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

By Miranda Brethour, Dr. Jan Grabowski
University of Ottawa

This research aims to prompt a reconceptualization of resistance, foremost challenging 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.[1] A definition of resistance will be formulated on the basis of Nazi policy in regards to the Jewish people and supported by previous scholarly definitions. This step is integral to placing culture within the narrative of resistance, and thus achieving a more nuanced perspective. Scholars of cultural resistance have emphasized the necessity of approaching culture in the ghettos from such a perspective, as since "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."[2] This quote refers to the concentration camps in particular; nonetheless, it is equally applicable to the ghettos. In spite of the complexity of this field, identifying trends within cultural resistance remains a valuable contribution to the historiography.

Cultural resistance was a common and widespread mode of resistance in the ghettos that helped the Jewish populations protest the occupation on a number of levels. After studying a selection of sources from the ghettos of Warsaw and Łódź, I was able to conclude that culture fulfilled three main roles within the ghetto, all of which fall under the umbrella of resistance to the Nazi occupation. They are as follows:

1. The production of culture as a method of physical survival
2. Culture as a vehicle of expression
3. The role of culture as psychological relief

This three-tiered approach is not to oversimplify the role of culture in the ghetto. Rather, it acknowledges the complexity of culture, yet sacrifices some of the nuance for the sake of clarity.

This article will consider both art and intellectual culture. These are often studied as separate entities; however, in the ghettos art and intellectual culture were both practiced to fulfill the same three roles illustrated above. In the larger ghettos of the Generalgouvernment, the practice 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. Culture often overrode religious tradition, as a concert poster from the Warsaw ghetto advertises a concert planned for a Saturday, the Sabbath, and a day of rest.[3] Thus, cultural activities in the ghetto took place regardless of the religious calendar. Furthermore, those who actively practiced Judaism in the ghettos faced distinct issues in addition to those faced by the non-Orthodox population. While the meager 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. In result of these additional hardships and others, few Orthodox Jews 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 takes 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.[4] While this metaphysical relationship with culture did exist, 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 wealthier class 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 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 away from these patterns and were both sources of inspiration and primary material for this research. Despite their differences, Gila Flam's *Singing for Survival* and Shirli Gilbert's *Music in the Holocaust Ghettos and Camps* challenge the over-represented viewpoint that culture acted solely 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 sphere, but in the physical sphere as well.

A set of boundaries for what can be qualified as resistance are needed in order to justify the above statement. 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.[5] 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.[6] This fails to hold true in the context of cultural decrees. Although armed revolt in the ghettos and camps was limited in sphere and success, this conclusion excludes so-called passive resistance, otherwise known as 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 this 'passive' resistance within its boundaries. Following the functionalist line of thought, 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 was 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."[7] During the Wansee Conference held in January 1942, high-ranking Nazi officials planned the murder of approximately eleven million Jews, including those residing in countries not under German-occupation such as the United Kingdom and Portugal.

Although complete annihilation was not necessarily a policy until the late summer of 1941, the conditions established by the Germans within the ghetto from the outset were detrimental to both the physical and psychological well-being of the Jewish population. Resistance in the ghettos therefore constituted of any effort, physical or verbal, undertaken to protest the Germany policies, including ghettoization, the ration allotments, as well as cultural and religious regulations. This definition of resistance properly includes attempts by Jews to physically survive the ghetto, maintain a sense of Jewish identity and tradition, as well as generate 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.

Michael Marrus puts forth in his historiography of resistance that the definition of resistance in the context of the Holocaust must be broad due to the diversity of circumstance faced by European Jews.[8] 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.[9]

Jews residing in the ghettos in Poland faced persecution on many levels; henceforth, a study of resistance in such a context must consider how people may have resisted against any aspect of persecution.

It is first essential to understand that policy on cultural activity was not uniform within the ghettos of the Generalgouvernment, 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.[10] By contrast, in Łódź, the chair of the Judenrat Chaim Rumkowski created an extensive network of schooling from primary years to university which was recognized as legal by the occupiers.[11] Although these two ghettos are being used as case studies in this research, they were very different in terms of cultural structure. On April 30, 1942, Heinz Auerswald, an SS lawyer, forbade the performance of Aryan literature, art, or music in the Warsaw ghetto's cafés and theatres. The order existed for almost a year prior to April 1942, according to Chaim Kaplan, but was only enforced upon Auerswald's decree.[12] In Łódź, the orchestra played works by Beethoven and other Aryan composers, suggesting either that no such ban existed, or that 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.

Many cultural institutions and outlets existed in both Warsaw and Łódź. In Warsaw, YIKOR was an illegal organization created to promote the Yiddish language in the ghetto. A similar organization, Tkuma, was created to spread the Hebrew language.[13] 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. He attempted to legalize the ghetto symphony orchestra when it became illegal in 1942 and also organized various performances.[14]

The center of Łódź's cultural web was Marysin, an agricultural area where youth took part in organized schooling and productions at the House of Culture. The system in Łódź was quite different than that of Warsaw, as cultural productions in Łódź most often took place under the watchful eye of Rumkowski, the chair of the Judenrat. Nonetheless, there were similarities between cultural life in the two ghettos. In the performance sector, both ghettos had a legal symphony orchestra as well as theatre troops. A broad informal cultural network also existed.[15] In the evenings and times after curfew, groups gathered at individual homes to exchange ideas, teach, read poetry, and more.[16] Whether formal or informal, culture had practical value for a number of ghetto inhabitants. Those who possessed cultural talents used their skills as a source of income or to amass resources. Their success varied and was dependent not only on the skill of the artist, but also on the venue and time period. Due to the nature of occupation as an assault on all aspects of Jewish life—physical, cultural and psychological—these actions can and should be considered a form of resistance.

Culture as a mode of physical survival was most commonly seen in education, particularly in 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."[17] 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, she does not mention her classes as a source of relief from psychological stress of the ghetto. Sara depended on the rations received from school, as she and her cousin Salek, "looked forward eagerly to the beginning of the new school year, when [they] would again have enough to eat."[18] When her father fell ill, Sara snuck her allotted soup and meat patty out of the school, in order to provide for her father after her mother's death.[19] In an interview, Sonya, one of the teachers from the Łódź ghetto, confirmed that one of the school's major objectives was to give the students safety from the streets of the ghetto and provide them with a single meal a day.[20]

In the fall of 1941, primary schooling for children up to the age of eleven was legalized in the Warsaw ghetto. Thousands of children made use of the school's breakfast system.[21] Limited primary evidence exists on the use of schooling as a source of food in Warsaw, both because the legalized system was short-lived, and because the children who took part in it 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.

Like their students, educators were also motivated by the income and food they could potentially receive from their occupation. Dawid Sierakowiak was both a student and an educator in the Łódź ghetto, and he tutored many students in the ghetto for pay. He justified his tutoring work, in addition to his regular school work and manual labour, noting "cash is cash, and the main thing is to have something to eat and to survive."[22] He bartered with families for better prices, sometimes refusing to take on a student because he didn't believe it was worth the amount their families 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."[23] 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 their food rations or to purchase necessities. 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.[24] This forced them to pursue their craft in any way that would enable them to make a living. Professor Kellerman, a violinist previously of the Leipzig Conservatory, played his violin outdoors and received pieces of bread and coins from his listeners. His talents as a musician and as a well-paid music teacher sustained him and his wife during their residence in the ghetto.[25]

Musicians also played in cafés and restaurants for wages, to an audience which consisted mainly of the ghetto intelligentsia. The Warsaw pianist Władysław Szpilman was one such musician. During his prewar career, Szpilman performed in concert halls and on the Polish Radio. In the ghetto, he played at venues such as Café Nowoczesna on Nowolipki street to support himself and his family, adapting his livelihood to suit to the ghetto's circumstances. He remarked in his diary, "Life, although so unimportant, had none the less forced me to overcome my apathy and seek some way of earning a living."[26] Adult choirs were another aspect of the formal culture sector in the ghetto. Although no primary documentation could be found revealing their motives, choir performers in Warsaw received benefits such as free meals and the conductor a salary of 300 złóty per month.[27]

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 musicians singing in the streets alongside their children, who collected the coins.[28] In Łódź, Yankele Hershkowitz 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. He was known after every song to cry out "a new song for ten Pfennig and no more" thus, earning an income.[29]

In various forms, culture was used in the ghetto as a method of physical resistance. Through culture, the Jews were able to attain food, medical treatment and other essentials, challenging the German policy of oppression and annihilation. Culture was one of the only ways Jews could express themselves emotionally, and personal expression offered Jews an opportunity to assert their humanity. Theatre, poetry, and singing were more than entertainment: they were modes of social commentary. They expressed resentment towards the German and Jewish authorities, thoughts of revenge, the oppression of the ghetto, and connections to Jewish tradition. Even in Łódź, where cultural activities were heavily supervised, performers managed to covertly express themselves through art. This primarily highlights the lack of passivity among the Jewish population. Jews in the ghetto were actively aware of German injustices and spoke out against them, despite personal risk, as insulting the Germans or maintaining a connection to Jewish religious identity countered German rule and was a punishable offence in the ghetto.

Janina Bauman observed a cabaret performance of "sketches of ghetto life" which exposed the corruption and indifference that characterized the ghetto.[30] Similarly, Mary Berg noted many instances of such criticism during theatrical performances in Warsaw. 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.[31] Unlike the symphony, there are no accounts that suggest theatre performances were suppressed for their open condemnations of ghetto authority, making them a source of popular entertainment in the ghetto. According to actors who performed in ghetto theatrical productions, the ability to be on stage and express themselves was the most important aspect of the art.[32]

Painting offered an opportunity for the artist to visually represent the ghetto how they chose. As the artist is often considered 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."[33] 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, or the corruption of the Order Service.[34] 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."[35]

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,
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,
friendship sunk to the bottom
and now well...there is no one
I can telephone.[56]

Through poetry, Szlengel expressed his animosity of the German policy of ghettoization and its personal impacts on his own life. The poem emphasizes Szlengel's intense, yet ultimately fruitless, desire to speak with those on the other side of the ghetto wall. This resonates with the broader psychological impact of ghettoization, which uprooted and isolated Jews from their previous lives.

Singing provided the same relief as theatre, painting, and poetry. Miriam Harel, a survivor of the Łódź ghetto, stated, "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."[37] 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 singer Yankele Hershkowitz, was one of such songs. Its use of political and social satire pokes fun at 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.[38]

Hershkowitz 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 Hershkowitz for insulting Rumkowski, proof that ridiculing ghetto authority carried consequences, the crowd surrounded him and enabled him to escape arrest.[39] Oskar Rosenfeld also mentioned Hershkowitz's street performances in his diary, recalling a particular song that made fun of the Germans and their girlfriends.[40] He sung this tune directly within range of the Germans 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.[41]

As this excerpt suggests, the song highlights the corruption and disparity between the poor and elite in the ghetto. It particularly criticizes the Jewish Order Police for its collaboration with the Nazis. The Jewish Order Police was forcibly created for the purposes of facilitating the compliance of the Jewish population, enforcing Nazi decrees and assisting with deportations to the labor and death camps.

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. Sometime 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 sung the Polish patriotic song "Hey, marksmen arise!" in a place when declarations of Polish patriotism were banned.[42]

Not only was culture a medium though 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 sustenance. 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.[43] 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 article. 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 recognized that the bond theatre performances were able to form with Jewish culture.[44] Since Nazi policy directly attacked Jewish traditions themselves, maintaining connection to Jewish identity through culture qualifies as resistance.

This connection was established through songs that focus on Palestine, and 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!"[45] 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.[46] 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.[47]

Culture also provided a sense of normalcy or figurative escape from the ghetto, thus acting as 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 spoken upon the importance of this drive to live as a determining factor of survival itself.[48] 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, particularly languages, for future benefits. When he was 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!"[49]

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.[50] Whether one group makes up the majority of ghetto students is not of 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."[51]

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 rather the "wonderful atmosphere, the feeling of being able, even for a short time, to get away from the bitter ghetto reality."[52] 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 other's homes every day to study subjects such as classics and mathematics.[53]

Mary Berg was an attendee of many ghetto education initiatives. A recurring topic in her diary is a graphic art course, wherein 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 suggests that she derived substantial enjoyment from this course, particularly in an entry on February 25, 1941: "The atmosphere is pleasant. I feel as though every day I am visiting another world for a few hours, a world far removed from the ghostly life of the ghetto."[54]

Some ghetto inhabitants clung to culture as a remnant of their prewar 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 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."[55]

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."[56] 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 atmospheres. Gazeta Żydowska reported that a few hours of being in a warm hall in a "truly Jewish atmosphere" of Yiddish speech and music allowed this experience to bring relief.[57] A revue from January 1941 of a performance described the transition from the 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."[58]

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 Nazis 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 Jewish resistance.[59] 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."[60]

Outside of these official institutions, culture was still nevertheless a source of psychological relief. Mary Berg experienced this sense of psychological escape from listening to Professor Kellner play violin 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."[61] 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.

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, group members continued meeting in private. One these members was Leah, whose testimony centers 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.[62]

Leah's experience does not represent the majority, however. 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 be played while the ship is going under: simply to raise spirits.[63]

In the ghettos, cultural activity played a role as psychological resistance. Ghetto inhabitants practiced 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.[64]

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 a sense of culture. Understanding cultural activity as something that people strove to pursue despite known risk and obstacles reinforces its place within the sphere of 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.[65] 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 17, 1944, when the Germans confiscated musical instruments and abruptly brought an end to musical performance in the Łódź ghetto.[66] 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 labor during the day, and would then play in the orchestra without any pay at night.[67]

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 11, 1942, musical life continued underground.[68] Small groups were organized to perform and listen to music in peoples' homes. Furthermore, although the Germans had forbidden non-Jewish music, this continued even after the orchestra was forcibly disbanded for violating that decree. The Polish composer Chopin was one of the forbidden artists; however, musicians

continued to play his lesser-known pieces, and, if questioned, lied and said it was another composer.[69] 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.[70] 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. Performances were held under carbide lamps when the electricity went out, and the audience wrapped themselves in blankets while the performers on stage went blue with cold.[71]

Especially in the Warsaw ghetto, where no extensive legal education network existed, education was a risky endeavor. 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. She and her friends had to carry their books through the ghetto streets under their coats, in full knowledge that if they were caught by the authorities, they would have been killed immediately.[72] Vladka Meed observed her neighbour hurrying her daughter to similar secret classes.[73]

Education 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.

Culture was also practiced as a form of collaboration with the German occupiers. This lies outside the sphere of resistance, but is imperative to note nonetheless. 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 documents as closely to reality as possible while avoiding conclusions based on moral bias. Where this phenomenon is most easily recognized is within the ranks of the Jewish authority figures, the Judenrat, and Jewish 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 Germans in the deportation and murder. Culture potentially calmed the population, reminding them of times before the ghetto and thus making them less fearful and suspicious of what was to come. This calming and nostalgic quality of culture dichotomously could be used both by the population as a method of psychologically resisting German policy, whilst also 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 who requests that music be 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 by arming themselves, 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 used 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 establishment of the Final Solution, the Jews were physically abused and humiliated by the perpetrators. In this context, Jews in the ghettos turned to productions of culture that promised a chance at both physical and psychological survival. Whether it was used as a means of making money, expressing suppressed feelings about the ghetto and related policies, or psychological relief from the oppressing ghetto life, culture became an everyday mode of resistance against the occupying forces and the policies they had imparted.

A significant amount of research could still be done on this subject, 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 and ultimately fruitless at bringing about change, these everyday acts of cultural resistance combated the ideas of the Nazi regime by fighting to survive and actively rejecting 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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