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Tipping the Rescuer?

The Financial Aspects of the Budapest Building Managers' Helping Activity during the Last Phase of the Second World War

Abstract

My research – through a history of the Budapest building managers (in Hungarian *házmaster*) – asks to what degree agency mattered amongst a group of ordinary Hungarians who are commonly perceived as bystanders to the Holocaust. I analyse the building managers' wartime actions in light of their decades-long struggle for a higher salary, social appreciation and their aspiration to authority. Instead of focusing on solely the usual pre-war antisemitism, I take into consideration other factors from the interwar period, such as in this paper the tipping culture. In my PhD thesis, I claimed that the empowerment of the building managers happened as a side-effect of anti-Jewish legislation. Thanks to their social networks and key positions, these people became intermediaries between the authorities and Jewish Hungarian citizens, which gave them much wider latitude than other so-called bystanders. That is to say that an average Budapest building manager could bridge the structural holes between the ghettoised Jewish Hungarians and other elements of 1944 Hungarian society as a result of his or her social network. This article argues that the actions of so-called bystanders in general, and the relationship between Budapest building managers and Jewish Hungarians in particular, can only be understood by placing them in a *longue durée*. Furthermore, it suggests that it is impossible – and unhelpful – to allocate building managers to a single category such as 'bystander'. Individual building managers both helped and hindered Jewish Hungarians, depending on circumstances, pre-existing relationships, and the particular point in time.

1. A Brief Introduction

Generally bystanders are regarded as passive observers, whose passivity limits their responsibility for the genocide happening next to them.¹ Nevertheless, inaction itself is also a form of action, and Ernesto Vardeja calls those who could intervene to stop the persecution but fail to act "moral bystanders".² Vardeja rightly points to the "moral bystander" as someone who – being part of the same society – is actually responsible for the actions of his fellow citizens who are becoming perpetrators in his close proximity. But in wartime Hungary social solidarity towards the Jewish Hungarians was seriously damaged by state funded propaganda, which aimed ease Hungary's social problems by using the wealth of the so-called Jews.³ The *Righteous*

1 Victoria J. Barnett, *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity during the Holocaust*, Westport 1999, 9-10.

2 Ernesto Vardeja, *Moral Bystanders and Mass Violence*, in Adam Jones (eds.), *New Directions in Genocide Research*, London 2012, 153-169.

3 Whenever it is possible I try to avoid naming the threatened and persecuted Hungarians as Jews, as this term is ambiguous in the sense that it is in accordance with the categorisation of the interwar and wartime antisemitic systems. In addition to this, as Tim Cole notes (see it in Tim Cole, *Constructing the 'Jew'*, *Writing the Holocaust: Hungary 1920–1945*, in: *Patterns of Prejudice* 33 (1999) 3), the usage of this term could also often contradict the self-definition of the persecuted. That is why, rather than the simplistic use of the word Jew, I prefer to write about Jewish Hungarians, an expression which includes both of the victims' possible (or hyphenated) identities.

among the Nations award was founded for those who were not misled by any kind of propaganda, and who did not want to remain bystanders during the Second World War, but managed to provide actual help for the endangered people. Like Vardeja's category of the "moral bystanders", the introduction of the *Righteous*' category also divides the general population into morally accepted and unaccepted groups. The problem with both categorisations, however, is that they are unable to grasp the complexity of the micro landscapes, where these helpers and bystanders acted or failed to act. In the summer of 1944, the Hungarian government separated the Jewish and Christian residents of Budapest not into a single closed ghetto area, as for example in Warsaw or other major cities of the region, but by assigning dispersed apartment buildings as "Jewish ghetto houses". The almost 2,000 buildings were spread through the entire city and were marked on the façade by a yellow Star of David. Although the building managers of these houses did not officially belong to any authority, they nevertheless on a daily basis policed with discriminative regulations and acted as intermediaries between the authorities and the ordinary citizens, which gave them much wider latitude than other bystanders. This paper investigates why Budapest building managers helped certain Jewish Hungarians in spite of the difficult circumstances. It is fascinating to see what kind of help the building managers provided for Jewish Hungarian tenants during the critical periods of 1944. In what ways did this relate to the practice of peacetime tipping of the building managers? I will also examine what makes an ordinary Hungarian *házmester* become a *Righteous among the Nations of Yad Vashem*, and to what extent this categorisation can simplify the history of a Budapest ghetto building.

2. The Case of Mrs K.

Since 1962 the Israeli authorities have awarded the title *Righteous among the Nations* to more than 24,000 people, who during the Second World War helped the persecuted Jews. This number includes seventeen Budapest building managers. One prominent example is Mrs Rozália K., who, according to *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations*, received recognition in 1998 because 54 years earlier, during the Arrow Cross reign, she bravely hid a doctor called Dr Róna at her place, as well as a certain Mrs Fellner, whom she employed as a maid at home.⁴ As the building manager of Kádár utca 5, she also put the four members of the Recht family in an empty flat in the building, from where, according to the same *Encyclopedia*, the inhabitants escaped due to the Russian siege of Budapest. Furthermore, she found shelter in the basement for the Váradi family, and later she admitted to her home the 8-year-old Péter Simon with his mother and grandmother.⁵

From here onwards my paper draws heavily on the files of the Budapest building managers' Justificatory Committee (Igazoló Bizottság) and the Hungarian People's Court (Népbíróóság), a unique set of sources collected in a 1945–46 denazifying and retribution procedure. Thanks to this process, there are many documents and immediate post-war testimonies available in the Budapest archives about the building managers' wartime conduct. In spring 1945, the new communist mayor of Budapest announced the forming of a Justificatory Committee of the Building Managers to

4 Sara Bender/Pearl Weiss (Eds.) *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust, Europe (Part I) and other countries*, Jerusalem 2007, 261.

5 See on this: Kinga Frojimovics/Judit Molnár, *A Világ Igazai Magyarországon a második világháború alatt* [=The Righteous Among the Nations of Hungary in the Second World War], Budapest 2009, 226.

check which *házmester* committed crimes against the inhabitants during the war, and which one joined the Hungarian Nazi movement, the so-called Arrow Cross.⁶ The Committee's members were delegated by the Building Managers' Free Trade Union, and the five political parties, which made up the Hungarian National Independence Front (Magyar Nemzeti Függetlenségi Front – MNFF), a Soviet backed umbrella organisation of the anti-fascist political powers.⁷ They were led by the skilful guidance of a professional lawyer when they investigated the immediate history in each and every Budapest apartment building. On the next pages, I will compare this Committee's findings about Mrs K.'s activity to the version displayed in Yad Vashem's *Encyclopedia*, and I will point to the differences and commonalities.

The Justificatory Committee file of Mrs Rozália K. contains much evidence of the good deeds, which further elucidates the ways she assisted the Jewish Hungarians' hiding in Kádár utca 5 in 1944. First of all, there is Dr Róna's statement written on a doctor's prescription form, testifying that Mrs K.'s helpful acts brought danger to herself and to her own family. The physician was eager to explain that Mrs K. not only saved many Jewish Hungarians' lives, but she was so busy with dealing with the affairs of those in hiding that her own children often had to wait long hours for food.⁸ The head of the Váradi family also wrote to the Committee to give details about how Mrs K. allowed him to hide in his apartment, even though the building manager knew that he was an escapee from the labour service. She tolerated his presence and even brought him and his family food. Moreover, she urged him to create a hiding spot behind a large wardrobe.⁹ These survivors depict Mrs K. as a proactive and practical person, who facilitated their hiding. This picture corroborates the *Encyclopedia's* reference to her opening of an abandoned apartment for the use of the Recht family.¹⁰ From a historical point of view, she was not an innocent 'angel', but a wily and smart woman, and probably exactly these attributes made her successful in helping.

However, not everybody wrote to the Justificatory Committee in favour of Mrs K. For example, Imre Weisz, a canned food merchant, accused her of arranging immunity during ghettoisation for the apartment of a "Jewish lawyer", in return for a radio, carpets and a piano.¹¹ Accordingly, Mrs K. manipulated the apartment's registration: since it became registered as a 'Christian property', it was exempted from the moving in of the ghettoised Jewish Hungarians. What merits interest here is not so much the allegedly earned asset, but rather how powerful a building manager could grow due to the anti-Jewish legislation. These people could easily modify the effect of the centrally ordered ghettoisation rules in the locality.

Imre Weisz, during his hearing at the Justificatory Committee, suggested that Mrs K. and her husband only helped those inhabitants of the building who could pay for

6 Ágnes Nagy, Lakóközösség kontra háztulajdonos, házmegbízott kontra házfelügyelő: Osztályharc a bérházban. A Budapesti házfelügyelők igazolása 1945-ben [=The Tenants' Community Counter Building Owner, Class Struggle in the Apartment Building: the Justificatory Process of Budapest Building Managers in 1945], in: Budapesti Negyed 17 (2009) 1, 164.

7 The Magyar Nemzeti Függetlenségi Front [=Hungarian National Independence Front] was formed on 2 December 1945 in Szeged, south-east Hungary. It was founded by the following parties: Független Kisgazdapárt [=Independent Smallholders Party], Magyar Kommunista Párt [=Hungarian Communist Party], Szociáldemokrata Párt, [=Socialdemocratic Party], Nemzeti Parasztpárt [=National Peasant Party] and Polgári Demokrata Párt [=Civil Democratic Party].

8 Budapest Főváros Levéltára [=Budapest City Archives], BFL XVII/ 1598. Magyar Házfelügyelők és Segédházfelügyelők 291/a. sz. Igazoló Bizottságának iratai [=The 291/a Justificatory Committee Files of the Hungarian Building Managers and of the Assistant Building Managers]; Box No. 5, The Case of Mrs Rozália Ko., a Statement Submitted by Dr Róna, dated 9 June, 1945.

9 Ibid., Mr Váradi's letter, dated also 9 June, 1945.

10 Bender/Weiss (Eds.), *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations*, 261.

11 Budapest City Archives, BFL XVII/ 1598, the Case of Mrs Korecz, a Letter of Mr Imre Weisz, dated 2 June, 1945.

their services. His impression was that the building manager was not in favour of him because he, as a poor man, was unable to pay her considerable tips. Imre Weisz lived in a three-room apartment in Kádár utca 5 until June 1944. Mr Weisz claimed that during his absence due to his resettlement order to his wife's relatives, the *házmester* first simply occupied and then formally requested his apartment from the Nazi authorities, thereby maliciously ousting him from it.¹² Mr Weisz also believed that after the war Mrs K. tried to make it harder for him to get back his former apartment by forging his pre-1944 registration data. Although the Justificatory Committee, at the end of the day, approved Mrs K.'s wartime acts, it had to formally note that while in the summer of 1944 the K. family lived in a studio offered for them as a *házmester's* lodge, by the time of the post-war denazification process they already lived in the three-room apartment formerly inhabited by Mr Weisz. Moreover, from the minutes of the Justificatory Committee it is also known that Mrs K. sublet one room of the three to subtenants.¹³ Therefore, what the justificatory process uncovered here – and what is central to my research – is that after the war the lifesaver Mrs K. was in a significantly better financial situation than before helping the Jewish Hungarians. The *házmester* in many ways acted as a landlord, as a building owner when exercising complete spatial control over Kádár utca 5: she could open empty apartments, force tenants out from the building, and by doing so, she could improve her own living standard significantly. However, perhaps the most interesting aspect of this story is that, during 1944, only the act of occupying Imre Weisz's apartment made it possible for the building manager to accommodate the saved Jewish Hungarians, as it would have been impossible in her small lodge to hide people due to the lack of space. The consequence of this move is actually twofold. Firstly, Mr Weisz' three-room apartment, being substantially bigger than the building manager's original one-room lodge, made it possible for Mrs K. to hide the saved Jewish Hungarians. Secondly, once she moved into the bigger apartment, she could also hide some Jewish Hungarians in the empty lodge. Thus, one may speculate that she could only become a recognised *Righteous among the Nations* because she was able to usurp the Weisz-apartment. But what is not at all a speculation is that from the perspective of Imre Weisz this story was much more about losing his home than about saving Jewish Hungarians from Nazi persecution.

The Budapest building managers worked and lived in intimate micro communities, where they helped certain members of the community, while they also refused to help other members or simply forced them to follow the anti-Jewish regulations. The inactivity of the so-called bystanders is often due to their unwillingness to enter the sphere of victims and perpetrators.¹⁴ When Mrs K. hid the persecuted Jewish Hungarians and brought them food, she stepped out from her so-called bystander role and stepped up against the Nazi perpetrators. However, if she really occupied and requested the apartment of Mr Weisz, she might be well suspected of complicity with the perpetrators. Vardeja is right to describe the existing literature as far too static when it comes to the "bystander-victim-perpetrator" categorisation.¹⁵ He calls for a dynamic approach here, because due to the change of circumstances, over time bystanders could become perpetrators or active helpers.¹⁶ It seems that in the ghetto house the building manager

12 Ibid., Mr Weisz's testimony at a hearing of the Justificatory Committee, on 20 June, 1945.

13 Ibid., Lóránt Várady's testimony at a hearing of the Justificatory Committee, on 20 June, 1945.

14 Vardeja, *Moral Bystanders and Mass Violence*, 157.

15 Vardeja, *Moral Bystanders and Mass Violence*, 157. Here Vardeja actually talks about the philosophical works, not about the historical ones. See this also in: Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation*, Nashville 1996, 83.

16 Ibid., 157.

repositioned his or her role not only over time, but also tenant by tenant. And it also seems that actors like Mr Weisz are missing from the stories of Yad Vashem's *Righteous among the Nations*, and for this reason, I find these stories incomplete.

3. Grey Zones

It is disturbing to realise how grey the zone of rescuers was, and it is more than understandable that Yad Vashem, the official Israeli Authority of Remembrance of the Holocaust, tried to narrow down the group of *Righteous*. However, their choice of criteria, especially the exclusion of those rescuers who intended to profit from helping, goes against the tradition of tipping the Budapest building managers. In the next section, I am going to show why this categorisation does not fit the wartime Hungarian reality, and how Yad Vashem's approach throws the baby out with the bathwater – to use a stylistically questionable idiom. This is particularly true in the context of the apartment buildings, where building owners or landlords did not pay a proper salary to their employees, to the building managers. They only provided them free accommodations, but most of the *házmester's* income came from the tips and other payments of the tenants. For example, tenants did not have a key to the main gate of the apartment building, which was only locked at 10 p.m. by the *házmester*. But if the tenants happened to arrive home after this moment, they had to wake up the building manager and were obliged to pay him the so-called *kapupénz* (gate-money).¹⁷

Following the German invasion of Hungary (19 March 1944), in a period when the 'liberating' Red Army gradually approached Budapest, hiding emerged as crucially important.¹⁸ Immediately after Regent Horthy's naively unprepared attempt to withdraw the country from the Axis, the German troops handed power to the Arrow Cross leader, Ferenc Szálasi (15 October 1944). As it became clear to Jewish Hungarians that they needed to survive only for a couple of months, more and more chose to hide themselves, a strategy in which the building managers played an important part. The cruel death marches continued in November, several tens of thousands of Jews were marched towards Mauthausen, and the Arrow Cross fighters regularly raided the ghetto houses to find enough Jewish Hungarians for this sort of deportation. It largely depended on the *házmester* who was taken by the Arrow Cross and who could stay put in the apartment building. My research challenges the concept dominant in Hungarian Holocaust literature which sees rescue efforts performed almost exclusively by foreign diplomats (Wallenberg and others) and exceptionally brave members of the Hungarian political and social elite. While recognising the significance of these actions, I argue that equally significant assistance was provided by ordinary Hungarians, such as the building managers. Nevertheless, unlike Mrs K., in most cases these people were never awarded any recognition for their activities. This is because while they helped certain Jewish Hungarians, they often chose not to help or had to report others, and also because they did what they did not so much because of moral considerations but for earning tips. This article questions undervaluing the courage of these people when tipping was a part of normal life, and honouring good service by tipping was the *comme il faut*. The introduction of anti-Jewish laws and the building managers' suddenly growing authority, added to the long-

¹⁷ This was regulated in: Lakbérleti szabályrendelet [= Decree on Housing Issues], 1936/130 decree of Budapest. See in: Tivadar Dános, Háztulajdonos, Lakó, Házfelügyelő [=Houseowner, Tenant, Building Manager], Budapest 1936, 459-460.

¹⁸ Krisztián Ungváry, Budapest ostroma [=The Siege of Budapest], Budapest 2001, 214, 223-224.

standing tradition of tipping, created a unique setting where *házmesters* could be rewarded for helping the survival of Jewish Hungarians. Viewing these offerings from the 21st century, our intention to think in black and white terms causes difficulties in moral judgment over the nature of the saved people's donations. Were these bribes or well-deserved tips? There are several factors here, which have to be considered in order to be able to answer this question.

Yad Vashem lists four criteria to fulfil for recognising a *Righteous* individual, of which the third is the most significant from the perspective of this study. It draws up a necessary mental set up on the saviour's side, which could not include the expectation of any kind of reward – this is obviously in conflict with an average Budapest building manager's mind-set, as they lived largely from tips. Yad Vashem's third requirement is: "The initial motivation being the intention to help persecuted Jews: i.e. not for payment or any other reward such as religious conversion of the saved person, adoption of a child, etc."¹⁹

The other three requirements are in short:

- Active involvement of the rescuer in saving one or several Jews from the threat of death or deportation to death camps.
- Risk to the rescuer's life, liberty or position.
- The existence of testimony of those who were helped or at least unequivocal documentation establishing the nature of the rescue and its circumstances.²⁰

Comparing the data of some 500 recognised Hungarian rescuers who fulfilled these requirements, the historian Sári Reuveni notes that no more than 14 per cent of them acted during the spring of 1944, when approximately 432,000 people were deported from the Hungarian provinces, mostly to Auschwitz-Birkenau. This means that the majority of the helping, namely 86 per cent, happened in Budapest in the last phase of the Second World War.²¹ Reuveni also notes differences in the nature of help provided. In the countryside, most assistance involved the temporary sheltering of more or less unknown persons who had escaped from a local ghetto, as opposed to Budapest, where the relationship between helper and helped usually had a longer history.²²

Reuveni is right to point to the importance of a longer relation between rescuers and rescued in Budapest. Cole and Giordano refer to the same issue, when writing about ghettoisation in the Hungarian capital. They emphasise that higher survival chances existed for those Jews who, by staying in their apartment buildings, also stayed in a social space where they were known by the non-Jews living in this specific community.²³ In an average apartment building the *házmester* had very often served for years those who were hidden by him or her during the reign of the extreme right Arrow Cross movement. Moreover, even if the building manager was new in the post, his or her relationship with the tenants was based on an established tradition. And exactly this tradition is what goes against the third criteria set for the Righteous among the Nations, namely that the rescuer could not get any remuneration for helping, and could not act on the basis of the promise of a reward.

I believe that the Budapest *házmesters* form a special group within the rescuers: in many cases they could legitimately accept money or a present for helping, especially

19 See this on the website of Yad Vashem: <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/faq.asp#1> (23.9.2014).

20 Ibid.

21 Sári Reuveni, Magyar fák az Igaz Emberek erdejében [=Hungarians Trees in the Forest of the Righteous Among the Nations], in: László Karsai (Ed.), *Küzdelem az igazságért: Tanulmányok Randolph Braham 80. Születésnapjára* [=Fight for Justice: Studies for the 80th Birthday of Randolph Braham], Budapest 2002, 568.

22 Ibid.

23 Tim Cole/Alberto Giordano, On Place and Space: Calculating Social and Spatial Networks in the Budapest Ghetto, in: *Transactions in GIS*, 15 (July 2011) s1, 143-170, here: 148-149.

since rewarding different kinds of their services by tipping was a must in Hungary. For instance, for decades they were rewarded for opening the gate of an apartment building between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. by at least a set sum per occasion, and by law they had to be paid for providing the elevator on demand. In these cases the legislation set a minimum fee, but the assumption was that a polite and well-serving *házmester* received a much higher tip than this minimum. This gratuity system explains why many building managers were also paid for their rescue activity during the Holocaust. Tipping them was part of everyday life, which is why I argue that merely this circumstance should not discredit their importance in rescuing Jewish Hungarians. Moreover, when a building manager helped out a troubled inhabitant, he fulfilled exactly that obligation which Vardeja thinks follows from the helper's social position.²⁴ Nonetheless, the helped inhabitant also had social obligations, including honouring the services of a good building manager with tipping. The tradition of tipping made it almost compulsory to reward the services of the building managers, therefore it could have given a negative message if the saviour was not receiving anything from the saved, as the Yad Vashem criteria requires.²⁵ Nevertheless, as we shall see, this system also resulted in significantly higher chances of survival on the richer Jewish Hungarians' side.

4. Helping for money?

An average Budapest building manager obviously could not help all Jewish Hungarians, hence he or she had to decide whom to help. In order to be able to understand the choices of the *házmester* in 1944, we need to take into consideration the interwar tradition of tipping, but we also need to think of the society's attitude towards supplementary payments. Accepting money for helping, and – from another vantage point – observing the financial progress of Jew-saviours was part of moral normality in Budapest in 1944–45. In a similar case from the Justificatory Committee files, twenty-five residents of Pozsonyi út 16 wrote to the Committee to express their gratitude towards the local building manager for saving their lives and feeding them during the Arrow Cross reign. Six other Jewish Hungarians, who were only relocated into the building while it served as a ghetto house marked by a yellow star, confirmed that the *házmester* cooked for the ghettoised people, and when Arrow Cross units raided the building, the building manager hid them in 'Christian' apartments or in the cellar.²⁶ Mrs Surányi, however, another person who had to move into the building when the ghettoisation started, told the Justificatory Committee that the *házmester* indeed served her and all the other residents, but these were paid services.²⁷ Mrs Epstein added to this that since she was a widow and could not satisfy the building manager in a financial way, he was quite rude to her, while the same individual treated her friend who paid him large amounts very well.²⁸ Therefore in the apartment building of Pozsonyi út 16, similarly to Kádár utca 5, there was a division between the experience of poorer and richer people.

Reading these stories, we are faced with the symbiosis of two seemingly paradoxical practices: the negative discrimination towards the poorer inhabitants was unac-

24 Vardeja, *Moral Bystanders and Mass Violence*, 154.

25 As a Holocaust survivor notes in her recollections, even rejecting a tip was an insult in interwar Budapest. See: Szilvia Czingel, *Szakácskönyv a túlélésért* [=Cookbook for Survival], Budapest 2013, 31.

26 Budapest City Archives, BFL XVII/ 1598, The Case of Mrs Pozsár, a letter dated 17 June, 1945.

27 Ibid., the testimony of Mrs Surányi told to the Justificatory Committee, on 9 July, 1945.

28 Ibid., see Mrs Epstein's testimony at a hearing of the Justificatory Committee, on 16 July, 1945.

ceptable (especially in the eyes of the leftists), but paying for the *házmester's* life-saving services was still widely accepted in Hungarian society in the 1940s. To differentiate between a tip and a bribe is not an easy task. At first glance, there seems to be a moral line between the two phenomena, but what considerations are behind this moral judgment? One factor which is likely to make a difference here is the prospective or retrospective orientation of the person who offers the sum in question. He or she either wants to appreciate the high quality service experienced, or – as Torfason, Flynn and Kupor put it – he or she wants to “encourage good service in the future”.²⁹

After comparing the tipping cultures of various countries, Torfason, Flynn and Kupor maintain that there is a relation between the moral acceptance of bribing and the longer temporal focus of tipping. Their study compares the general attitude towards bribery country by country on the basis of a 2006 Gallup survey. They found that while for instance Canadians and Indians are similarly willing to tip, Indians are more likely to tip with a prospective orientation, and, at the same time, they find bribing more acceptable than Canadians.³⁰ Their conclusion is that if someone tips with a prospective focus, then this person is likely to show greater tolerance towards bribery. This could also be true for 1940s Budapest society. Whereas Jewish Hungarians, who in the interwar period were used to tip the building managers for their services in the apartment building with a more retrospective focus, in the difficult months of 1944 they started to encourage the same *házmester* to assist their survival by their supplementary payments and donations.

Those who paid received the necessary assistance from the *házmester*. Those who were unable to pay could be drafted to the death marches, or to different kind of work-groups, and were often the subject of the Arrow Cross fighters' brutality. Although this is a bit speculative and the border between bribe and tip stays very blurred, one can conclude that in 1944–45, Hungarian society showed a significant tolerance towards bribing the Budapest building managers.

Another important factor which lies behind the motivation of help is pre-existing social connections. Well-documented cases in many apartment buildings across the Hungarian capital show that the building managers hurried to save first the owners and supervisors of their buildings. Even if these people's survival was the building managers' direct professional interest, nevertheless, this tendency underlines my argument that the *házmester* contributed more to the survival of the richer Jewish Hungarians than to the poorer ones.

This is what happened, for instance, in Lázár utca 11, an apartment building close to the famous Budapest opera house. In June 1944, this building was designated for non-Jews, but with the help of building manager István Allmann, the Jewish Hungarian owner could hide here and survive the ghetto period. For the justificatory process, the owner, Dr Sebestyén, described how the *házmester* brought them food and firewood, and provided a hiding place for them.³¹ Only a couple of blocks from here, in Nagymező utca 36, *házmester* Udvardy kept the building owner's money and assets safe.³² In early December 1944, from Szondi utca 42c the building manager Dávid Sipos took courage and went into the already sealed ghetto of Budapest. There he passed his own identity documents to his boss, the building supervisor Béla Czigler, and by this he effectively

29 Magnus Thor Torfason/Francis J. Flynn/ Daniella Kupor, Here's a Tip: Prosocial Gratuities are Linked to Corruption, in: *Social Psychological & Personality Science* 4 (2013) 3, 348-354.

30 *Ibid.*, 350-353.

31 BFL XVII/1598, Justificatory Committee Files, Box No. 8, district VI, The Case of István Allmann, letter of Dr György Sebestyén, dated 13 August, 1945.

32 BFL XVII/1598, Justificatory Committee Files, Box No. 7, see the questionnaire in the case of István Udvardy.

saved Mr Czigler's life.³³ There is no reason to think that these building managers only helped the building owners and supervisors. In fact, Allmann, Sipos and Udvardy actively backed the hiding of others as well. However, the building owners, supervisors and the other richer or influential tenants were more likely to be among the saved ones by the *házmesterek* than the poorer inhabitants.

An interesting example of help provided for the richer or more significant tenants can be seen in the case of István Bartos. He was the *házmester* of Visegrádi utca 60, and on 27 April 1945, twelve residents reported him to the police because he was not willing to give back the belongings of the Jewish Hungarian tenants. These things he allegedly stole from their apartments during December 1944, a month the tenants had to spend in the central ghetto area in district VII.³⁴ When – following the post-war denunciation – the police searched the *házmester's* apartment, they found several pieces of cloth with the initials of the tenants on them and further personal belongings, which made the building manager's wrongdoing unquestionable. However, a number of other tenants praised the same building manager for his assistance during the German occupation. Accordingly, he delivered a package to György Gergely, in a labour service camp, sent by his wife living in the ghetto house.³⁵ When the ghetto building was due to be emptied, it was the building manager, who – thanks to his network connections – knew in advance about the coming Nazi raid in early December. He quickly informed Róbert Spitz, a wealthy paint merchant residing in the building, who then escaped, thereby avoiding this round-up.³⁶

Building managers in general provided a link between the authorities and the tenants. This function characterised them already in the earlier years of the war, and to a lesser extent in the interwar years. It is enough to think about their role in compulsory address registration, or their distributing assignments with food rations cards. Nevertheless, while prior to ghettoisation the Jewish tenants could also contact directly the authorities, this became extremely difficult once they were confined into a closed ghetto building. From being the focal point between the authorities and the tenants already in the interwar era, it follows that the *házmester* had extensive experiences with policemen, postmen, municipality officers, etc. This is why they knew how to approach them, and they were very often entrusted with otherwise classified information during the Second World War. This factor can also partly explain their high success in helping the survival of the hidden Jewish Hungarians. Bartos knew when the emptying of the ghetto house was planned by the authorities. He used this information to save the wealthiest person residing in this building. Bartos, the earlier mentioned Mrs K. and many other building managers brought food for the trapped Jewish Hungarians, acting as middlemen, many of them earning on these transactions. At Szent István park 10 building manager Papp was accused by the tenants of not letting in Christian friends bringing food for those imprisoned in the ghetto house during 1944.³⁷ At the same time, he was accused of earning from the starving tenants by selling them food.³⁸

33 BFL XXV 1a Files of the Budapest People's Court, case number 1945/200, The Case of Dávid Sipos, statement of Béla Czigler, 33.

34 BFL XVII/1598, Justificatory Committee Files, Box No. 3, district V, The Case of Mr István Bartos, a denunciation signed by 13 residents, dated 27 April 1945.

35 Ibid., György Gergely's letter, written on 23 June 1945.

36 Ibid., see Mr. Róbert Spitz's letter, written on 24 July 1945.

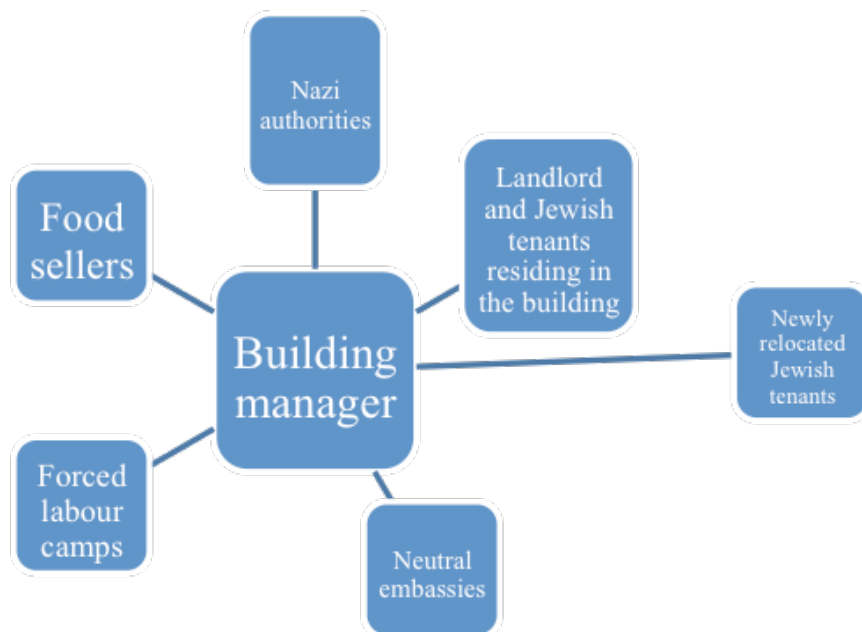
37 See this in the justificatory process: BFL XVII/1598, Justificatory Committee Files, Box No. 9, The Case of Mrs Papp, letter by Ármin Rejtő building warden, dated 2 May 1945.

38 BFL XXV 1a Files of the Budapest People's Court, case number 1945/1500, The Case of György Papp, see the verdict of the People's Court, 12.

These instances prove that a Budapest building manager could bridge the structural holes between the ghettoised tenants and other elements of 1944 Hungarian society thanks to his or her social position. The building manager could for example buy food for the ghettoised people, but the tenants could also access often vital information through the *házmester*. According to Ronald S. Burt, “structural holes are an opportunity to broker the flow of information between people, and control the projects that bring together people from opposite sides of the hole.”³⁹ By spanning the structural holes these individuals gained a competitive advantage, which is the metaphor of social capital.⁴⁰ The below diagram shows how a Budapest building manager – thanks to his or her social position – could bridge the structural holes between the ghettoised people and other segments of the society. The diagram also illustrates that the landlords and certain other Jewish tenants – residing already for years in a building which later was turned into a ghetto house – had closer ties with the building manager than those individuals who were forced to move there only because of the anti-Jewish regulations. Their prior contacts often resulted in a higher level of trust.

In addition to this, the building managers knew the background of the older residing tenants much better. Consequently they could easily pick a richer one from whom a higher remuneration could be expected. This ‘cherry-picking’ could also be based on emotional ties, or on earlier higher tips received by the building managers. It obviously made sense to save those tenants first who were willing to – and able to – better tip the *házmester*. These tenants also proved to be valuable in social networks, thus, as a result, class status mattered and the richer Jewish Hungarians had better survival chances in most Budapest apartment buildings.

Diagram: The Network of Budapest building managers



³⁹ Ronald S. Burt, *The Social Capital of Structural Holes*, in: Mauro F. Guillén/Randall Collins/Paula England/Marshall Meyer (Eds.), *The New Economic Sociology*, New York 2005, 155.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 149, 155. See on this also: Ronald S. Burt, *Brokerage and Closure: An Introduction to Social Capital*, Oxford 2013, 4-5, 10-24.

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