiently wait until she had made enough money selling her work in order to make their escape, and ultimately made it to the Aryan side successfully.

In various forms, culture was used in the ghetto as a method of physical resistance. Through culture, the Jews were able to attain benefits such as an income that in turn could provide enhanced rations, medical treatment and other elements essential for survival. This challenged the German policy of physical oppression and consequent annihilation.

Culture also acted as one of the only ways one could express truly how they felt. As resistance, this expression provided as a forum wherein the Jews could reassert their humanity as impassive beings. Theatre, poetry, and singing, art forms that used the spoken word, were wrought with commentary. They expressed resentment towards the German and Jewish authorities, thoughts of revenge, the oppression of the ghetto, and evoked connections to Jewish tradition. Even in Łódź, where cultural activities were heavily supervised, performers managed to overtly express themselves through art. Primarily this highlights the impassivity of the Jewish population, as they were actively aware of the unjustness of German policy and spoke out against them. Insulting the Germans or maintaining a connection to their religious identity went directly against German rule, and was a punishable offence in the ghetto.

Janina Bauman observed a cabaret performance where they exposed in "sketches of ghetto life" the corruption and indifference that characterized the ghetto.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Mary Berg noted many instances of this cultural expression during theatrical performances in Warsaw.

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<sup>28</sup> Janina Bauman, *Winter in the Morning: A Young Girl's Life in the Warsaw Ghetto and Beyond 1939-1945*, (London: Virago Press, 1986), 93.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

During a revue at the Femina Theatre, “there were biting satirical remarks directed against the ghetto government and its ministers,” including the chair of the Judenrat Adam Czerniakow.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike the symphony, there are no accounts that suggests theatre performances were in any way suppressed for these open condemnations of ghetto authority, making it a source of popular opinion in the ghetto. According to actors that performed in ghetto theatrical productions, the ability to be on stage and express themselves was the most important aspect of the art.<sup>31</sup>

Painting offered a opportunity for the artist to visually represent the ghetto how they chose. As the artist is inseparable from their work, it is inevitable that visual art from the ghetto would reflect the author’s emotion. Oskar Rosenfeld contemplated the difficulty of representing the ghetto of Łódź through visual art, as an entity “outside of the realm of civilization.”<sup>32</sup> He noted several ghetto motifs that appear in visual art as being accurate expressions of the ghetto environment, such as people pulling carts, the constant hunger, the corruption of the Order Service.<sup>33</sup> These ghetto motifs appear in Mary Berg’s descriptions of her art course in the Warsaw ghetto. When representing the ghetto through visual art, the students chose to present its “misery figures.”<sup>34</sup>

Poetry was another method of expression. Władysław Szlengel composed the poem “Telephone” in the Warsaw ghetto, that laments the break in communication with the world outside of the ghetto:

Within my heart broken, and sick,

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<sup>30</sup> Berg, *The Diary of Mary Berg*, 102.

<sup>31</sup> Rovit, “Cultural Ghettoization and Theatre,” 464.

<sup>32</sup> Oskar Rosenfeld, *In the Beginning Was the Ghetto: Notebooks from Lodz*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 238.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Berg, *The Diary of Mary Berg*, 70.

with my thoughts on the other side  
I was sitting one evening  
next to the telephone -

And I think: let me ring  
someone on the other side  
when I am on telephone duty  
in the evening -

And suddenly I realize: my God -  
there is actually no one to call,  
in nineteen thirty-nine  
I went on a different road.

Our ways have parted,  
friendships sunk to the bottom  
and now well...there is no one  
I can telephone.<sup>35</sup>

Through poetry, Szlengel expressed his animosity of the German policy of ghettoization and its personal impacts.

Singing, largely in the casual sphere, provided the same relief as theatre, painting, and poetry. Miriam Harel, a survivor of the Łódź ghetto, stated that “song was the only truth. The Nazis could take everything away from us, but they could not take singing from us. This remained our only human expression.”<sup>36</sup> This quote overtly points towards the role of culture, in this case singing, as a method of directly resisting Nazi policy. Culture was a way not only of physically and psychologically resisting the ghetto, but also of directly challenging Nazi policy that treated the ghetto inhabitants as subhuman.

In Gila Flam’s book on singing in the Łódź ghetto, she records many songs that showcase the role of singing as expression. “The Notorious Ghetto,” composed by the infamous ghetto

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<sup>35</sup> Władysław Szlengel, “Telephone,” Trans. John and Bogdana Carpenter, *Chicago Review*.

<sup>36</sup> Gila Flam, *Singing for Survival*, 1.

singer Yankele Herszkowitz, was one of such songs. Its use of political and social satire pokes fun as the systematic nature of Nazi policy and the Judenrat:

The notorious ghetto,  
It runs like clockwork,  
Everything is in order,  
No unemployment,  
They eat roast,  
Play cards,  
The entire *Beirat* is corrupt.<sup>37</sup>

The street singer Herszkowitz was well known for his risqué songs that critiqued the agents of control in the ghetto. The most remembered by survivors was his song about Chaim Rumkowski. When a policeman attempted to arrest Herszkowitz for insulting Rumkowski, proof that ridiculing ghetto authority carried consequences, the crowd surrounded him and enabled him to escape arrest.<sup>38</sup> Oskar Rosenfeld also mentioned Herszkowitz's street performances in his diary, a particular song that made fun of the Germans and their girlfriends.<sup>39</sup> He sung this tune directly within range of the German's themselves, refusing to relinquish his human ability to express himself in the face of threat.

A popular song of the Warsaw ghetto, "Money, Money," set to the tune of a pre-war American jazz song, closely reflects the content of "The Notorious Ghetto" and other songs from Łódź:

Money, money, money is the best thing,  
The Jewish policeman is just a scoundrel,  
Puts you on the train and sends you away to a camp.  
Money, money, money is the best thing. <sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>39</sup> Rosenfeld, *In the Beginning Was the Ghetto*, 273.

<sup>40</sup> Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust*, 23.

As this excerpt suggests, the song highlights the corruption and disparity between the poor and elite in the ghetto.

The call for revenge was also a common topic expressed in songs. This could take the form of a political prophecy, that the Jews would live through this period to enact revenge upon their oppressors. A significant period after the Aktion of July 1942, Władysław Szpilman remembered walking with his work group through the Warsaw ghetto on New Year's Eve. When asked to sing by the Germans, they sang the Polish patriotic song "Hey, marksmen arise!" in a place when declarations of Polish patriotism were banned.<sup>41</sup>

Not only was culture a medium through which to express discontent, frustration, and revenge, but also a way to evoke connections to one's Jewish identity. This aspect of expression somewhat merges with the third element of culture in the ghettos; the idea of culture as morale supply. However, the link between culture and identity will be understood as expression for the purpose of this research due to the reliance on verbal expression, lyrics, to form this connection.

In the Warsaw ghetto, the Germans forbid religious study, teachings and public or private worship to take place.<sup>42</sup> With so many restrictions, maintaining a connection to Jewish culture would reinforce a sense of communal belonging and identity. Pinchas Saar, the official theatre painter and set decorator in the Łódź ghetto, is an antithesis in the context of this paper. He remarked in an interview with Gila Flam that he did not believe that culture, specifically theatre, was as important in the ghetto as it is often presented today. Nonetheless, he ultimately stated the bond theatre performances were able to form with Jewish culture.<sup>43</sup> Since Nazi policy directly

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<sup>41</sup> Szpilman, *The Pianist*, 125.

<sup>42</sup> Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews*, 335.

<sup>43</sup> Flam, *Singing for Survival*, 131.

attacked Jewish traditions themselves, maintaining connection to Jewish identity through culture qualifies as resistance.

This connection was established through songs that focus on Palestine, the future of a Jewish community there. One was composed by Yankele Hershkowitz, who described the communal desire to live in Palestine, and celebrations that would take place after the state of Israel was declared: “I’m going to Palestine, That is a golden land... Rumkowski and his army want to enter Eretz-Yisrael too. We’ll make noise, All through that time, we’ll have a celebration, all right!”<sup>44</sup> In the Warsaw ghetto a similar song was sung by Janina Bauman’s sister Sophie. Composed in Hebrew rather than Yiddish, the main idea of this song mirrors that of the Łódź ghetto. It expresses the desire of the ghetto’s young population to leave the humiliation of the ghetto to build the new homeland in Palestine.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, culture was used as one of the “weapons of the powerless” in the ghetto, a method of expression that challenged the German notion of Jewish inferiority and provided relief from the tension of ghetto life.<sup>46</sup>

Culture also provided a sense of normalcy or figurative escape from the ghetto thus, psychological resistance to the occupiers. A select number of survivors from Warsaw and Łódź credited this to be a contributing factor to their survival, for various reasons including a reminder of how life existed outside the ghetto boundaries. Especially for children, schooling in the ghetto played this role, inputting a sense of community and future goals in their lives. In both the ghettos and camps, scholars and survivors alike have spoke upon the importance of this drive to

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>45</sup> Bauman, *Winter in the Morning*, 86.

<sup>46</sup> Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews*, 294.

live as a determining factor of survival itself.<sup>47</sup> Those who relinquished their desire to live, were known as a *muselmann* in the camps. Although they had not yet died, the inmates knew that once that stage of apathy was reached their death was inevitable. For some, culture became this source of moral stamina that withstood against the Nazi policies.

Dawid Sierakowiak was one of the many children and young adults in Łódź who attended the school system run by the Judenrat. From his diary, it appears as though his education injected a degree of normalcy and objective in his life. Unlike other attendees such as Sara Zyskind, he did not focus upon the daily rations as the single reason to walk to Marysin for schooling. He often mentioned his desire to learn, in particular languages, for future benefits. When he is unable to go to school due to illness, he lamented: “Damn the times when I complained about getting up in the morning and about tests. If only I could have them back!”<sup>48</sup>

Educators at the time held different explanations for why Jewish youth continued to study in the ghetto. Two dichotomous groups exist, while one particular teacher believed they studied to satisfy an inner desire without thought of future benefit, another asserted that they attended school out of obligation.<sup>49</sup> Whether one group makes up the majority of ghetto students is not importance, since primary evidence from diaries confirms that for certain youth, including Dawid Sierakowiak, studying was undertaken out of personal drive as “the miraculous way of getting away from reality.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, (New York: Touchstone, 1958), Shirli Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust Ghettos and Camps.*, Emil Fackenheim, “The Spectrum of Resistance During the Holocaust: An Essay in Description and Definition.”, Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, (Beacon Press, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> Sierakowiak, *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak*, 37.

<sup>49</sup> For more details and primary documents upon this debate see Joseph Kermish, *To Live With Honor and To Die With Honor*; specifically the section upon culture in the ghettos.

<sup>50</sup> Kermish, *To Lie With Honor*, 503.

Survivors Vladka Meed and Janina Bauman both recalled positive memories of their ghetto educations in Warsaw. In the winter of 1941 a group of young adults, including Meed, met to listen to a speech about the Jewish writer I.L. Peretz. Afterwards, they spread to various houses to repeat the lecture. She did not recollect the discussion among the forty inhabitants of the house behind the blacked out windows but, the “wonderful atmosphere, the feeling of being able, even for a short time, to get away from the bitter ghetto reality.”<sup>51</sup> Bauman partook in a similar system, continuing her studies with nearby friends. They established small groups led by teachers from a prewar grammar school, and walked to each others homes everyday to study subjects such as classics and mathematics.<sup>52</sup>

Mary Berg was an attendee of many ghetto education initiatives. A recurring topic in her diary is a graphic art course where the students learnt a range of topics from art history, architecture, and drawing techniques. Berg partook in competitions and symposiums with other students, and describes in detail her fellow classmates and the pieces they created. Her tone when speaking suggests that she derived substantial enjoyment from this course, in particular an entry on February 25, 1941: “The atmosphere is pleasant. I feel as though ever day I am visiting another world for a few hours, a world far removed from the ghostly life of the ghetto.”<sup>53</sup>

Some ghetto inhabitants clung to culture as a remnant of their pre-war lives. Władysław Szpilman’s family did so during the Aktion period to maintain a sense of normalcy: “My parents, sisters and brother knew there was nothing they could do. They concentrated entirely on staying

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<sup>51</sup> Ben-Zvi and Hava Bromberg, *Portraits in Literature: The Jews of Poland*, (Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2011), 218.

<sup>52</sup> Bauman, *Winter in the Morning*, 39.

<sup>53</sup> Berg, *The Diary of Mary Berg*, 42.

in control of themselves and maintaining the fiction of ordinary daily life. Father played his violin all day, Henryk studied, Regina and Halina read and Mother mended our clothes.”<sup>54</sup>

While up to this point culture has been shown as a medium of psychological resistance both through its potential to connect the ghetto inhabitants with their prewar-war time habits as well as providing a sense of metaphysical escape, this section will focus entirely on the latter. In the ghetto, performance became the most common method to achieve metaphysical escape. Both ghettos had theatre troops, symphony orchestras, choirs and other forms of performances. However, it is essential to acknowledge that such events were largely restricted to the upper classes of society, due to an entry fee. The elitist character of these performances appears in writings and revues from the time, including Dawid Sierakowiak’s diary. He depicted one of the weekly orchestras concerts at the Cultural House in Marysin: “Today I went to the concert on Krawiecka Street again. It was the first concert worth seeing in the ghetto: a Beethoven evening. The whole of select Society gathered, bloated and dressed up.”<sup>55</sup> His use of the word “select” to qualify society, suggests the limited social representation in the audience of formal performance. Nonetheless, this does not render the moral gains from such events meaningless.

One of the main established theatres in the Warsaw ghetto was the Eldorado on Dzielna Street. Various revues describe the psychological relief afforded by these performances, seemingly a joint product of the physical and metaphysical atmosphere. A few hours of being in a warm hall in a “truly Jewish atmosphere” of Yiddish speech and music enabled this experience to bring relief. A revue from January 1941 of a performance described the transition from the

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<sup>54</sup> Szpilman, *The Pianist*, 94.

<sup>55</sup> Sierakowiak, *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak*, 174.

beginning to end of a performance feeling alike to the end of a storm when “the sun comes out. The mood lightens. The stage is full of life, the whole ensemble sings and dances.”<sup>56</sup>

Oskar Rosenfeld, one of the contributors towards writing a chronicle of the Łódź ghetto at the time, made similar remarks about the House of Culture in Łódź. Although it was restricted in some ways due to the heavy supervision by the Germans and Chaim Rumkowski - it has been said that the chair of the Judenrat attended almost every performance during the House of Culture’s existence - the audience still managed to attain a sense of relief from the performances. In Rosenfeld’s opinion, the institution itself met the metaphysical needs of Jews, and was proof the ghetto could not break the Jewish resistance.<sup>57</sup> He believed that this institution of culture was successful at providing “400 downtrodden souls with two liberating hours” thus, bringing “honor to its name and mission.”<sup>58</sup>

Outside of these official institutions of culture, relief from performance was still attained. Listening to a work of music or viewing a piece of art carried the ability to distract certain ghetto inhabitants from the reality of their situation. Mary Berg experienced this sense of psychological escape from listening to the violinist previously mentioned, outside her home at 41 Sienna street: “When he begins to play, windows open on all the floors. I often close my eyes and imagine that I am attending the concert of some great virtuoso, discreetly accompanied by a distant orchestra.”<sup>59</sup>

One survivor connected culture and the psychological relief attained from it, directly to her survival. When Rumkowski ordered the youth group *Hakhsharah* closed at the end of 1941,

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<sup>56</sup> Engelking, *The Warsaw Ghetto*, 557.

<sup>57</sup> Rosenfeld, *In the Beginning Was the Ghetto*, 68.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>59</sup> Berg, *The Diary of Mary Berg*, 62.

group members continued meeting in private. One these members was Leah, whose testimony centres around the singing that occurred at these meetings and the psychological relief from the ghetto they provided:

We did not give up singing. It was singing for its own sake. We sang all kinds of songs. Actually, we did not have any good news to talk about. We tried to forget the bad times, so we sang. It worked wonderfully! I think it was one of the things which helped us to survive.<sup>60</sup>

Leah's experience does not represent the majority. Although this response to culture did not necessarily promise a greater chance at physical survival, it is nevertheless significant as a psychological method of resisting the German policy of the ghetto. This reflects Czerniakow's response to criticism of his focus upon creating cultural activities for the ghetto population, and the youth in particular. His intent in organizing these activities was, in his view, comparable to a captain on a sinking ship that requests jazz music played while the ship is going under: simply to raise spirits.<sup>61</sup> In the ghettos, cultural activity played a role as psychological resistance. Ghetto inhabitants practised culture as a way of remaining connected with their prewar habits and metaphysically escaping the oppression created by German policy. In his article, "Resistance as Happiness," David R. Blumenthal takes a similar approach, arguing that any attempt to fight Nazi oppression by remaining optimistic through culture, religion, and other mediums, is resistance.

Many barriers were overcome and risks taken in pursuing Jewish cultural life in the ghettos. It is significant to mention these since it is assumed especially in places like Łódź where the majority of cultural life was legal, that little difficulty stood in the way of maintaining

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<sup>60</sup> Flam, *Singing for Survival*, 156.

<sup>61</sup> Adam Czerniakow, *The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniakow*, 376.

a sense of culture. Understanding cultural activity as something that people strove to pursue despite known risk and obstacles reinforces its place within resistance.

In Łódź the symphonic orchestra, according to a select number of reviews, performed at a high level despite numerous difficulties. Oskar Rosenfeld noted that the conductor Theodor Ryder managed to conduct the orchestra with no full score, and not all the instrumentation sketched.<sup>62</sup> The struggles to perform their weekly Wednesday evening concert expanded over time, as various members including the concertmaster had been deported. Despite this, concerts continued up until January 17th 1944, when the Germans confiscated musical instruments and abruptly brought an end to musical performance in the Łódź ghetto.<sup>63</sup> Rosenfeld also remarked in his diary that playing in this orchestra was not the job of the members. They would most likely work doing physical labour during the day, and then played in the orchestra without any pay at night.<sup>64</sup>

The symphony in Warsaw, which became legal in the beginning of 1941, underwent similar struggles. When the orchestra was suspended for playing German music on April 11th 1942, musical life continued underground.<sup>65</sup> Small groups were organized to perform and listen to music in peoples homes. Furthermore, although the Germans had forbidden the playing of non-Jewish music, this continued even after the disbanding of the orchestra for that exact reason. The Polish composer Chopin was one of the forbidden artists however, musicians continued to play less known pieces by him, and if questioned, lied and said it was another composer.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Trunk, *Lodz Ghetto: A History*, 380.

<sup>63</sup> *The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto 1941-1944*, ed. Dobroszycki, Lucjan (Binghampton: Vail-Ballou Press, 1984), 471.

<sup>64</sup> Rosenfeld, *In the Beginning Was the Ghetto*, 80.

<sup>65</sup> Adam Czerniakow, *The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniakow*, 342.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 579.

Legality did not influence music in the informal sector, Janina Bauman remembered listening to the one record she had, Beethoven symphony no. 5, on the gramophone during the cold night after curfew with her friends.<sup>67</sup> Most clandestine or informal cultural activities took place after curfew which at the beginning of the occupation in Warsaw was from seven at night to five in the morning. During this time people gave recitations, and actors and musicians were known to perform.

Theatre performances in Warsaw faced numerous difficulties including a lack of materials. An amateur theatre group in early 1940 made a curtain out of a sheet, with decorations made out of tablecloths and bedspreads. Even in the established theatres, they had performances under carbide lamps when the electricity went out and the audience wrapped themselves in blankets while the performers on stage went blue with cold.<sup>68</sup>

Especially in the Warsaw ghetto where no extensive legal school network existed, education was a risky endeavour. Two examples from the ghetto in Warsaw illustrate the drive of young people to find a way around the barriers and continue their intellectual lives, as well as the perseverance of the parents to create an education for their children. Frieda Aaron, who completed years five and six as well as two years of gymnasium underground, spoke of the dangers associated with pursuing clandestine education in the Warsaw ghetto during her interview with the USC Shoah Foundation. Her and her friends had to carry their books through the ghetto streets under their coats, with full knowledge that if they were caught by the

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<sup>67</sup> Bauman, *Winter in the Morning*, 54.

<sup>68</sup> For more details on theatre in the Warsaw ghetto, see Engelking *The Warsaw Ghetto*, 532, 555.

<sup>69</sup> Frieda Aaron, Interview 802, Visual History Archive, *USC Shoah Foundation*, 2015, Web. 8 Oct 2015.

authorities they would have been killed immediately.<sup>69</sup> Vladka Meed observed her neighbour hurrying her daughter to similar secret classes.<sup>70</sup>

Educator did not carry the same risk in Łódź, but difficult circumstances existed nonetheless. Dawid Sierakowiak often complained of how difficult it was to focus on his studies and learn new ideas due to the hunger. He also had to walk to Marysin, far from where he lived in the ghetto, in order to attend classes. With the extreme hunger and illness prevalent in the ghetto, these two seemingly simple tasks would have required incredible effort. In light of the perseverance to continue cultural life despite difficulties and the ways in which it was used, the production of culture in the ghetto can be considered an act of resistance.

Another way culture was practised in the ghettos that lies outside the sphere of resistance, was as a form of collaboration with the Germans. This element is important to understand since the divide between right and wrong is often ambiguous, even when discussing a seemingly innocent topic, such as culture. Culture as a form of collaboration in the ghettos is difficult to identify, one must attempt to unearth and interpret the intent of past individuals from primary document as closely to reality as possible, while avoiding conclusions based on a moral bias.

Where this phenomenon is most easily recognized, is within the ranks of the Jewish authority figures, the Judenrat and Order Police. The creation of cultural activities for the ghetto population by the Judenrat, for example Chaim Rumkowski's activities and schooling for children, can be viewed as ultimately assisting the German's in the deportation and murder. Culture potentially calmed the population, reminded them of times before the ghetto and thus made them less fearful and suspicious of what was to come. This calming and nostalgic quality

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<sup>70</sup> Vladka Meed, Interview, Visual History Archive, *USC Shoah Foundation*, 2015. Web. 5 Dec 2015.

of culture, dichotomously could be used both by the population as a method of psychologically resisting German policy, while being a way the authorities could render the populations more complacent to orders.

Czerniakow's quote, that his intent in organizing these activities was comparable to a captain on a sinking ship that requests music played, can also be understood as a form of collaboration. Through culture, he attempted to shield the population from the reality of their fate. This reassurance would hinder the development of physical resistance, whether that be armed, or attempting escape. He created an orchestra within the Order Service, that played at celebratory events such as the opening of a new playground for children. The chairs of the Warsaw and Łódź Judenrat, Rumkowski and Czerniakow, did use culture in a way that can be interpreted as supporting the Germans.

Placing culture in the ghetto against the backdrop of Nazi policy is integral to understanding its nature. The Nazis attacked all spheres of Jewish life - physical, cultural, and religious. Even before the Final Solution was established that planned the annihilation of European Jewry, the Jews were physically abused and humiliated by the perpetrators. In this context, the Jews turned to productions of culture that promised a chance at both physical and psychological survival. As a means of making money, expressing suppressed feelings about the situation, and psychological relief from the oppressing and foreign ghetto life, culture became an everyday mode of resistance to the occupying forces and situation they had imparted.

There exists significant amounts of research left to do in this area as the cultural life of each ghetto and camp are distinct, shaped by countless factors including the nature of the prewar cultural life and occupying authorities in the area. However, this topic is also essential to

challenge the idea that the Jews were utterly complacent to the German occupiers. Though small, these everyday acts of cultural resistance resisted the ideas of the Nazi regime by fighting to survive and actively reject German policies in all spheres. Thus, the definition of resistance in the context of Holocaust must be expanded to include these acts of cultural resistance lest the full breadth of resistance historiography remain incomplete.

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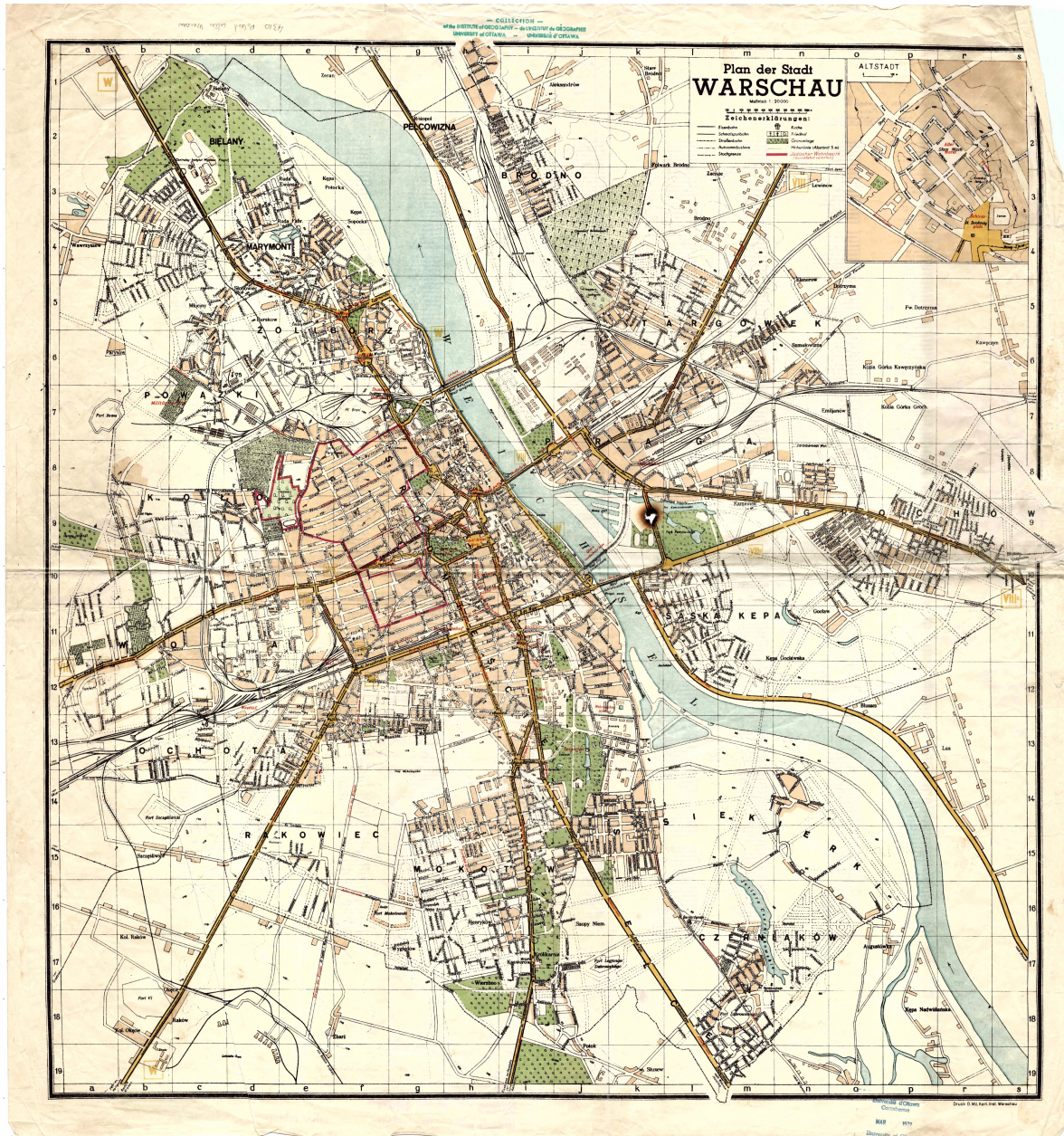
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Appendix A



This historic map of Warsaw was produced by the British war office in 1943. The ghetto is marked by red borders near the centre of the city.

