# In the Strongholds of Our Hearts:

## Classifying Self-Help in the Warsaw Ghetto and the Oneg Sabbath Archive as Acts of Multi-Dimensional Resistance and Survival

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*"One spark is hidden in the stronghold of my heart*
*One little spark, but it is all mine;*
*I borrowed it from no one, nor did I steal it*
*For it is of me, and within me."*[1]

- *Hayim Nahman Bialik*

**Introduction**

Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum, a Polish and Jewish historian, writes on June 26th, 1942, of an English radio broadcast circulating the details of the Nazi genocide of Polish Jewry. The day was a Friday, where minutes before sunset the Jewish Sabbath[2] would commence. Ringelblum writes: "The O.S. [Oneg Sabbath] group has fulfilled a great historical mission. It has alarmed the world to our fate, and perhaps saved hundreds of thousands of Polish Jews from extermination…I do not know who of our group will survive, who will be deemed worthy to work through our collected material. But one thing is clear to all of us. Our toils and tribulations, our devotion and constant terror, have not been in vain."[3] The toils and tribulations of which Ringelblum speaks defined the nearly two-and-a-half-years of work by the Oneg Sabbath archive to document the situation of Polish Jewry within and beyond the confines of the Warsaw Ghetto. While the preservation of the archived histories of Warsaw Jewry during the Holocaust was at that moment terrifyingly uncertain to Ringelblum—let alone the future of his fellow Jews in the face of genocide—the relief is palpable and heavy in his words. Ringelblum writes hopefully that

[1] Chaim Aron Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony; the Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan.* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 132.
[2] The Sabbath, also known as the Shabbos or Shabbat, is the traditional day of rest in Judaism, occurring on the seventh day of every week in the Jewish Calendar. The Oneg Sabbath Archive coworkers held official meetings every Saturday for the duration of their work.
[3] Emanuel Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto; the Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum.*, Schocken Books, SB460 (New York: Schocken Books, 1974, 295).

hundreds of thousands of Jews might be saved by Allied intervention in response to the damning and urgent indictment. At the time of the broadcast, 700,000 deaths among the Polish Jewry were recorded. By the culmination of the war, 2.3 million more Polish Jews would die; only 380,000 would live.[4]

Germany had launched its invasion of Warsaw, Poland nearly three years prior—on September 1st, 1939, a day that marked the beginning of World War II. The Seventh Army bombarded the city of Warsaw until its capitulation on September 28th, and officially occupied the city on October 1st.[5] Restrictive ordinances were enacted swiftly and enforced systematically across all of Warsaw's Jewish population. Ever-tightening food rations were instituted, tens of thousands of Jewish refugees were deported and resettled against their will, decrees forbade Jews from moving out of their residences, and arbitrary arrests sent Jews to labor camps weekly.[6] Warsaw Jewry experienced all such oppressions and more before the official imposition of the Warsaw Ghetto on October 2nd, 1940, where Jews were resettled and confined by walls and curfews, cutting off important communication with the Aryan[7] sides of Poland.[8] All across Poland ghettos were constructed and oppressive laws were instituted. The Nazis were intent on crushing the livelihoods of Polish Jewry and dissolving every ounce of agency over their

[4] "Murder of the Jews of Poland," accessed December 11, 2021, https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/fate-of-jews/poland.html.
[5] Barbara Engelking, *The Warsaw Ghetto: A Guide to the Perished City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 37.
[6] Engelking, *The Warsaw Ghetto, 38-39*.
[7] In using this word, I'm guided by the following information: "'A 19th-century linguistics term used to describe the Anod-European languages. The term was subsequently perverted to refer to people who spoke those languages, which the Nazis deemed superior to those people who spoke Semitic languages. Thus, Aryan came to describe people of 'proven' non-Jewish and purely Teutonic 'racial' background. Quoted from "Jewish Children on the Aryan Side," accessed November 18, 2021, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-children-on-the-aryan-side.
[8] Engelking, *The Warsaw Ghetto*, 38-39

collective futures. What followed were the systematic killings of the Jewish populace via routinized mass murders in ghettos and a system of concentration camps across Western Europe.

Having a comprehensive understanding of the atrocities and acts of genocide of Nazi Germany is imperative to productive discussions of the Holocaust. That said, the act of doing history compels us to tell objective and comprehensive stories of the oppressed as well as the oppressors. No organization was more cognizant of this responsibility to history and narrative than the Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto, known as the Oneg Sabbath (O.S.).[9] The conception, organization, and opening archival work of the O.S. is credited to Ringelblum, who as a seasoned social historian and passionate activist "was by conviction an active practitioner of popular education, a communal worker, a political party member, and dedicated member of the people."[10] Primed by his training as an academic and galvanized by his background in activism, Ringelblum secretly collected material testimonials to the Jewish situation at the beginning of the German occupation and composed impersonal historical records of his day-to-day observations. Beginning in May of 1940 and after months of initial personal work, he began recruiting a dedicated staff of Jewish intelligentsia, community investors, and social activists committed to the mission of preserving the situation of the Jews and crimes of the Germans in writing.[11] The collective and covert archival project of the Warsaw ghetto had been set into motion.

The significant historical undertaking of the O.S. archive, despite its secrecy, cannot and indeed should not be analyzed as an insular process. Without surveying the social systems that

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[9] The Hebrew name "Oneg Sabbath" loosely translates to "Sabbath Celebrants" or "Saturday Joy." The archive has taken on different spellings across various primary and secondary sources, including "Oneg Shabbat," "Oneg Szabat," "Oyneg Shabes," "Oneg Shabbath," and many others. The archive is also known as the "Ringelblum Archive" (in memoriam to its founder) and the "Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archive."

[10] Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto; the Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum, x.*

[11] Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto; the Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum, xviii.*

sustained life among Warsaw Jewry, accounts of the O.S. project would be incomplete. Due to the relationships between the O.S. staff and various community organizations, as well as Ringelblum's background in mutual aid and social advocacy, the work of the O.S. became inextricably connected to the ghetto's systems of social self-help. Warsaw's self-help infrastructure both buoyed the Jewish community in the face of Nazi oppression and "furnished an even greater opportunity for the archives to function" within the enclosure of the ghetto.[12] While the O.S. archive project and the interwoven systems of Jewish self-help have notable differences in their procedures and purposes within the ghetto, one crucial fact unites them: they are both examples of non-violent resistance to Nazi oppression. Given stereotypes about Jewish passivity and the perceived lack of action by European Jews against oppression, non-violent instances of resistance in the Holocaust are oftentimes left unacknowledged. Considering the oppression and genocide faced by Warsaw Jewry and their efforts to sustain not only physical life through traditions of self-help but to create Jewish memories of the Holocaust through writing, the O.S. project challenges assumptions of passivity in the face of genocide

This paper traces a brief history of self-help in Europe and within Jewish tradition, then emphasizes its significance to the story of the ghetto and to the livelihoods of Warsaw Jewry. Next, this paper examines the development, function, and mission of the Oneg Sabbath archive, including the specific parameters for the collection, commission, and creation of archival material, its personnel and their significance to the project, and how the shifting context of the war and growing Jewish knowledge of the German's Final Solution altered the focus of the project. Through exposition in both sections I will stitch together the fabrics of two Jewish

[12] Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto; the Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum, xix.*

traditions, self-help and the written word, and demonstrate how they both separately and cooperatively constituted intentional and powerful resistance to the genocide of Jews by Nazi Germany. Finally, through the deconstruction of the myth of Jewish passivity under Nazi oppression and its relation to Israeli commemorative narratives and definitions of Jewish resistance, I argue that historians must respect the agency of historical actors and moreover recognize their intentions in the past before laying claim to their acts in the present. **By closely engaging with archival documents preserved by Warsaw Jewry, I will show that the O.S. archive and the interwoven enactments of self-help were instances of intentional historical, physical, cultural, and spiritual resistance against the oppressive Nazi regime, as well as acts of physical and metaphysical survival stemming from cosmic traditions of Jewish culture.**

**Crises of Survival: Jewish Self-Help and Warsaw Mutual Aid**

Popular education's instruction of the Holocaust has often centered the sweeping acts of violence unleashed upon the Jews of Europe. Much less attention has been given to Jewish resistance. When Jewish acts of resistance are brought up, they usually involve sensationalized and impossible stories of unbreakable spirit and true grit. Mundane efforts of Jews to maintain what livelihood they could in the face of oppression and genocide have been overlooked, discounting the ways they worked to fulfill the everyday need to feed oneself, find warm clothes, and educate one's children. As a consequence, insufficient attention is paid to instances of Jewish daily survival and the ghetto welfare structures which supported these daily acts against Nazi

institutional oppression. The institutions of Jewish self-help and community mutual aid are a crucial component to the story of the Warsaw ghetto in which the work of the O.S. archive took place.

Self-help can be defined simply as contributions made and actions undertaken by individual members towards the support and survival of whole communities. In an effort to diversify our understanding of self-help, it is important to view its presence within the broader context of European resistance and in relation to traditions present in both Judaism and the city of Warsaw. Within Jewish tradition, self-help runs parallel to the practice of *Tzedaka*, which derives its meaning from the Hebrew work *tzedek,* directly translating to "justice."[13] *Tzedaka* is practiced as a self-governing system of taxation of the Jewish community members, who in the pursuit of justice give substantial portions of their annual net income (a minimum of 10 percent) to the poor and needy.[14] In an emic sense *tzedaka* derives meaning from the word justice, however the practice has evolved beyond financial aid, today becoming synonymous with mutual community support and charity work among young Jews. That said, the concept of self-taxation is necessary to our diagnosis of self-help traditions and arises later in our discussion of programs within the Warsaw ghetto. Self-help appears among European instances of justice and aid as well. During World War II, self-help was a necessary practice for the preservation of at-risk communities across Europe, emerging out of "pre-existing welfare and political links" from far-left political groups.[15] This necessity for self-help united not only Jews and non-Jews,

[13] "What Is Tzedakah?"
[14] "What Is Tzedakah?"
[15] Bob Moore, "Integrating Self-Help into the History of Jewish Survival in Western Europe," in *Jewish Histories of the Holocaust*, ed. Norman J.W. Goda, 1st ed., New Transnational Approaches (Berghahn Books, 2014), 193–208, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qd11w.14, 198.

but groups deeply divided by political and religious beliefs, with factors such as class solidarity and the dire need for social welfare contributing to actors setting aside their personal differences.[16] Additionally, European self-help was primarily done illicitly and in secret, emphasizing strategies of collective economic power during the 1920s and 30s to aid comrades in secretly fleeing fascist persecution.[17] The origins of European self-help in far-left politics and its strategies of leveraging both class unity and communal economic power carry over to enactments of self-help in the Warsaw ghetto.

Within the city of Warsaw, self-help systems extended from a nearly "two-thousand-year-old tradition of mutual aid" prior to the establishment of the ghetto.[18] Warsaw's network of social support leading up to World War II was comprised of a wide array of interlocking and co-supportive organizations, many of which were driven through the leadership and consistent advocacy of Ringelblum and adjacent O.S. coworkers. One organization which typifies this network is the Joint Distribution Committee, also known as the Joint. The Joint was a leading international welfare organization that was invaluable to the communities of Warsaw through free loan societies and more generalized public service during the skyrocketing oppression of Jews in the 1930s.[19] Beyond Warsaw, the Joint was in service to all of Poland, "supervising the activities of particular organizations, stimulating them to undertake work in new

[16] Moore, "Integrating Self-Help into the History of Jewish Survival in Western Europe," 194.
[17] Moore, "Integrating Self-Help into the History of Jewish Survival in Western Europe," 195
[18] Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto; the Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum, xix.*
[19] Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archive*, Helen and Martin Schwartz Lectures in Jewish Studies (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 98.

fields, activating Jewish social life, coordinating the work of separate organizations and attempting to give an answer to *new* economic problems of Jewish life."[20]

At the outset of World War II, communities across Poland including Warsaw and its localized branches of the Joint were faced with the dilemma of a lack of "experience or experts in the fields of social help," exacerbated and in-part caused by the mass departure of Polish and Jewish social work leaders from Warsaw.[21] As a testament to Warsaw's commitment to self-help, the leadership of the Joint remained in the city, and eventually through its "*spirit of constructivism*" and emphasis on economic revitalization via tertiary welfare organizations became the foundation for self-help work in the Warsaw ghetto.[22] Ringelblum was included in that group of social leadership, serving as the head of the Jewish Self-Help Society (Z.S.S.), "an offshoot of the Joint," prior to an through the occupation of Warsaw.[23] His leadership, alongside an established network of coworkers within Warsaw self-help, provided the ghetto with important community foundations in the face of oppression, while also allowing him access to daily news and reports about the situation of Jews across Poland to build his early material collections for the archive. Many of Ringelblum's coworkers would eventually become personnel of the O.S. archive, recruited by Ringelblum for their deep community connections and expertise in organization, management, and writing.

The situation of the Jews in Warsaw following the occupation of the city and the imposition of the ghetto called for the continued investment in and creation of methods and

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[20] E. Ringelblum, *The History of Social Aid in Warsaw During the War*, in Joseph Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!--: Selected Documents from the Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives "O.S." ("Oneg Shabbath")* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1986), 340.
[21] Ibidem
[22] E. Ringelblum, *The History of Social Aid in Warsaw During the War, 341*.
[23] Emmanuel Ringelblum, *O.S. ["Oyneg Shabbath"], 4*.

models of self-help discussed above. The institutional oppression of the Nazi regime was "systematic, planned, and organized," and was intended to destroy all pillars which supported Jewish culture, community, faith, livelihood, and historical memory.[24] As early as 1934 the Nazi regime began its categorization of Jewish people as, to invoke the philosopher Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer,* "a 'bare life' stripped of all its value," a subhuman to be excluded from society to leave it as sole province of the privileged Aryan.[25] Economic persecution as early as 1933 took the form of anti-Jewish boycotts, reclassification of professional job titles, mass evictions of leadership positions, and the liquidation of Jewish businesses.[26] Movement of Jews between and through cities and states required express permission that was rarely if ever given, and the imposition of forced identification via the Star of David on patches and armbands routinized their otherness to the non-Jewish public.[27] The structural groundwork to dehumanizing the Jewish populace was completed, soon after followed by the confinement of Jews within the ghettos.

Stripped of their economic networks, belongings, and homes, Jews in the ghetto were left without schools, familiar places of worship, community centers and meeting places, denied the most basic fabrics of society, relegated to destitution and starvation via food rations insufficient to keep one alive. Such was the purpose of the ghetto. To compound these conditions, labor camps were created for the express purpose of destroying the bodies and minds of ghetto inhabitants, particularly young people and men of working age.[28] Warsaw was notorious for its

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[24] Ignasi Marti and Pablo Fernandez, "The Institutional Work of Oppression and Resistance: Learning from the Holocaust," *Organization Studies* 34, no. 8 (2013): 1195–1223, https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840613492078, 1198.
[25] Marti and Fernandez, "The Institutional Work of Oppression and Resistance," 1199.
[26] Marti and Fernandez, "The Institutional Work of Oppression and Resistance," 1200.
[27] Ibidem
[28] Emmanuel Ringelblum, *O.S. ["Oneg Shabbath"],* in Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!, 13*.

severe abuses of camp internees, with O.S. staff member Rabbi Simon Hubberband's account describing backbreaking physical labor, humiliating and dehumanizing exercises led by Nazis, and sporadic, torturous beatings over the course of a week at labor camp Dynasy in the Summer of 1940.[29] Such habitual dehumanization ripped the life out of countless Jews, and in the worst of cases rendered them as *Muselmanner*,[30] described by Ignasi Marti and Pablo Fernandez as "persons utterly destroyed, devastated, broken physically" and psychologically by the life in camp without the physical nor spiritual recourse to recover.[31] Given these oppressions inflicted upon the Jews and their crippling effects on individual productivity, Warsaw Jewry turned to models of co-dependent self-help imbedded in both cultural and city tradition to combat the regime's oppressive measures and sustain their community.

Self-help was carried out by numerous institutions within the ghetto. By far the most important for the day-to-day wellbeing of the ghetto were the House Committees (H.C.). Typically based within community apartments, the H.C. numbered almost 2,000 at their peak and fulfilled many important functions in the ghetto, including general support of the needy, provision of medical care, serving as communal housing for ghetto inhabitants, and acting as venues for social, cultural, and educational events.[32] As Ringelblum put it, "no aspect of wartime Jewish life was unconnected with the house-committee."[33] Experiencing its greatest successes during 1940, the H.C. were rather provincial, adopting a small-scale and neighborly approach to self-help that emphasized cautious and localized aid for the inhabitants of one apartment or

[29] H. Hubberband, *Dynasy — Summer of 1940,* in Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!, 265*.
[30] The origin of the word *Muselmann* is unknown. Marti and Fernandez contend it may have originated from Auschwitz and spread to other camps.
[31] Marti and Fernandez, "The Institutional Work of Oppression and Resistance," 1201.
[32] Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!, 337*.
[33] Emmanuel Ringelblum, *O.S. ["Oneg Shabbath"], 17*.

house, and additionally compelling monthly contributions from its residents.[34] In an addendum to a description of life in an apartment house acting as an H.C., an unknown community leader describes the inspiration for their creation: "The potential of communal and economic energy was so high initially that any spark was sufficient to set in motion the still great possibilities of 1940. Multidirectional activities, full of noblest ambitions and greatest aspirations were running full speed with a force never yet encountered."[35] In this sense, the significance of the H.C. lay both in their role as a localized system of support specifically benefitting the residents of each housing block and as a wider movement which helped to ignite belief in self-help and thus produce social rigor amongst the Jewish populace.

In contrast to the localized approach of the H.C., the Jewish Welfare Society (J.W.S) provided centralized self-help community aid to the entire ghetto. While the H.C. were an essential self-help network, they could not supplement the needs of the ghetto alone. Evidenced by an archived letter from the J.W.S. in August of 1941, many of the H.C. residential groups were too poor to fully provide for their house the necessary support to survive, and relied too heavily on the support of their neighbor, often feeling "personally obliged to him for humane aid."[36] Furthermore, several public service buildings including boarding-schools, public kitchens, clinics, and refugee-points had no H.C. within them to support their invaluable community aid.[37] Thus, via the pooled contributions of the Warsaw Jewry through the sacred duty of the Monthly Rate and special fundraising campaigns, the J.W.S. satisfied the need for centralized social aid to

[34] *A Description of Life in an Apartment House in Warsaw, Gesoa Str. 19,* in Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!*, 149.
[35] *A Description of Life in an Apartment House in Warsaw, Gesoa Str. 19, 152*.
[36] *Jewish Welfare* Society, in Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!*, 347.
[37] Ibidem

the entirety of the ghetto.[38] Such aid was focused on fundraising for particular causes within the ghetto, in addition to the creation of funds for specialized social causes. The J.W.S. issued a collection of funds specifically set aside for the transportation and settlement of refugees, in addition to fundraising for the insurance of the Warsaw Sick Fund.[39] Additionally, the J.W.S. increased the provision of lunches in both quality and quantity by distributing release slips from Nazi imposed rations, organizing the feeding of children in their private homes, and enacting the "Basket Action" initiative which procured fresh produce and bread for orphanages, refugee points and other public service operations.[40]

While the networks of the H.C. and J.W.S. provided ghetto inhabitants with a wide array of communal aid and basic needs, more specialized self-help undertakings were equally as important in sustaining community and combatting Nazi oppression. Educational organizations and clandestine schooling were significant in maintaining the academic training and social stimulation of Jewish students in Warsaw. Buoyed by self-help models of fundraising and in the wake of the Nazi's closure of Jewish schools—and thus the mass exodus of Jewish students—now jobless teachers and headmasters secretly organized teaching operations through secret study groups and specialized curriculum within the H.C.[41] Teaching subjects from basic cleanliness to Jewish literary works to social and ethical education in both Hebrew and Yiddish, the primary goal of clandestine schools was not to educate the entire ghetto.[42] Rather, ghetto secondary schooling sought to provide the space that might save children from the physical and

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[38] *Jewish Welfare* Society, *349*.
[39] *Jewish Welfare* Society, *350*.
[40] *Jewish Welfare* Society, *352*.
[41] *A Preliminary Study In Teaching People During the* War, in Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!*, 469.
[42] *An Outline of Pedagogical Activity in the Alimentation Points on Karmelicka Street 29, Nowolipki Str. 39, and Krochmalna Str.* 96, in Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!*, 474.

mental miseries of the ghetto environment. Clandestine schools were connected to efforts to provide cultural spaces for the ghetto, with one of the key contributors to such efforts being the Yiddish Cultural Organization (Y.I.K.O.R.). Y.I.K.O.R. was created to "introduce knowledge of Yiddish to the masses of the employees in the Jewish social institutions," and further to preserve the language alongside renewed practice of cultural traditions.[43] The most important aspects of Y.I.K.O.R.'s community work was the arrangement for public cultural performances and the programming of Yiddish cultural events for youth and children, in an effort to reassert the Jewish cultural base under Nazi oppression. Adjacent and interconnected to the provision of general and cultural education was the O.S.'s archival work, as they worked to preserve these instances of community edification for future Jews to read and learn from, thereby extending self-help efforts beyond the Warsaw ghetto. The educational and cultural foundations of self-help in the ghetto, alongside the O.S. archives' role in preserving those foundations, signify a concerted effort by Warsaw Jewry to maintain their academic rigor and rich cultural life for the purpose of continuing the production of influential Jewish intelligentsia in opposition to the Nazi agenda.

Community aid in Warsaw, whether the supplying of nutritious meals, rekindling of civil edification, housing of the needy or protection of refugees endured as a result of Warsaw Jewry's commitment to self-help and cultural practices of *tzedaka.* The efforts of community leaders to rally support for mutual aid, and to create reliable centralized and localized support curtailed the mission of the Nazis to destroy the lives of Warsaw Jewry. The O.S. archive and the historical actors who reflected on the aid have testified to the effectiveness of self-help in sustaining Jewish communal life amidst the oppressive circumstances of the ghetto. The archive is interconnected

[43] Hersz Wasser, *Yiddish Culture Organization "YIKOR" Warsaw Ghetto, 1940*-1942, in Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!*, 442.

with self-help in Warsaw, having preserved invaluable information and figures relating to the multitude of operations, organizations, and events which occurred. Through the detailed analysis of the origins and instances of self-help in the context of Nazi oppression, and the O.S.'s role in preserving those instances, we can see how both extend the legacy of Jewish action in the face of oppression.

## Section 2: Oneg Sabbath: The Procedures, Mission, and Resistance of the Warsaw Ghetto Archive

The story of self-help resistance to Nazi oppression in the ghetto is the backdrop for the undertaking of the Oneg Sabbath archive, beckoning Ringelblum towards the challenging and necessary historical mission of documenting adversity and resistance to it, as well as the reclamation of livelihood by Warsaw Jewry. The archive curated documents and monographs with numerous topics besides those of self-help and mutual aid, capturing the day-to-day survival and self-documentation efforts of Jews in Warsaw. As such, the O.S. can be seen as an extension of self-help community action to preserve Warsaw Jewry, collecting histories and personal testimonies of individual Jews, and thus engaged in preservation of Jewish life beyond physical safety. Indeed, Nazi Germany's plans to kill the Jews was coupled with the intention to "write their history and determine their posterity" following the completion of genocide, evidenced by the presence of "Nazi film crews who roamed the ghetto to depict Jews as filthy degenerates."[44] As such, the archive, its staff, and its recruited contributors were willfully, though in many cases unknowingly, engaged in an act of metaphysical survival, embroiled in the shared struggle for

[44] Kassow, "Documenting Catastrophe," 173

agency over the historical memory of Jews in opposition to Nazi attempts to silence them. Through description of the creation, function, and shifting goals of the O.S., the necessity for the archive as survival through memory and thus memory as resistance to oppression will be demonstrated. Furthermore, the feasibility of the archive as a potential tool to halt the death and suffering of Jews will be considered, insofar as the O.S. proprietors took concerted action via the use and dissemination of archive resources as the reality of the Final Solution surfaced.

The previous discussions of self-help in this paper have primarily surrounded the physical survival of Jews through pillars of self-help in the Warsaw ghetto. That said, this paper emphasizes that enactments of self-help and linked archival processes of the O.S. are both examples of physical and metaphysical survival by Warsaw Jewry. In acknowledgement of the unsettled distinction between physical and metaphysical—though overlap between the two is inevitable—it is important to clarify their use and definitions. Put simply, physical survival is the act of staying alive amidst Nazi oppressions. Metaphysical survival, in contrast, can be described as any act which continues the intangible existence of the Jews in anticipation of loss of physical life, with an emphasis on the creation and preservation of history, identity, memory, traditions, and possibility. Metaphysical survival can also encompass those acts which further Jewish legacies in the absence of physical life, and thus can be continued by anyone, regardless of their proximity to the deceased "subject of survival." Finally, metaphysical survival can be aligned with the Jewish commandment to live, insofar as Jewish victims during the Holocaust may never have had the choice to continue living, and so were compelled to extend their survival through limited opportunities of oral and written memorialization while they could. The O.S. archive exemplifies these conceptions of metaphysical survival by collecting physical material which is

embodied with the experiences, emotions, wills, and last testaments of Jewish identities and lived histories.

Thus far Nazi oppression has been described in sufficient enough detail to confer a general understanding of the forms it took, in addition to its scale and effect on the Jewish populace. Public reports translated from the O.S. archive assert that the Nazi's imposition of anti-Jewish administrative ordinances, appropriately summarized as broad-scale resettlement, eradication of sanctioned economic and employment opportunities, and the creation of ghettos, were perceived by the O.S. as initial means to reach an eventual end. The knowledge of the Jews to the grand scheme of genocide was delivered by the Polish Underground in February of 1942 and originated from the death camp in Chelmno, making clear the connections between the last three years of oppression and the Nazi's Final Solution.[45] One O.S. report written in April of 1942 entitled "The Second Stage" situated these ordinances as a prelude to genocide and emphasized the ordinances as successfully othering the Jewish subject, citing the routinized deportations and mass murders of Jews by both Nazi soldiers and Aryan civilians in seven Polish cities as evidence.[46] Although the initial ordinances undeniably wreaked significant economic and social hardships on the Jews, the main goal of the ordinances was to prepare the Jewish populace for systematic extermination, with the endgame of the Nazi agenda being the total genocide of the Jewish people.

The eventual plans of genocide, known as the Final Solution, and the accompanying oppressions which arranged the populace for the execution of such plans, effectively rendered

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[45] Engelking, *The Warsaw Ghetto*, 667

[46] *The Second Stage: April 1942, Warsaw ghetto, Oyneg Shabes report "Drugi etap ["The second stage"] on mass destruction of Jews on Polish lands*, in "The Ringelblum Archive Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto. Oyneg Shabes. People and Works - Central Judaic Library," 329-336.

the Jews as purposeless subjects to the Nazis. This status of purposelessness conferred by the Nazi's knowledge of their eventual demise removed all incentive for German soldiers to police the quotidian lives of Jews—including the material collection and written projects associated with the O.S.—beyond the theft of their material wealth and physical punishment. In other words, what use was there in wasting time and energy on watching out for trivial rule-breaking when the physical and historical genocide of the Jews was all but assured by destruction of sacred property, seizure of economic capital, and the systematic Final Solution? In an evaluation of the nearly three years of research and collection by the O.S. up to December of 1942, Ringelblum affirms the Nazi's attitude of indifference, writing how educational lectures and illegal political propaganda circulated freely.[47] This sort of quasi-freedom provided ample opportunity for not only the blossoming of self-help, but for the O.S. to "develop and branch out," recruiting staffers and contributors and beginning the unified work of material collection.[48]

Ringelblum states that he began "collecting material on contemporary times" in October of 1939.[49] At that point Ringelblum was in charge of the Z.S.S., furnishing him early access to valuable material which would build the base of the O.S. archive. His leadership for Warsaw self-help and extensive background working in mutual aid and with Warsaw academia connected him to a broad network of Jews, which he first consolidated and organized in May of 1940, capable of undertaking the creation of a ghetto-wide underground archive.[50] Over a year after the first collection of writings, he hosted the first inaugural meeting of the O.S. archive on

[47] Emmanuel Ringelblum, *O.S. ["Oyneg Shabbath"], 5*.
[48] Ibidem
[49] Emmanuel Ringelblum, *O.S. ["Oyneg Shabbath"], 4*.
[50] Ibidem

November 22nd, 1940, at his apartment at 18 Leszno Street, where the archive coworkers met to firmly establish its structure, function, and overall mission.[51]

Though no copies of an original mission statement, translated or otherwise, were found through research, the archived writings of Ringelblum grant us a sufficient idea of the O.S.' historical mission and role within the Warsaw ghetto. Ringelblum articulates the general aim of the archive as the "presentation of a photographically true and detailed picture of what the Jewish population had to experience, to think and to suffer."[52] Ringelblum continues by emphasizing the nature of the work as historical, principally focusing on comprehensiveness and objectivity, situating the archive as the authoritative body of information from which to learn and write about the situation of Warsaw and the Holocaust at large.[53] In consideration of the historical purpose of the archive and its immense responsibility to supply the future historian with both proof and details of how genocide transpires, the mission had to be kept secret. The O.S. operated on a need-to-know basis, avowed only to a few outside of its staff, through the entire course of the project. The archive's aspects of objectivity (disclosing the complete and detailed situation of Warsaw Jewry), comprehensiveness (leaving no facet of ghetto life and Nazi oppression untouched), and necessary secrecy are made evident through later analysis of its personnel structure and procedures. The O.S.'s historicity and clandestine nature are crucial pieces of its mission to sustain Jewish declaration of truth amidst Nazi censorship and serve as first-person indictments of the crimes of Nazi genocide.

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[51] Engelking, *The Warsaw Ghetto, 660*.
[52] Emmanuel Ringelblum, *O.S. ["Oyneg Shabbath"], 8*.
[53] Emmanuel Ringelblum, *O.S. ["Oyneg Shabbath"], 9*.

The colossal scope of the O.S. project and its purely historical quality demanded a productive and organized staff, which exhibited an exceptional strength of will and standards of competency in the realms of academic composition, social work, political radicalism, and project management. Far from a rag-tag assemblage of diarists, staff were intentionally recruited by Ringelblum and other comrades for their skills and outstanding work-ethics, and further vetted to ensure their reliability. Hersz Wasser, one of the secretaries for the archive, arrived as a refugee from Lodz with a background in the Polish Zionist Left, and acted as a financial bookkeeper and a connection to the refugee populations in Warsaw.[54] Rabbi Simon Hubberband, lauded by Ringelblum and his associates for his unmatched talents as a writer and historian, worked for the Jewish Association for Mutual Welfare and was the chief writer and curator of material surrounding religious life in the ghetto.[55] Rachel Auerbach, one of only three surviving members of the O.S., served the ghetto through her leadership in operating soup kitchens while authoring research pieces on hunger in the ghetto, utilizing her close proximity to ghetto inhabitants through the soup kitchens to interview them for the archives' collections.[56] Menachem Kon was a "voluntary worker and cultural leader" within the ghetto who served as the O.S. treasurer, in addition to begin their biggest financial sponsor.[57] While countless more names deserve our attention, such as director of the Joint and O.S. collaborator Icchak Gitterman, or Szmuel Winter who served in both the Judenrat[58] and O.S. as head of the Supply Section, the above names

[54] Engelking, *The Warsaw Ghetto, 662*.
[55] Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!, 55*.
[56] Emmanuel Ringelblum, *O.S. ["Oyneg Shabbath"], 17*.
[57] Engelking, *The Warsaw Ghetto, 662*.
[58] The Judenrat was a Nazi appointed Jewish Council in the Warsaw ghetto. They oversaw the implementation and operation of Nazi ordinances such as distribution of rations, health and sanitation, the Jewish police, and the postal service. Furthermore, they served as the intermediary between the Warsaw Jewry and the Nazi oversees of the ghetto and were often criticized by the ghetto community for ineffective community aid and internal corruption.

demonstrate the diverse political, social, and professional backgrounds of the O.S. staff as well as the intentionality with which they were chosen.

The O.S. operational committee, which can be seen as the directing body of leadership for the archive, was divided into several branches. The executive body was headed by Ringelblum and included two secretaries, Hersz Wasser and Eliahu Gutkowski, in addition to the copyist Izrael Lichtensztajin.[59] All of these men were heavily involved in the ghetto relief organization known as the Aleynhilf,[60] which was invaluable for the growth of the O.S.[61] The executive body was concerned with the continuous and efficient function of the archive system, engaged in day-to-day work such as financial bookkeeping and fundraising, while also making "decisions about strategy and research agendas" and directing the recruitment of archive coworkers.[62] Another auxiliary council, composed of social activists "from various movements…supported the work of the archive morally and financially," likely working to cover the costs of writing supplies and extra food to archive contributors,[63] and perhaps offering direction to archival staff on what merited further research and attention within the ghetto.[64] Another subsection was comprised of the various coworkers designated with "[collecting]

[59] Engelking, *The Warsaw Ghetto, 661*.
[60] The Aleynhilf was one of the core self-help and relief networks of the Warsaw Ghetto. Ringelblum maintained strong connections between the Aleynhilf and the O.S., using their relationship to find potential contributors to the archive and even intertwining their finances. Kassow, "Documenting Catastrophe."
[61] Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History?*, 147
[62] Samuel Kassow, "Documenting Catastrophe: The Ringelblum Archive and the Warsaw Ghetto," in *Jewish Histories of the Holocaust*, ed. Norman J.W. Goda, 1st ed., New Transnational Approaches (Berghahn Books, 2014), 173–92, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qd11w.13, 181.
[63] One of the controversies surrounding the O.S. archive was its privileged access and connections to soup kitchens. In order to ensure that its contributors and subjects for case studies would survive the ghetto, Ringelblum would often call on community correspondents such as Auerbach to provide additional rations, among other basic needs, to archive contributors. These practices by the archive constituted a moral dilemma which was not lost on the archive staff, evidenced by the various archived self-reflections of coworkers.
[64] Ibidem

materials…collecting news, noting down events, making observation, [and] researching and describing the occupation," composed of academics and accomplished writers such as Hubberband and Auerbach.[65] The writers were also joined in their work by a core of "interviewers and information gatherers," whose role was more expendable than the writing staff and thus undertook the more dangerous task of venturing deep into the recesses of the ghetto community.[66] Finally, there was a necessity for a technical staff, headed by the educator Izrael Lichtensztajin, who had sole "physical possession of the materials as they flowed into the archive," and with the exception of "Ringelblum and a few others, actually knew the archive's location."[67] The technical staff seems to have been charged with the maintenance and organization of the ever-growing mountains of physical material collected. In summarizing the personnel structure, the meticulous division of labor is indicative of the intentionality of the archive to play to each contributor's strengths.

The detailed composition of the O.S. personnel speaks to the archive as an incredible feat of organization amidst the difficulties of ghetto life, and as such points to the tradition of self-help—whereby Jews support other Jews in some financial or physical way— as crucial to the enterprise of survival via written memory through the archival process. The same connection can be drawn for the identities of the O.S. personnel themselves, insofar as self-help bound Jews of different cultural backgrounds and political leanings for the greater good of producing the archive for future generations. Furthermore, and as a result of the deep-seated role of self-help in Warsaw, the connections of several O.S. personnel to communitive organizations such as the

[65] Ibidem
[66] Kassow, "Documenting Catastrophe," 181
[67] Ibidem

Joint, House Committees, and the Aleynhilf allowed for the comprehensive and efficient recruitment of Jews across the spectrum of class, politics, and cultural involvement to be researched and interviewed. The structure of the O.S. inextricably links it to the traditions and organizations of self-help in Warsaw, which helped to fulfill its comprehensive historical mission to document the situation of the ghetto and situates the archive as an intentional act of self-survival by Warsaw Jewry.

In order to further develop and complete an extensive analysis of how the archive functioned and upheld its commitment to objectivity, secrecy, and self-help, it is imperative to examine the procedures of document collection, commission, and creation. We can begin with collection, or *zamling*, which from the beginning was the priority of the archive's intake of material.[68] In combing through a list of materials included in the O.S. compiled by Wasser, all manner of fragments of the ghetto were noted no matter how mundane, including but not limited to personal stories, diary entries, lists of refugees, military reports and ordinances, children's poetry, and various letters of communications. Some examples of titles and subjects which appeared in this particular list of archive fragments were "memorandum for contracting typhus," "Rogowy's letter about principles of taxation," "invitation to a seminar, Hebrew," and a "Yiddish textbook for the third grade."[69] Other physical prints of note were receipts, advertisements, and leaflets from soup kitchens, emergency services, and various welfare societies, including the noteworthy collection of miscellaneous ration cards and membership cards of the ghetto. Anything that would provide "future historians insights into the life of the ghetto" was collected

[68] Kassow, "Documenting Catastrophe," 182

[69] *June-July 1942, Warsaw ghetto, [Hersh Wasser], lists of materials included in the Oyneg Shabes archives (fragments),* in "The Ringelblum Archive Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto. Oyneg Shabes. People and Works - Central Judaic Library," 53-79.

and stored within the archive.[70] Wasser's list includes the title of the material collected in addition to an associated codename, which for some choice archival entries reveals collaboration with extraneous organizations. One example is an archived report of the United Fighting Underground Organization of the Warsaw Ghetto (Warsaw Underground), originally dispatched to the Polish Government in Exile in London on November 15th, 1942, and subsequently collected by the O.S. for posterity.[71] Such extraneous reports accompanied large swaths of miscellaneous material local to the Warsaw ghetto, providing historians with numerous possibilities as to what written material ghetto inhabitants produced and consumed through their internment.

In addition to collection, the commission of more specific writings for the archive was essential to the mission of the O.S., developing as an extension of archive work after the initial success in collection. For the purposes of this paper, commission can be described as the process of locating, recruiting, researching, and writing on specialized areas of interest and concern within the Warsaw ghetto. While commission also encompassed the efforts of O.S. coworkers to encourage certain ghetto inhabitants to write personal diary entries or daily journals, Jewish intelligentsia's conduction of internal ghetto research and engagement in writing was most significant in amounting material for the archive.

Monographs and research focused on all manner of subject matter, ranging from Jewish-Polish-German relations, early acts of resistance, forms of aid for the poor, school systems, religious life, the economic situations and strategies of the Jews, and several other

[70] Ibidem
[71] Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!, 34*.

topics and subtopics.[72] Analysis of an outline for a particular monograph preserved within the archive, entitled *On the Situation of the Jewish Quarter in Warsaw in the Year 1941, in Numbers*, attests to their wide scope, as it included evaluations of population and identity, food supply, sanitation, mortality rates, and both social and economic aid.[73] Archived alongside this outline is the plan for an informative interview of workers, which included questions about their structure of occupation, rate of employment, source of raw materials, difficulties of particular industries, and their perceptions on constructive aid for their chosen line of work, among other useful inquiries.[74] This outline is a representative example of the monograph and interview structures employed by the O.S. writers, and validates the interests of the archive to document comprehensive perspectives and truths of the ghetto experience as opposed to articles of a more exploratory academic nature.

Considering the commission and curation of academic material for the archive raises a key question: how would they decide what subject matter would be commissioned, and moreover who would be recruited for the writing itself? An initial answer is quite self-evident: the O.S. core staff of writers, well-versed in their respective disciplines and in ghetto daily life, would identify the need for research on a particular aspect of ghetto life and write it themselves. Such an approach decreased the difficult work of first vetting a participant for reliability and then convincing them to undertake the arduous work. The close and personal relationships of the O.S. staff to potential contributors, evidenced by their wide range of professional, academic, and

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[72] *Tentative topics: Early 1942 [?], Warsaw ghetto. Anonymous. General topics for monographs on Jewish settlements (shtetls) during the occupation*, in "The Ringelblum Archive Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto. Oyneg Shabes. People and Works - Central Judaic Library," 132.
[73] *An Outline For a Monograph (On the Situation of the Jewish Quarter in Warsaw in the Year 1941, in Numbers)*, in Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!*, 166-168.
[74] *An Outline For a Monograph (On the Situation of the Jewish Quarter in Warsaw in the Year 1941, in Numbers), 168-169*.

social connections, also made recruitment and commission work less difficult. The diverse backgrounds of the O.S. staff not only afforded the archive connections to many trusted individuals who undertook writing projects, but also proximity to untapped populations of ghetto inhabitants who could offer material aside from scholarly work. Similar to how O.S. staff members were assigned heads of departments and subjects within the archive themselves, staff would connect with writers who had expertise in particular subjects, allowing for the simple delegation of topics for their writing. This explanation is also self-evident, and additionally supported by the previous demonstrations of Ringelblum's recruitment strategies. Just as Ringelblum used his status to recruit the archive's core leadership, the O.S. coworkers utilized their positions to request and direct all manner of written academic monographs and material.

In addition to the relationships between the O.S. staff and the potential contributors, the archive instituted public questionnaires and competitions which compelled ghetto inhabitants of all backgrounds and educational training to participate in the project. Of course, the true objectives of these events and sessions were never revealed to applicants or interviewees. Prior to contacting individuals for interviews, O.S. policy required the investigation of "character" in addition to community and political background.[75] Following this preclearance procedure conversations would take place, although no notes would be taken by O.S. staff during the meetings themselves, disguising the actual purpose of sessions and keeping suspicion at a minimum.[76] In terms of commissioning monographs from external contributors, archive staff would pretend they were "collecting information on the city which was indispensable to the work of the *Landsmannschaten*," a mutual aid society of the ghetto branching out of the widely trusted

[75] Emmanuel Ringelblum, *O.S. ["Oyneg Shabbath"], 11*.
[76] Ibidem

Z.S.S.[77] In the words of Ringelblum, "most people played dumb, feigning ignorance of the objective of our work," and while such secrecy undoubtedly hampered the quality and scope of material, protecting the integrity of the archive was most important.

The structures of questionnaires and competitions possess an aspect of fastidious historicity and comprehensiveness, intent on capturing all dimensions of a particular subject matter and on efficiently gathering useful information and perspectives. Judging from one archived enquiry questionnaire the questions were drawn from several subtopics of interest in relation to the broad subject at hand, splitting a series of specific inquiries into each subtopic. The questions themselves are both descriptive (numerical data of inhabitants, labor procedures, administration of funds, systems of relief organizations, etc.) and normative (attitudes about Jewish relations with Aryan populations, problems with ghetto institutions, opinions on refugee populations, impact of Nazi oppressions, and miscellaneous personal experiences.)[78] The O.S. questionnaires also took a marked interest in the archival of youth experiences, evidenced by a specially designed "Survey of Jewish Youth in Warsaw" for youth aged 14-21 years old which collected information on family circumstances, social movements, employment, education, and culture.[79]

Competitions, while much more selective of interviewees and submissions, were constructed similarly to the questionnaires, encouraging the writing on wide arrays of themes,

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[77] Ibidem

[78] *[Enquiry Questionnaire's]*, in Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!*, 24-26.

[79] *Survey of Jewish Youth in Warsaw* (covering young people from 14 to 21 years of age): *Early 1942, Warsaw ghetto. Anonymous. Questionnaire for Jewish youth in Warsaw. From the collection of material entitled "צוויי יאָר המהלם האָלבע" [Two and a half years of war]*, in "The Ringelblum Archive Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto. Oyneg Shabes. People and Works - Central Judaic Library,"144.

and even suggesting the composition of other themes not initially sought after by the O.S.[80] Guidelines limited submissions to autobiographies, diary entries, edited papers, and collaborative reports, and focused on the collection of primarily factual material and secondarily normative analysis of ghetto life.[81] In an effort to incentivize participation in the competitions, cash awards sponsored by the Joint were posted which the O.S. jury divided up amongst worthy submissions from both established intelligentsia and youth, which had the added benefit of granting the competitions legal authority as a result of the Joint's involvement.[82] In summation, the evaluation of commissioned material for the O.S. archive further supports its historical orientation and thorough nature, while also bolstering its connection to social organizations and mutual aid.

Building off of their collection and commission, the O.S.'s original creations are signs of its autonomous role in resistance, where it produced projects of its own in addition to its gathering of other material. Perhaps the biggest example of an internally driven creation was a project proposed by Ringelblum to describe the complete history of Warsaw Jewry from the very beginning of the war. Entitled "Two and a Half Years" and "initiated at the beginning of 1942," the project had the broad goal of summing up Jewish life during the two-and-a-half-year period of which the Jews had lived through Nazi occupation of Warsaw.[83] Utilizing the previously discussed methods of commission of research studies and monographs, a specialized staff of academics and writers divided itself into four groups each responsible for one section of the report: "general; economic; a part devoted to culture, science, literature, and art; and social

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[80] *[Enquiry Questionnaire's]*, *Rules for a Competition of Gathering and Description of Facts and Events on Selected Themes of Jewish Life During the War*, in Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!*, 27.
[81] *[Enquiry Questionnaire's]*, *Terms and Outline for a Youth* Competition, in Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!*, 28.
[82] Engelking, *The Warsaw Ghetto, 666*.
[83] Ibidem

welfare."[84] The project lamentably never came to fruition, for just as the three year anniversary of the war dawned the Nazis initiated plans of mass deportations to concentration camps, ripping crucial contributors from the ghetto and thus disappearing significant collections of important research and written material for the project.[85] From the words of Ringelblum, the nearly sixteen-hundred page project would have been "one of the most important documents of the War period." This tension to succeed in their historical endeavors before time ran out, both in archive making and historical writing such as "Two and a Half Years," speaks to the changing relationship which the O.S. had to their material and the changing obligations they had to their community. As they became conscious to the Final Solution, the archive leadership reoriented their priorities from comprehensive and disciplined collection to the survival of the amounted material and the Jewish people by all means they could.

This reorientation of their priorities leads us to another significant example of the O.S.'s resistance. Beginning in March of 1942 and as a response to the first information of Jewish exterminations from the death camp Chelmno, the O.S. began its publication of monthly bulletins which communicated to ghettos across Poland the Nazi's extermination of the Jewish populace.[86] Such efforts were led by members of the O.S. executive group (Ringelblum, Wasser, and Gutowski), tasked with checking and collating incoming information into public bulletins alerting Jews to the planned exterminations by Nazis.[87] The first bulletin, published after March 27th, 1942 in the Warsaw ghetto, exemplifies the bleakness of the situation and unadulterated nature of the report, listing the details of violence including the procedures of deportation,

[84] Ibidem
[85] Emmanuel Ringelblum, *O.S. ["Oyneg Shabbath"], 6*.
[86] Engelking, *The Warsaw Ghetto, 667*.
[87] Ibidem

mass-roundups, and mass-killings suffered by multiple ghettos.[88] These monthly bulletins, written with information provided by and disseminated through the United Fighting Underground Organization in Warsaw and wider networks of the Polish underground, were crucial to inter-ghetto communication of the genocide in-progress. Through collaboration with the *Armia Krajowa*,[89] the O.S. were able to pass on both the March 27th report and "The Second Stage" reports to the Polish Government in Exile, which claimed acts of genocide by the Nazis onto the Jewish people and implored the Allies to intervene. This period of the O.S.'s work can be seen as a crucial turning point in its focus. With the collective existence of the Jews at stake, the main priority of their work shifted from one of self-documentation to physical survival, a matter of life and death of the Jewish people as they knew it. Additionally, their intentional actions to alert both adjacent ghettos and the international community to the widespread murders of Polish Jewry demonstrates not only awareness of their resistance to genocide, but also agency over the classification of their history in-progress.

Analysis of the O.S. archive's mission, personnel structure, methods, and accomplishments, all against the backdrop of Nazi oppression, firmly assert the immensity of the project and its significance to and beyond the historical reality of the Warsaw ghetto. The project of the O.S. and its alliance with initiatives of self-help through its personnel and network of

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[88] *News Reports – No.1: After 27 March 1942, Warsaw ghetto, Oyneg Shabes bulletin: מיטטיילונגען" [News], issue 1, "די יידישע באַפעלקערונג אונטער ן עייכן פון פיזיסשער אויסראָטונג" ["Jewish population in danger of physical extermination"], which included information about the situation of Jews in various localities in the territory of the Republic of Poland in March 1942*, in "The Ringelblum Archive Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto. Oyneg Shabes. People and Works - Central Judaic Library," 215-229.

[89] "Translated to the 'Home Army,' the *Armia Krajowa* was a Polish military resistance organization whose primary goal was to prepare for an armed uprising against Nazi Germany at the end of their occupation. They maintained constant contact with the Polish Government in Exile in London and would rely on their support following a successful uprising. In addition to their collection and delivery of reports regarding the situation of the Jews through their Propaganda Office, they engaged in multiple instances of armed and economic subversion, notably their assistance in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising beginning on August 1st, 1944 and ending October 2nd, 1944. 'Home Army,'" Yad Vashem - Shoah Resource Center, accessed November 19, 2021, www.yadvashem.org.

contributors is conclusive. This alliance is key to the story of Warsaw Jewry during World War II and is a significant example of how they resisted Nazi oppression. The O.S., as a result of Ringelblum's vision and his coworkers' expertise, is an accurate and authoritative picture of the Warsaw ghetto, an ideal tool for historians and a compelling example for how one might, or indeed should, do history. Finally, its painstaking efforts to produce public bulletins for the endangered Jews of Warsaw and all of Poland emphasizes that the O.S. archive was more than a project of documentation, situating it as a force for the physical survival of Jews. Each of these conclusions is demonstrative of the O.S. archive as necessary for the survival of the ghetto past its corporeal existence and how the archive endures the story of its inhabitants and their survival in print. In this sense, the written and archival work of the O.S. is intentional metaphysical survival through memory which in perpetuity resists future acts of genocide. Historians must be conscientious of this memorial significance when classifying resistance and acts of survival, or otherwise risk disrespecting the lives and wills of historical actors.

## Section 3: The Holocaust and Amidah: Classifying Self-Help and the Oneg Sabbath Archive as Acts of Resistance

Investigation of and inquiry into Warsaw self-help and the Oneg Sabbath archive has revealed their character as historical instances of social and cultural resistance to Nazi oppression, as well as efforts for physical survival. The work of this paper lays bare a host of complex questions regarding its assertions of physical versus metaphysical survival, the meaning of memory, and how each of these concepts might constitute resistance. Discourse surrounding

resistance during the Holocaust and throughout Jewish history is complicated, contentious, and impassioned. Scholars who write historiographies of Jewish resistance disagree on issues ranging from the circumstances which beget resistance, what actions constitute legitimate resistance, how one practices ethical historiography, and how to do right by Jewish victims. I will advocate for a more open-ended approach to classifying resistance through an assemblage of existing scholarship and primary sources. Through my analysis I aim to classify self-help and the O.S. archive as acts of resistance, and further situate the O.S. as resistance through metaphysical survival and memory which instructs the present on the horrors of genocide and how it still plagues our world today.

In providing framing for the discussion to follow, I want to underscore the weight of the historical episode, and the implications of engaging with concepts of resistance. One of the most pervasive stereotypes surrounding European Jews during the Holocaust is that they "went to their death passively, without a struggle."[90] This stereotype presupposes that the Jews "must bear some responsibility for what happened to them," and that while trapped in the ghettos and subjected to genocide there were opportunities furnished for them to save themselves that they did not act or did not succeed in acting upon.[91] Such logic, according to Nechama Tec, amounts to victim blaming which alleviates some of the responsibility for deaths of approximately 6 million Jews from the Nazis, and shifts it onto the Jewish people.[92] The issue of victim blaming not only underlies discussions of Jewish resistance, but also broadly implicates itself within the collective histories and memories of Jewish resistance across time and space.

[90] Nechama Tec, "Jewish Resistance: Facts, Omissions, and Distortions," 2014, 40.
[91] Ibidem
[92] Ibidem

One example is the transformation of the commemorative narrative of Masada, where Jewish rebels took their last stand in the revolt against the conquering Roman army lasting from 66 to 73 A.D.[93] As the Roman army encroached upon and eventually demolished the outer walls of the fortress, the Jewish rebels reckoned not with their deaths, rather their inevitable lives in servitude to the Roman empire should the army spare their lives. The Jews at Masada, in a holy resolution to declare agency over their lives, killed each other in resistance to the enslavement and death at the hands of the Romans, an act of martyrdom known in Hebrew as *kiddush ha-Shem*.[94] This historical narrative of Masada, however, was altered during the 1920s by Zionist apologists, who "suppressed the suicide as part of Masada's symbolic significance" in efforts to establish a commemorative narrative of active resistance in Israel which "[raised] Masada as a historical metaphor for a national struggle for freedom and the readiness to fight for it to the bitter end."[95] Implicit in the erasure of suicide from the commemorative narrative of Masada was the national glorification of armed resistance, and, consequentially, widespread condemnation by Israeli Jews of the assumed passivity of European Jewish exiles suffering the evils of the Holocaust.

The national criticism of Jewish exiles in Europe which ensued upon news of the Holocaust reified that the "future belonged to the national revival in the Land of Israel," whereas

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[93] Yael Zerubavel, "The Death of Memory and the Memory of Death: Masada and the Holocaust as Historical Metaphors," *Representations (Berkeley, Calif.)*, no. 45 (1994): 72–100, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928603, 74.
[94] *Kiddush ha-Shem* refers to the sanctification of the name of the Divine, and is connected to the act of martyrdom, where one suffers death in the name of the sanctification of the Divine. Standing alone, acts of suicide are condemned by Jewish law. However, acts of martyrdom and *kiddush hashem* are religiously acceptable under specific conditions where one must suffer death rather than violate three commandments: idolatry, unchastity, and murder. One lone Jew should violate all three commandments before suffering death. However, if a Jew is in the presence of ten or more Jews, they must perform acts of *kiddush ha-Shem* and choose a martyr's death. "Kiddush Ha-Shem and Ḥillul Ha-Shem," accessed November 19, 2021, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/kiddush-ha-shem-and-x1e24-illul-ha-shem.
[95] Zerubavel, "The Death of Memory and the Memory of Death," 77.

"Jewish life in Exile could only lead to death and destruction."[96] This othering of the Jewish exile, stemming from the original stereotype of Jewish passivity, was codified through the establishment of a day of commemoration for "the Holocaust and the Ghetto Uprisings."[97] Coupled by the emphasis of the uprisings as acts of martyrdom and heroism, the official commemorations reinforced the creation of the "submissive Diaspora Jew" and discouraged international solidarity between the homeland of Israel and Jewish victims of Nazi evil.[98] National conceptions and commemorative narratives of Masada and the Holocaust only began to change following the significant losses incurred by Israel in the Yom Kippur war of 1973.[99] The Yom Kippur War opened up opportunities for solidarity between Israel and the diaspora, laying bare the shared trauma of death faced by Jews across time, and even giving rise to the redefinition of heroism and resistance to include the acts of non-violent physical survival under Nazi oppression.[100] The transforming narratives of Masada and the Holocaust in Israel weighs heavy on our discussion of how both scholarship and Jews remember acts of resistance. As historians under obligation to practice ethical history, we must not make statements which place value judgements on the lives and actions of Jews during the Holocaust. The existence and continued pervasiveness of the stereotype of Jewish passivity evidences the need for historians to disentangle normative views and political retellings of the Holocaust from the traumatic reality that befell the Jewish people.

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[96] Zerubavel, "The Death of Memory and the Memory of Death," 79.
[97] Zerubavel, "The Death of Memory and the Memory of Death," 80.
[98] Ibidem
[99] Zerubavel, "The Death of Memory and the Memory of Death," 87.
[100] Ibidem

Before laying the foundation for how scholars have defined concepts of resistance and survival during the Holocaust, it is important to review our claims about the circumstances of oppression faced by the Jews. Throughout the paper the Nazi oppressive measures have been summarized and have affirmed that the ultimate goal of the Nazis was to enact genocide. However, knowledge of the Final Solution was only gained by European Jewry in February of 1942, and thus we must differentiate between the knowledge of historical actors to their situation and our current knowledge of the arc of oppression as informed subjects of the present. Considering such oppression and this differentiation between past and present knowledge, it is unreasonable to normatively ascribe judgements of passivity, guilt, and ethics to Warsaw Jewry. Indeed, Israeli Holocaust historian Dalia Ofer asserts that "wherever the individual lacks the freedom to make a real choice" such ethical questions are rendered "null and void."[101] As we explore the differing perspectives of historiographies of resistance, we must be conscientious to how theories might invalidate the experiences and acts of Jewish resistance.

Dan Mikhman's *Holocaust Historiography: A Jewish Perspective: Conceptualizations, Terminology, Approaches, and Fundamental Issues* is an authoritative work on historiographies of resistance in the Holocaust. Mikhman surveys and critiques a host of theoretical observations related to Jewish resistance during the Holocaust and assesses their significance using historical examples. The first definitions of Jewish resistance referenced by Mikhman originate from Israeli research in the 1950s and 60s. He notes that as a result of popular perceptions of Jewish passivity, "the semantic field of the term 'resistance' began to expand" to include *kiddush*

[101] Dalia Ofer, "Intellectuals in the Warsaw Ghetto: Guilt, Atonement, and Beyond," *Journal of Jewish Identities* 1, no. 2 (2008): 7–28, https://doi.org/10.1353/jji.0.0020, 22.

*ha-hayyim*, or the "sanctification of life."[102] The semantics of resistance continued to expand, and by the end of the 1960s the Hebrew terms *amidah* (steadfastness) and *hitnagdut* (implying subversion or armed resistance) were used in scholarly circles of Jewish resistance, with *amidah* eventually becoming the broad Hebrew term for resistance. Israeli historian and Holocaust scholar Yehuda Bauer's definition of resistance in Hebrew is "rendered as *amidah*," which defines "Jewish resistance during the Holocaust as any group action consciously taken in opposition to known or surmised laws, actions, or intentions directed against the Jews."[103] Other definitions, such as survivor of the Vilna ghetto and Zionist historian Marc Dworzecki's, do not limit *amidah* to group action and include "all acts by Jews."[104] In both cases, definitions of *amidah* include physical, spiritual, and moral acts and expressions which oppose Nazi oppression as resistance, and are notably distinguished from violent or armed acts of resistance synonymous with *hitnagdut*. This "revised approach" will be the basis for how this paper classifies self-help work and the O.S. as acts of resistance.

Mikhman also provides counterpoints to the revised approach of resistance and *amidah* which seek to reduce the scope of what constitutes resistance, with the key criticisms coming from Holocaust historian Raul Hillberg and U.S. American-Jewish historian Lucy S. Dawidowicz. Hillberg boldly claims that once cannot "redefine 'resistance' to include food smuggling, escapes and even elemental struggles for life under starvation conditions," and that "these evasion and alleviation reactions are not resistance" because they "did not stem the Nazi

[102] Dan Mikhman, *Holocaust Historiography: A Jewish Perspective : Conceptualizations, Terminology, Approaches, and Fundamental Issues*, Parkes-Wiener Series on Jewish Studies (London ; Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), 218.
[103] Mikhman, *Holocaust Historiography, 219*.
[104] Mikhman, *Holocaust Historiography, 218*.

advance.[105] In continuation of Hilberg's limitation of resistance to only include effective obstruction of the Nazi advance, Dawidowicz critiques the apologetic perspective for straining "resistance…beyond its usual meaning," glorifying "resistance as an ultimate value," and "misunderstanding the heroism of martyrdom."[106] Hillberg and Dawidowicz situate the "usual" meaning of resistance as closer to *hitnagdut*, and contrary to the revised approach limit resistance via assessments of possibility, success, and values of martyrdom. In summation, Hilberg and Dawidowicz are highly critical of the revised approach to *amidah* for its use as "an apologetic term…used to satisfy national psychological needs."[107]

In an effort to consider further theoretical implications of the revised approach and critically analyze perspectives such as Hillberg and Dawidowicz, we may turn to U.S. American researcher and political scientist Roger S. Gottlieb. Gottlieb defines resistance as "predetermined acts motivated by the intention to thwart, limit, or end the exercise of power of the oppressor group over the oppressed."[108] Gottlieb substantiates this claim by emphasizing that for such acts to be resistance oppressed actors "must hold certain beliefs about their identity" and "must have beliefs concerning the manner in which the oppressor group is exercising its domination, [and] about how the assault on their identity is being conducted."[109] In other words, historical context and the knowledge and opinions of historical actors are crucial to determining whether something is an act of resistance. So, for Jews who felt that beyond physical safety their collective ideals as a people were at stake—given their unified identity as Jewish, collective

[105] Mikhman, *Holocaust Historiography, 219*.
[106] Mikhman, *Holocaust Historiography, 220*.
[107] Mikhman, *Holocaust Historiography, 221*.
[108] Roger S. Gottlieb, "The Concept of Resistance: Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust," *Social Theory and Practice* 9, no. 1 (1983): 35.
[109] Ibidem

understanding of the Nazi's oppression, and engagement in concerted acts to resist such oppression—any act of preserving identity and cultural practice could be defined as resistance. Gottlieb's analysis complicates our conception of the Holocaust, reminding us that for the Jewish people knowledge of the Nazi's goals was constantly evolving and growing, and as such their responses to oppression were everchanging through the course of the war. In contrast to Hillberg and Dawidowicz, who believe that the Nazi's goal to physically exterminate the Jewish people is the sole backdrop for defining Jewish resistance, Gottlieb advocates for a more open-ended conception of the past, where less value is placed on the effectiveness of acts to resist the oppressor and more attention is given to the intentions of Jews in the Holocaust. Resistance must consider the shifting context and knowledge of historical actors to their oppression, their intention to resist oppression, and their rationale for how such intentions and acts might lead to their physical and metaphysical survival.

Utilizing the revised approach as a base and drawing on the perspective of Gottlieb, self-help and the archival endeavors of the O.S. can be classified as acts of resistance to Nazi oppression and acts of genocide. In clearly defining self-help and the O.S. as acts of resistance to the Nazis, genocide can be described as "an assault on all the physical, psychological and collective conditions of their existence."[110] Engagements in self-help by Warsaw Jewry were undertaken with the broad intentions to sustain the physical, economic, social, and cultural livelihoods of the collective. Sustaining what livelihood they could through predetermined acts of self-help constitutes resistance to oppressive Nazi ordinances which preceded the Jews' knowledge of the Final Solution. One example which typifies self-help as resistance are the

[110] Gottlieb, "The Concept of Resistance," 39

House Committees. Described by Holocaust survivor and one of the leaders of the Warsaw ghetto uprising Israel Gutman, the H.C. "were the vital microcosms of ghetto society that permitted people to join together in a disciplined and purposeful effort."[111] In addition to its constructive roles in providing physical livelihood, Warsaw ghetto mailman and educator Peretz Opoczynski writes of how "ordinary Jews construed the house committees as a symbol of political freedom, a reminder that they could still help themselves and function as a concerned community."[112] Using the H.C. as an example of self-help work in Warsaw and the testimonies to its effectiveness by ghetto inhabitants show how self-help practices constituted intentional resistance to initial Nazi ordinances. Self-help shows how Jewish resistance can include acts which work to overcome the effects of collective victimization and sustain life and autonomy in the face of oppression.

The work of the O.S. archival project was intended to fulfill the historical mission of preserving the situation of Warsaw Jewry, objectively and comprehensively, for the enlightenment of the world to the plight of the Jews during the Holocaust and use as historical material for further written resistance to genocide. Prior to knowledge of the Final Solution, the methods for preservation of Jewish experiences, and opposition to Nazi oppression by the O.S. were predetermined and unified around the shared understanding of the Nazi's threats to erase their history. The undertaking of "Two and a Half Years," although uncompleted, exemplifies this intention to preserve Warsaw Jewry's history in progress with accuracy and agency, resisting known efforts of erasure by the Nazis. In direct response to new knowledge of the Nazi genocide

[111] David Courpasson and Ignasi Marti, "Collective Ethics of Resistance: The Organization of Survival in the Warsaw Ghetto," *Organization (London, England)* 26, no. 6 (2019): 853–72, https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508418820993, 863.
[112] Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History?*, 127

against the Jews, the work and priority of the O.S. switched to the physical survival of the Jewish populace. Thus, the production of the monthly bulletins constitute resistance insofar as the O.S.'s actions were made off of evolving knowledge to the Nazi's plans of genocide and intended to prompt allied action to end the Nazi's exercise of power.

Primary accounts of historical actors are crucial to substantiating these claims of the O.S. archive as a force for the resistance, survival, and testimony to the crimes committed against the Jews. Menachem Kon attests to this mission in a preface to an essay on the Jewish child during occupation which was archived in the O.S:

> *I regard it a sacred duty…for everyone, talented or not, to write down whatever he sees with his own eyes, or hears from a witness of the murders committed by the barbarians in each Jewish town. When the time comes — as come it certainly must — the world shall read and know what the murderers perpetrated. And this will constitute the richest source for the author of the dirge and lamentation upon our times. This will be the most powerful arsenal in the hands of the future avenger of all of us…*[113]

Kon's statement explains the intention of writing during the Holocaust as a tool for future indictments and investigations into the genocide of Jews. Additionally, Kon situates the act of writing as spiritual, transcendent of the current physical moment, and as a tradition to be continued by those who will gain access to the histories preserved within the O.S. Ringelblum echoes the sentiment of Kon, writing of those who served the O.S. and their sense of responsibility to the sacred duty of the written work: "Everyone was fully aware of the

[113] Kermish, *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor!, 56*.

importance of his part in completing the task. They understood how important it was for future generations that evidence remain of the tragedy of Polish Jewry. Some also understood that the collected material served the present as well, informing the world of the horrors perpetrated against the Jews."[114] The "Two and a Half Years project," alongside writings of Ringelblum and Kon, demonstrate the collective commitment of the O.S. personnel to resist the erasure of their history and ensure their metaphysical survival through the sacred and spiritual act of writing. Furthermore, the creation of bulletins alerted the Allies to the genocide of the Jews and called for their intervention, and thus are acts of physical resistance to the Nazi's Final Solution.

The O.S. archive and engagements of self-help, in addition to their character as physical resistance, can be situated as acts of spiritual resistance which extend from cosmic traditions of Jewish writing and transcend collections of physical material. Milton Teichman emphasizes the "remarkable quantity of writing done" during the Holocaust, quoting scholar of Yiddish literature Yachiel Szeintuch who emphasizes that "the phenomenon of writing in general and of literary creation in particular among Jews…has no precedent in Jewish history."[115] Teichman continues by classifying the practice of ghetto writing as "a form of spiritual resistance," as "an affirmation of life at the very moment the enemy sought your annihilation.[116]" In this sense, Teichman, similarly to Kon and Ringelblum, writes of resistance as a sacred duty which serves to affirm life in the moment genocide and for those who will take after them and engage with the material they left behind. Vladka Meed, a courier in the Warsaw ghetto, expands upon Teichman's affirmation of life through writing to include all practices of "traditional Jewish ethics" as efforts to retain

[114] Emmanuel Ringelblum, *O.S. ["Oyneg Shabbath"], 7*.
[115] Milton Teichman, "How Writers Fought Back: Literature from the Nazi Ghettos and Camps," *Judaism* 47, no. 3 (1998): 345.
[116] Ibidem

their humanity and indeed preserve their lives.[117] Meed further emphasizes that "under the most difficult conditions of unexpected pain…[Jewish] resistance [resided]…in the minute aspect[s] of everyday life," including self-documentation and communal support via self-help.[118] Words from Meed, Ringelbum, Kon, and countless other Jews from the Holocaust era reject the claims of scholars like Hillberg and Dawidowicz who gatekeep what resistance can be. Through emotionally gripping prose, they posthumously assert personal agency over their actions as resistance past their physical lives. The combined accounts of World War II era Jews, Holocaust historians, and other scholars cited through this paper reify abstract concepts of resistance into both a physical and spiritual tradition of surviving and resisting Nazi genocide through memory.

**Conclusion**

The Oneg Sabbath archive is a multi-dimensional act of resistance to the oppression of the Nazis and their plans of genocide against the Jewish people. Through the deep social and personal connections of the O.S. personnel and its creator Emmanuel Ringelblum, the archive became rooted within ongoing engagements of self-help, which resisted the Nazi agenda through its models of physical mutual aid and community edification. Their symbiotic relationship, where self-help supported the work of the archive's documentation of the ghetto, represents the fateful intertwinement of millennia old traditions in Judaism, which in concert potentiated the powers of one another to resist the Nazi's mechanisms of genocide. The O.S. bears the insignia of an unparalleled historical enterprise, imbued with painstaking detail and the intrinsic passions

[117] Tec, "Jewish Resistance,"65
[118] Ibidem

of Ringelblum and his colleagues, who drew from their expertise to construct both a historically practical and deeply moving account of the Warsaw ghetto. The undertaking lives on as a testament to the resistance of European Jewry to the Nazis and represents the metaphysical survival of Warsaw through the written word and historical memory.

Jewish opposition to oppression reaches far back through time, containing innumerable instances of Jewish martyrdom, sacrifice, and resistance. The O.S. archive and the ghettos' self-help engagements are significant declarations of strength, tradition, and human spirit by Warsaw Jewry. This paper has argued that such declarations and acts constitute instances of resistance within the grand scale of Jewish opposition to oppression. However, the range of opinion within historiographies of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust is a reminder that issues of classification have been, and continue to be, in constant contention and reevaluation. It is important for historians in undertaking projects of classification to consult the current discussions on resistance as background to classifying certain historical episodes. That said, ethical projects of classification must consider the intentions and declarations of historical actors who engaged in the acts. Otherwise, we risk erasing the origins of purely historical acts from our discourse, thus distorting commemorative narratives based on modern ways of knowing.

The O.S. archive impresses upon its readers the enormity of its undertaking, its pure historical character and, perhaps most importantly, the cosmic significance of the project and its enclosed documents. Testimonies from the archive's most influential coworkers express curiosity about who might be charged with continuing the development of their lived histories. Such language shows the self-awareness of the O.S. staff to how history can be so easily co-opted, ignored, or worse, erased entirely, especially recognizing the Nazi's attempts to rewrite Jews into

history as an evil worthy of annihilation. The case study of Masada and its relationship to Israeli Jewish values of martyrdom further reinforces how historical episodes such as the Holocaust can be readily bent to the political wills of apologetics, and how the integrity of historical actors such as European Jewry can be chucked to the wayside to avoid uncomfortable truths and bolster national pride. The O.S. archive exists as a testimony to those uncomfortable truths, to the open wounds of Nazi oppression ever healing. It exists as a last hope to challenge historical untruth through writing, to outlast genocide beyond physical death, and as a continuation of the sacred Jewish commandment to live.

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