

"The Secret of the Movement's Strength"

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and its Driving Forces

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Course Description:

This seminar will focus on the women and men behind the symbol of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, as a major test case of Jewish armed resistance in the ghettos in Poland. Its leading questions will be: What were the driving forces behind the uprising? What enabled the close comradeship in arms between bitter political rivals (Zionists, Bundists and Communists)? In the historical aspect, we will study the social composition of rebels as a reflection of "Modern Jewish Politics." In the sociological aspect, we will examine the uprising as a manifestation of a distinct social formation, the "Jewish youth movement." In the methodological aspect, we will practice the reading of Holocaust memoirs, written from different perspectives, in terms of place, language, political affiliation, and gender.

Course Requirements:

1. Weekly reading assignments.
2. 2 responses on reading assignments:
 - Oral response – presentation of the text in class (7-8 minutes) at the opening of the meeting discussing the text.
 - The written response (1-page max.) should be submitted before the meeting discussing the text.

The oral/written responses should include a short background of the author and text, a brief summary of the text, a short personal response to the text, and one open question on the text.

3. Final paper – 3 options:
 - a. Another (third) response – to be submitted by 26.2.2025.

- b. Short (referat) paper – analysis of one primary source, using secondary literature (ca. 10 pages) – to be submitted by 26.2.2025 (paper proposal by 5.2, incl. the chosen primary source + 4-5 secondary sources).
- c. Seminar paper – analysis of one theme relevant for the topic of the course, based on primary and secondary sources (ca. 25 pages) – to be submitted by 23.6.2025 (paper proposal by 26.2).

For seminar paper – the paper proposal should include:

- Topic and research question.
- Paper structure (tentative table of contents, incl. introduction, 3-4 chapters and conclusion).
- List of sources (at least 1 primary + 8-10 secondary).

Final Grade:

Active participation in class and weekly reading assignments – 20%

2 Responses – 40% (20+20)

Final paper (or third response) – 40%

Course Program:

* Wednesdays, 14:15-15:45, fall semester 2025.

	Date	Title	Reading in Advance	Reading in Class
1	29.10.25	Introduction		
2	5.11	"The Secret of the Movement's Strength"	Gutman (1994)	Lubetkin, 275-277
3	12.11	Modern Jewish politics	Mendelsohn	
4	19.11	Jewish and Zionist youth movements	Schatzker	Lubetkin, 11-15
5	26.11	The Judenrat	Gutman (1995)	Lubetkin, 35-46
6	3.12	"Our women Liaisons"	Ronen	Lubetkin, 73-82
7	10.12	The Bund in the Underground	Edelman, 35-66	
8	17.12	Reading Holocaust memoirs: text and context	Patt	
9	24.12	The emergence of the Jewish Fighting Organization (JFO)	Lubetkin, 83-97, 106-118	Lubetkin, 120-124
10	31.12	The Bund in the Revolt	Edelman, 66-85	
11	7.1.26	The Uprising	Lubetkin, 145-159, 164-168, 178-189	Lubetkin, 229-234, 236-237
12	14.1	The Communists in the Ghetto and in the JFO	Goldkorn	
13	21.1	Conclusion	Dreifuss	Lubetkin, 243-256

(The program could change during the semester)

Reading List:

* = additional reading

1. Primary sources – memoirs:

Marek Edelman, *The Ghetto Fights: Warsaw 1941-1943* [Polish, 1945], London: Bookmarks, 1990 (German translation: *Das Ghetto kämpft*, Berlin: Harald-Kater-Verlag, 1993).

Zivia Lubetkin, *In the Days of Destruction and Revolt* [Hebrew, 1946-7], Ghetto Fighters' House, 1981.

Dorka Goldkorn, 'My Memories from the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising' [Yiddish, 1948], *Moreshet Journal for the Study of the Holocaust and Antisemitism*, 21 (2023).

2. Secondary literature:

a. Introduction and Jewish politics:

Yisrael Gutman, *Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994, pp. xi-xx.

Ezra Mendelsohn, 'Varieties', *On Modern Jewish Politics*, New York, Oxford: Oxford university Press, 1993, pp. 3-36.

* Jack Jacobs, 'Introduction', in: idem. (ed.), *Jews and Leftist Politics: Judaism, Israel, Antisemitism and Gender*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 1-17.

b. Jewish and Zionist youth movement:

Israel Gutman, 'The Youth Movement as an Alternative Leadership in Eastern Europe', in: Asher Cohen and Yehoyakim Cochavi (eds.), *Zionist Youth Movements during the Shoah*, New York, Peter Lang, 1995, pp. 7-18.

Chaim Schatzker, 'The Special Character of the Jewish Youth Movement', in: Asher Cohen and Yehoyakim Cochavi (eds.), *Zionist Youth Movements during the Shoah*, New York, Peter Lang, 1995, pp. 19-31.

* Zvi Lamm, *Youth takes the lead: the inception of Jewish youth movements in Europe*, Givat Haviva: Yad Ya'ari, 2004, pp. 15-46.

* Erica Nadelhaft, 'Resistance through Education', *Polin*, 9 (1996), pp. 212-231

c. Women in the resistance:

Avihu Ronen, 'Poland: Women Leaders in the Jewish Underground During the Holocaust', *The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*,

<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/poland-women-leaders-in-jewish-underground-during-holocaust>

* Judy Batalion, *The Light of Days: the untold story of women resistance fighters in Hitler's ghettos*, New York: William Morrow, 2020, esp. pp. 405-407.

* Lori R. Weintrob and Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz (eds.), *Heroines of the Holocaust: Reframing Resistance and Courage in Genocide*, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2025.

d. Reading Holocaust memoirs:

- Theory:

* Zoë Waxman, 'Transcending History? Methodological problems in Holocaust testimony', in: Dan Stone (ed.), *The Holocaust and Historical Methodology*, New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012, pp.143-157.

* Ruthellen Josselson, "The Hermeneutics of Faith and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion," *Narrative Inquiry*, 14, 1 (2004), pp. 1-28.

* Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014, pp. 1-42.

- Examples:

Avinoam Patt, *The Jewish Heroes of Warsaw: The Afterlife of the Revolt*, Wayne State University Press, 2021, pp. 305-331.

* Sharon Geva, "'With and Despite the Burden of the Past': 1946 in the Life Story of Zivia Lubetkin", *Moreshet*, 14 (2017), pp. 220-259.

* Amos Goldberg, 'Introduction: "If That Is a Man",' *Trauma in First Person: Diary Writing During the Holocaust*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017, pp. 1-29.

* Noam Liebman, 'Indeed "merely a description of the events?": The Memoirs of Jewish Warsaw Ghetto Police Officer Stanisław Gombiński as a Model for Hermeneutic Analysis', *Moreshet*, 18 (2021), pp. 160-193.

e. Driving forces (conclusions):

Havi Dreifuss, 'The Leadership of the Jewish Combat Organization during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: A Reassessment', *Holocaust Genocide Studies*, 31, 1 (2017), pp. 24-60.

* Rachel L. Einwohner, 'Opportunity, Honor, and Action in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising', *American Journal of Sociology*, 109. 3 (November 2003), pp. 650-675.

f. General background literature:

* Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

* Belah Guterman, *Fighting for Her People: Zivia Lubetkin, 1914-1978*, Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2014.

* Bella Gutterman, "'We, the Jews of the ghetto, inflicted casualties upon the Germans and even drove them off': Zivia Lubetkin and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising", *Moreshet*, 10 (2013), pp. 45-80.

* Daniel Blatman, *For Our Freedom and Yours: the Jewish Labour Bund in Poland 1939-1949*, London; Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003.

* Samuel D. Kassow, *Who will write our history? Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archive*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.