Survival Strategies, Ghettoization and the Persecution of Jews in Budapest, 1944

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

Through the Budapest experience of 1944 I investigate how the extreme situation – brought about by the occupation of the city by German forces and the putsch of the local Nazis, as well as the discrimination and subsequent persecution of Jews and the Allied bombings –affected the strategies of survival characterizing the capital's population. What did survival depend on and how did city dwellers – especially "Jews" – mobilize their resources to get beyond these regulations? Did personal strategies of resistance make a difference or was the fate of Budapest Jewry sealed after the German occupation? How effective were the antisemitic regulations in everyday life and to what extent did the rabidly antisemitic press of the time reflect the worldview of everyday people? By relying primarily on sources that lend themselves to the investigation of personal survival strategies, I argue that despite the fact that the highly antisemitic official discourse had a detrimental effect on Jewish – Gentile social interactions, it was not the only and most-pervasive factor that influenced the outcome of this relationship and the action of people. Moreover, I argue that both Jews and Gentiles contested antisemitic policies by trying to make it serve their needs, though in different ways. It is argued that contesting Nazi policies on a personal, family and bureaucratic level was a key factor in the survival of large segments of Budapest Jewry, due to the distinct nature of the Holocaust in Budapest.

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Introduction

> This better part of Hungarian officialdom strove to maintain legal order …even in the application of anti-Jewish laws and under the circumstances this was certainly the best course of action for their members to follow. However, in some areas…more would have been called for, especially after the German occupation: The administrators should have proclaimed the partial, and later total, breakdown of the political, moral and jurisdictional legitimacy of state authority, and they should have acted accordingly.
>
> *István Bibó*

The Hungarian Holocaust is often remembered as a unique case within Hitler's Europe, as it came significantly late in the history of the war, yet it was characterized by an unforeseen efficiency with regards to the deportation and subsequent gassing of almost half million provincial citizens within six weeks. The Budapest case, however, can be seen as even more exceptional, as this was the only major European city occupied by the Germans where the liquidation of the Jewish population remained unfinished. The Jews of Budapest – especially those who were not called up for labor service – could use the city space unrestrictedly till the spring of 1944. Even after the German occupation of the country on March 19, 1944, it took almost nine month to establish a Jewish ghetto within the city, with several previous attempts to separate the Jews failing one by one.[1]

[1] Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide, The Holocaust in Hungary*, Volume 2, (New York: Boulder-Columbia University Press, 1994), Tim Cole, *Holocaust City* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Szita Szabolcs, *A zsidók üldöztetése Budapesten* (Budapest: Magyar Auschwitz Alapítvány, 1994); Lévai Jenő, *A pesti gettó csodálatos megmenekülésének hiteles története* (Budapest: Officina, 1946); Karsai László, Holokauszt, (Budapest: Pannonica, 2001).

Through the Budapest experience of 1944 I investigate how the extreme situation – brought about by the occupation of the city by German forces and the putsch of the local Nazis, as well as the discrimination and subsequent persecution of Jews and the Allied bombings – changed the strategies of survival characterizing the capital's population. What did survival depend on and how did city dwellers – especially "Jews" – mobilize their resources to get beyond these regulations? Did personal strategies of resistance make a difference or was the fate of the Budapest "Jews" sealed after the German occupation? How effective were the antisemitic regulations in everyday life and to what extent did the rabidly antisemitic press of the time reflect the worldview of everyday people? By relying primarily on sources that lend themselves to the investigation of personal survival strategies, I argue that despite the fact that the highly antisemitic official discourse had a detrimental effect on "Jewish"[2]-Gentile social interactions, it was not the only and most-pervasive factor that influenced the outcome of this relationship and the success of survival. Moreover, I argue that both Jews and Gentiles contested antisemitic policies by trying to make it serve their needs, though in different ways. It is argued that contesting Nazi policies on a personal, family and bureaucratic level was a key factor in the survival of large segments of Budapest Jewry. Through the micro analysis of these personal strategies I demonstrate how and why Budapest – contrary to Tim Cole's recent labeling – never became a "Holocaust City", yet it became a space of survival for more than a hundred thousand Jews.[3] Rather than starting out from the assumption that Nazi, Arrow Cross and municipal policies were so effective that simply studying ordinances – issued by the SS or local quisling ministries and municipalities – a historian can grasp the essence of the Holocaust, I put this assumption into question. What if these policies

[2] I use "Jew" and "Jewish" in quotation marks when I refer to those subjected to antisemitic racial policy.
[3] Cole: *Holocaust City,* 220.

only acquired their meaning through being carried out and/or contested by city dwellers? Focusing both on the performance of the city population faced with the anti-Jewish measures and the desires of dejewification experts as well as the antisemitic press reveals the significant cleavages between the two positions. Suffice to say here that the official desire to discriminate the "Jews" as a whole never materialized on the level of Jewish-Gentile interactions, and there were many loopholes to get beyond these inhuman regulations as they barely served the interests of the majority.[4] Throughout the thesis, I argue that studying how the top-down processes of the Holocaust acquired meaning on a local level opens up new dimensions of understanding the extent and effect of discriminatory policies. Namely I argue that antisemitic measures and the burden of official antisemitism affected the persecuted population differently, based on various specificities of space, time, social networks and class.

While the few open acts of resistance and the abundant small-scale contestations of policies as well as the bureaucratic tussle could not stop the final establishment of the Budapest ghetto in December 1944 and the slaughter of many[5], it can be argued that they successfully slowed down the radicalization of anti-Jewish policies. Due to the landslide defeat of the *Wehrmacht* at the Eastern Front of the Second World War and the rapid advance of Soviet Army, these months of contestations proved to be essential for the survival of the capital's Jewry. In October 15 a strongly pro-German, quisling government seized power in Hungary, which left no doubts about its desire to solve the Hungarian Jewish question once and for good,

[4] The memoir of Tivadar Soros (*Maskerado: dancing around death in Nazi Hungary*, Edinburgh : Canongate, 2000) a lawyer who survived the Holocaust with fake papers is analyzed in the thesis along with other memoirs. On a recent publication on open Jewish resistance see David Gur, *Brothers for resistance and rescue: the underground Zionist youth movement in Hungary during World War II*, (Jerusalem : Gefen, 2007).

[5] Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide, The Holocaust in Hungary*, Volume 2, (New York: Boulder-Columbia University Press, 1994), 1122-1123.

though – in line with the official Nazi policy of concealing the massacres – policy was not open about its intentions to murder or hand over Hungarian Jewry to the Nazis. The killing and death-marching of thousands and the physical restriction and subsequent ghettoization of the majority of Budapest Jews, however, foreshadowed the different era that the Nyilas (Arrow Cross) government's accession to power represented.

That said it can be presumed with almost certainty that had it not been for the reluctance of various actors to facilitate ghettoization before mid-October, Budapest Jewry would have faced a similar fate than the ghettoized in 1941-1944 Poland: mass extermination before the Red Army reached Budapest in January 1945. István Bibó's criticism on the 1944 Budapest situation – according to which no cooperation should have existed between the Germans and the various administrative bodies in Hungary – still holds truth for the deportation of provincial Jewry[6], where the complicity of Hungarian authorities was especially instrumental, and without which the process could have been slowed down by a mass non-cooperation of the Hungarian gendarmes and the local municipalities as well as the Jewish organs. I argue, however, that in the Budapest case, paradoxically enough, this cooperation with the Germans had in fact the unintended consequence of creating what I call a network of overlapping bureaucracies, which in turn slowed down the implementation of Nazi policies until the Arrow Cross takeover.

Overlapping German and local bureaucracies and centers of power were instrumental in either facilitating or contesting plans to ghettoize urban Jewry in East and Central Europe. When trying to contextualize the uniqueness of the Budapest case, it is essential to define the concept of "the ghetto", so as to define the apparent

[6] Bibó, 168-169.

differences that existed, for instance, between cities like Amsterdam and Kovno, both of which had a "ghetto". I discern three different types of urban formations within Axis-ruled Europe, which denote different functions, though all of them are commonly labeled as "ghetto". While each type corresponds to a set of localities, it is important to highlight that most ghettoes united more functions throughout their existence, so a clear-cut differentiation remains elusive.

First (i) "ghetto" can denote the large assembly centers in the occupied Polish and Soviet territories that concentrated local Jewry before eventual deportations to death camps. Transit ghettoes (ii) were established for a shorter or longer period of time to concentrate and re-distribute Jewry often from several countries and regions. Based on the urban criterion, transit camps – like Westerbork in Holland or Fuenfbrunnen in Luxemburg – can be distinguished from transit ghettoes. The most similar case to the Budapest one is the example of the debates on the Warsaw ghetto in 1939-1940. Both Budapest and Warsaw represented a third type of ghetto formation, which I label as (iii) the metropolitan ghetto. Even in terms of Warsaw, however, it must be mentioned that the differences outnumber similarities, and only the belated establishment of both ghettoes form a common ground. Once the Warsaw Ghetto was established, it housed a large segment of regional Jewry as opposed to the Budapest one, and it developed a variety of ghetto institutions that were simply alien to the Budapest case, where the Ghetto had only a short-lived six-week existence during the last period of the *Drittes Reich*. Despite that, many similar strategies of survival developed in both cities as it is outlined in chapter 5.3, yet due to the different contexts, their outcome followed different trajectories.

Though building on the lead of Gutman and Cole in the study of urban ghettoization, my thesis is not intended to be the assiduous reconstruction of

municipal and ministerial policies leading to the establishment of the Budapest Ghetto. On the contrary to this top-down perspective characterizing the majority of Holocaust scholarship, I demonstrate through the case study of Budapest how local population in a city could influence, obey and override bureaucratic measures in connection with Nazi ghettoization. While Cole's monograph concentrated on the administrative history of Budapest ghettoization, I analyze how the constant changes around the shape and establishment of the Budapest ghetto changed everyday social relationships between and within the Jewish and non-Jewish population of the city.

I primarily rely on sources which reveal individual strategies and experiences of those who lived in Budapest in the period under scrutiny. This is why I turn to the qualitative analysis of individual petitions, memoirs, oral history interviews, trial documentation as well as contemporary press, which have not yet been investigated from the perspective of microhistory and Alltagsgeschichte that I am primarily relying on as a theoretical framework. Theories on urban history and on the spatial turn are also crucial as it is demonstrated that personal strategies were highly influenced by the space in which they were carried out.

Chapter 2 outlines the residential patterns of Budapest Jewry from the late 19th century to the interwar period based on statistical sources as well as birth and marriage certificates, while chapter 3 summarizes the main steps that led to the belated establishment of the Pest Ghetto and the so called International Ghetto, which was intended to house Jews protected by neutral states. Through memoirs, the contemporary press and the petitions to the city council, I also analyze how contesting ghettoization policies influenced their implementation. In chapter 4 it is analyzed how antisemitism was instrumentalized in various right-wing papers to achieve benefits and various rights to the city in 1944, and how it was intended to legitimate the

discrimination of Jews. As a counterpart to this, in chapter 5 I analyze to what extent did antisemitism and other factors like financial concerns, gender and age influence the success of survival strategies on a local scale, in yellow star houses. In order to reconstruct the microcosm of relationships between Jewish tenants and the Gentile building manager of certain apartment buildings, I rely on the 1945 vetting committee trials of former building managers. Through this analysis, I demonstrate that the success of survival strategies heavily depended on the residents' relations with the building manager. In addition to this, I investigate two memoirs from the point of view of personal survival strategies. Through briefly examining the Warsaw ghetto, I bring parallels to Jewish-Gentile cooperation and hostility witnessed in the Budapest case

1. Ghettoization, Alltagsgeschichte and Holocaust Historiography: Theoretical Approaches

While the history of the Holocaust in East and Central Europe tends to be in the centre of attention of "Western", mainly American and Israeli researchers, many of their works – being less accessible to local audiences – are barely known or oftentimes overlooked in the respective national historiographies. This definitely does not hold in the case of Tim Cole's *Holocaust City* which – through its Hungarian canonization by Gábor Gyáni – has contributed to stirring a major controversy among Hungarian historians in 2008, with several parties taking sides, among them the deputy Head of the Academy's Institute of History, Attila Pók as well.[7] As Cole's book on the making of the Budapest ghetto is connected to my thesis both in its topic and methodology, I briefly describe the theoretical-conceptual issues of the Holocaust scholarship through the analysis of his monograph. Connected to this I also describe how the approach of Alltagsgeschichte and microhistory can be of use when writing the history of ghettoization.

Without venturing to highlight the full scope of the debate centered around Tim Cole's book, it can be pointed out that a common theme was the underlying theoretical basis of writing Holocaust history in the past two decades. The argument of Gábor Gyáni focused on the theoretical backwardness of Hungarian-language Holocaust historiography, and pointed to the near complete absence of Hungarian historians from the international Holocaust scholarship despite the unrivaled

[7] Pók Attila, "Én, mi és ti. A magyarországi Holokauszt kutatásáról," (I, we and you. On the research of the Hungarian Holocaust) *Kommentár*, no. 5 (2008): 84-88.

popularity of their topic.[8] For Gyáni, Tim Cole, an English historian who came to research the ghettoization of Budapest in the early 1990s, served as a counterexample as Cole managed to bring fresh insights into the scholarship on the Holocaust in Hungary.

The main methodological innovation of Cole's book is his geographical approach to ghettoization, as he regards both the intentionalist-functionalist paradigm and the "historical-morphological" approach of Christopher Browning on the Holocaust insufficient and misleading. According to intentionalists like Friedman, ghettoization was inevitably leading to the final extermination of the Jews, and it constituted a necessary step between the legal and economic discrimination of the Jews and their final extermination in concentration camps or through ghetto pogroms. As opposed to this, functionalists argue that ghettoes were implemented apart from the final solution; as a proof of this it can be argued that ghettoes were installed even before any master plan of the Holocaust was born. The shift towards extermination only came when the ghettoes seemed to be failing. Trying to supersede the intentionalist-functionalist paradigm through examining case studies of ghettoization, Christopher Browning argued for a historico-morphological approach to ghettoes. According to this, no widespread generalization is adequate, as local processes were the most decisive factors influencing the establishment and future of the ghettoes. He contends, on the other hand that in general local authorities wanted normalization, and only orders from Berlin changed the course of events.[9]

Cole's take on the ghettoization refutes these paradigms mentioned above, and along with a general trend in the social sciences since the 1990s, he argues that

[8] Gábor Gyáni, "Helyünk a Holokauszt történetírásában," (Our Place in the Historiography of the Holocaust) *Kommentár*, no. 3 (2008): 13-23. Gábor Gyáni, "Modernizmus és Gettó. Budapest két arca," (Modernism and Ghetto. The Two faces of Budapest) *BUKSZ*, no. 4 (2005): 316-320.
[9] Tim Cole, *Holocaust City*, 31-34.

spatiality as a factor should be the main theoretical framework of studying ghettoization. Cole argues in a recent study published in the *Historiography of the Holocaust* edited by Dan Stone that "[S]tressing the physicality of the ghettoization also acts as a reminder of the central place of territoriality in the implementation of the Holocaust".[10] According to Cole, the most important aspect of ghettoization is its territoriality, or the exercise of power through space, as the making of the ghetto was "a means of gathering all the 'Jews' in the city together in one particular place ('Jewish presence'), and/or it can be a means of making the remainder of the city *judenfrei* ('Jewish absence')".[11] This spatial duality of "Jewish absences" and "Jewish presences" serves as a backbone of his investigation, which is essentially a close look at how municipal and ministry officials as well as Nazi and Arrow Cross politicians envisioned the spatial restructuring of the Budapest population in 1944.

Even though Cole's volume clearly opened a new chapter in Holocaust historiography by introducing the spatial dimension as an analytical category, he does not draw on many of the key texts on the "spatial turn" in historiography (his references are only to Soja's 1971 and 1985 articles in this regard[12], which only pre-echo the interest in space as a leading component in social scientific investigation). This might be explained by the fact that several years must have elapsed between the time of primary research, the writing and the publication of the book.

In terms of the spatial turn, on which this study builds on as well, I use Simon Gunn's definition, who argued that it denotes an understanding of space as an

[10] Tim Cole, Ghettoization. In *The Historiography of the Holocaust.* ed. Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 81.
[11] Tim Cole. *Holocaust City. The Making of a Jewish Ghetto* (New York: Routledge. 2003), 37.
[12] Edward W. Soja, *The Political Organization of Space* (Washington, Association of American Geographers, 1971). 9.

analytical category "as a means of understanding social and cultural processes".[13] While Soja argues that this shift to geography characterizing the "postmodern" must supersede the "modern" emphasis on time and history, Gunn contends that spatial analysis is only informative when put in a context provided by its own past, as it is argued by chapter 3 as well.[14] This thesis is a close look at how Budapest population developed strategies and networks that helped its survival in 1944, whereby I mostly focus on the apartment building as a spatial entity that partially determined the outcome of these strategies. On the contrary to Cole's treatise, which only looks at 1944 and regards Budapest as a plotting board on which different spatial policies were carried out, I also investigate the pre-history of 1944 by looking at the residential structures of Budapest Jewry, by which city officials had to face with when trying to implement their measures. Moreover, I shift the focus from the officials to everyday people and their strategies to use the city space according to their own interests.

While Cole argues that Budapest residents as actors clearly influenced the outcome of ghettoization policies, his book seems to continue the tradition of writing the Holocaust from the perspective of the perpetrators, though in *Holocaust City* this does not mean the Nazi officials but rather the Budapest city bureaucrats. It occasionally leads to taking words for facts on the part of the otherwise critically minded Cole who – when discussing the success of city officials – concludes that Buda was effectively made *"judenfrei"*. At another instance he argues that "ghettoization quite literally meant the reshaping of the city along segregated lines".[15] Aside from the fact that many sources testify that a large number of Jews remained successfully out of official ghettoization in Budapest – as well as all over Hitler's

[13] Simon Gunn, "The spatial turn: changing histories of space and place" in *Identities in Space, Contested Terrains in the Western City since 1850* ed. Simon Gunn and Robert J. Morris (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2001). 9.
[14] Ibid. 11.
[15] Cole, 173, 220.

Europe – either with false documents, mixed marriages or in hiding, if the agency of local population was taken more seriously by Cole, he would have had to concentrate more on the possibility of transgressing these policies.

Stemming from this approach of focusing on the bureaucratic history of ghettoization, the suffering and the massacres in contemporary Budapest are only briefly mentioned and not analyzed in his story, despite the fact that the spatiality of the various forms of anti-Jewish measures highly influenced the outcome of human experience as well, of which Cole displays awareness throughout his book.

Cole successfully imbeds the Budapest story in the central narratives of the Holocaust, yet he tends to be less sensitive to local processes and developments. At times he seems to hold on too tightly to his pre-established concepts and somewhat informal style. The most striking example of this is the title of the book, *Holocaust City*, which is not an adequate term to grasp the Budapest experience of 1944. Cole does admit that "Budapest was not a typical Holocaust city"[16] (though only towards the end of his book), and indeed, the Hungarian capital was the only major city in Central and Eastern Europe which never experienced mass deportations and where a large Jewish population managed to survive the Nazi period, with the actual ghettoes being established only in the very last phase of German occupation, as opposed to many neighboring countries. This is why it is misleading when Cole labels the yellow-star houses – to be found dispersed amidst "non-Jewish" apartment buildings – as ghetto houses, since their emergence actually testifies to the difficulty of erecting a ghetto in Budapest, not to its presence.

Besides the historiography on the Holocaust, in terms of a theoretical underpinning, the tradition of Alltagsgeschichte seems to be important for my thesis,

[16] Ibid. 220

as this approach of writing social history was primarily applied to reconstruct and voice the everyday experience of people under the Nazi regime. The concept of *Eigensinn* is of special importance here, as it serves as an underlying notion of studying everyday life. As Andrew Stuart Bergerson defined the term:

> [Eigensinn] can never be agency in the classic historical sense of willful, self-conscious intentionality. Self-deceptive, it is all too aware of its impact on the world and yet acts as if that outcome had not been planned in advance or intended as such. *Eigensinn* is a *slave's trope* it tweaks the nose of more powerful authorities, and than plays the fool or innocent to shield itself from the retribution. From this perspective, both eigensinn and herrschaft give daily life its everyday quality. Both require normalcy to function properly.[17]

Alf Lüdtke also pointed out that Eigensinn is not about individuals changing the deep structures of domination (Herrschaft), yet about their ability to – even illegitimately – use them for their own needs.[18] Attention is not primarily centered on the outbursts (Ausbrüche) of the individual against the system, but on reconstructing step by step individual decisions and acts as well as their socio-historical contexts. Alltagsgeschichte builds on the weberian notion of *Macht* (power) and *Herrschaft* (domination): while the former denotes the open and forced power, the latter describes domination that is based on widespread acceptance. As Bergerson argues, the reconstruction of everyday experience should be based on taking both domination and agency into account. *Eigensinn*, thus, was mostly studied in connection with *Herrschaft,* by denoting the free will of the individual in connection with larger structures and within the forms of domination.

[17] Andrew Stewart Bergerson, *Ordinary Germans in Extraordinary Times, The Nazi Revolution in Hildesheim* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 266.
[18] Alf Lüdtke, *Anyagiság, hatalom-vágy és a felszín varázsa. Az Alltagsgeschichte perspektíváiról* (Materialism, lust for power and the charm of the surface. The perspectives of Alltagggeschichte) *Aetas* 1 (2003): 147-156.

As opposed to microhistory, Alltagsgeschichte acknowledges the domination of structures over the individual to a certain extent; the main raison for this is that most of the Alltagsgeschichte studies focus on the Nazi period, in which, as Broszat pointed out, there was only sporadic and insignificant resistance against the regime, thus studying the outright manifestations of political resistance would have been futile. The sister approach of Alltagsgeschichte, the mostly Italian and American microhistory (as represented by Carlo Ginzburg, Natalie Davis and Robert Darnton among others) is more focused on the individual, and instead of emphasizing the relationship of the individual to forms of domination, it is more centered on the social networks through which individuals follow personal strategies. While the leap to the macro and the problem of representation of individual cases seems to be a logical gap that is yet to be bridged, microhistorians did not retreat to interpret their findings as bearing only local significance. Seemingly paradoxical concepts like "exceptional average" ("ungewöhnlich Normal") or "representative exception" ("normale Ausnahme") served as enlightening tools to interpret the case studies of microhistory, which essentially questioned that history can be understood from the top down from looking at the larger processes, and emphasized the bottom up ("Geschichte von unten – Geschichte von innen") approach of understanding and writing history.[19]

[19] Jürgen Schlumbohm, "Mikrotörténelem – makrotörténelem" *Aetas* 4 (2000): 139-146.

2. The Nonexistent Ghetto: Jewish ResidentialPatterns in Budapest, 1875-193

As the first chapter highlighted it briefly, Simon Gunn argued that "the primacy of space for contemporary analysis…has emphasized the importance of the concept of 'space' as an analytical category as against that of 'time', and thus implies a movement from the historical to the geographical as a means to understanding social and cultural processes". In the final analysis Gunn contends that "historical" and "spatial" approaches can be combined or reconciliated[20], yet this view is far from being a common ground among urban historians. Tim Cole, for instance, who applied a distinctively spatial approach in *Holocaust City*, focused on the manipulation attempts of city space by various authorities within eight month in 1944, without venturing into a historical investigation.

While theoretically every approach (historical, spatial, historical-spatial) can be legitimated, I argue that in the case of the persecution of Jews in Budapest, much of the problems that the authorities faced – the relocation and concentration of Jews, the designation of yellow star houses, the restriction of Jewish shopping time – cannot be fully grasped without the investigation of the Jewish residential patterns in the late 19th and early 20th century; in sum, the spatial approach of focusing on the ghetto area and downtown Pest as well as on the survival strategies applied by its residents needs to be combined with a brief historical introduction on the residential patterns of the Jewish population. All the more so, as opposed to many cities in Poland where

[20] As a proof of this see the recent urban historical studies published in his and Robert J. Morris's volume, for instance Barbara Burlinson Mooney, "Racial boundaries in a frontier town: St. Louis on the eve of the American Civil War, in Gunn and Morris, 82-99; Max Farrar, "The zone of the other: imposing and resisting alien identities in Chapeltown, Leeds, during the twentieth century," in Gunn and Morris, 117-133.; Matt Houlbrok, "For whose convenience? Gay guides, cognitive maps and the construction of homosexual London, 1917-1967", in Gunn and Morris, 165-186.

ghettoes were established – Lodz, Warsaw, Lviv for instance[21] –, Budapest Jewry was more dispersed residentially, thus the "place" of the "Jews" within the antisemitic urban planning was far from clear-cut. Despite the stereotypes echoed in contemporary antisemitic press, Jews did not cluster in any neighborhoods as a homogenous group in 1944. Mixed neighborhoods and apartment buildings were more the rule than the exception, and in many cases discriminative regulations separated husband and wife, child and parent from each other, as analyzed in the following chapter.

Based on contemporary statistics, I analyze the traditional Jewish residential patterns in Budapest in three different stages: first, at the end of the 19th century, than around 1900, and at last in the interwar period.

The first comprehensive statistics on Budapest population was published in 1894, which also contained data back to 1870.[22] Assembled in the spirit of Magyar nationalism, the bilingual *Statistisches Jahrbuch* of Gustav Thirring represented and grouped Jews as adherents of a religious denomination, which was carefully documented as a group accomplishing magyarization at a formerly unseen rapidity throughout the decades. From Thirring it becomes clear that within the decade between 1881 and 1891 the number of Jews of Hungarian nationality ("nemzetiség") increased from 59% to 75% while their absolute numbers increased two and a half times since 1870, surpassing 100, 000 four years before the Law of Reception.[23]

Presenting a seemingly "objective" and highly professional piece, Thirring gathered and grouped data according to the statisticians' and politicians' imagined and desired perspective of the city, which prompts for wariness on the historian's part.

[21] See Alan Adelson and Robert Lapides, *Lodz ghetto: inside a community under siege* (New York : Penguin Books, 1991); Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943 : ghetto, underground, revolt* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1982).
[22] Thiring, Gusztáv (Ed.). *Budapest Székesfőváros Statisztikai Évkönyve.* I évf. Budapest: Grill, 1894.
[23] Ibid, 55.

According to this, Budapest was expected to appear as a primarily Hungarian and Catholic city. The unintended consequence of this was that national and religious particularities within the city were downplayed and homogenized. This is a case in point for the Budapest Jewry, as by presenting data only on district boundaries which often comprised various different neighborhoods, the statistician could effectively blur the salience of religious-ethnic enclaves within the city. While table 1 shows that Jews had an almost even ratio in districts VI and VII throughout the 1870s and 1890s, it can be presumed with almost certainty based on the analysis of marriage and birth certificates that there was a heavy clustering at the time within the inner areas of districts VI and VII, around the synagogue built in the 1850s.[24] This stems from a mixture of previous administrative pressure on Jews to live off city proper as well as from religious desire to live close to the synagogue. There were no – official – residential boundaries of Jewish settlement since the Josephinian Reforms in Pest, but Jews did not or could not settle evenly in every part of the city.[25]

[24] Komárik Dénes, "A Dohány utcai zsinagóga építése," in *Budapesti Negyed*, no. 2, (1995) http://www.bparchiv.hu/magyar/kiadvany/bpn/08/komarik.html
Birth registry of the Neolog Israelite community. 1863, 1875, 1898; Birth registry of the Orthodox Israelite community, 1875.
[25] Frojimovics Kinga, Géza Komoróczy et alt., "Király utca: The Old-Old Jewish Quarter of Pest". *Jewish* (Budapest: Városháza, 1999), 67-88.

District	*Catholic*			*Reformed*			*Israelite*		
	1870	1881	1891	1870	1881	1891	1870	1881	1891
IV.	73%	69%	67%	9,2%	9%	9,4%	**7,4%**	**11,3%**	**13,5%**
V.	53%	54%	54%	4,7%	4,7%	5,5%	**34%**	**33%**	**32%**
VI.	55%	54%	52%	2,8%	4,7%	5,2%	**35,8%**	**35,1%**	**35,3%**
VII.	55%	54%	51%	2,8%	4,5%	6,4%	**35,8%**	**35%**	**35,8%**
III. (Óbuda)	78%	77%	74%	4,2%	5,1%	5,2%	**15,9%**	**14,9%**	**14,5%**

Table 1. Denominations in Budapest, 1870-1891. Source: Thirring Gusztáv, *Budapest Székes-főváros Statisztikai Évkönyve* (Budapest: Grill 1896) 55.

In the tables of Thirring, those of the "Israelite denomination" have a massive presence in areas of traditional Jewish settlement, just off the former city walls, yet their ratio did not significantly exceed one-third of the population of the entire districts. District V can be regarded a newer area of concentration, which included the elegant Lipótváros – largely built for and built by the wealthier entrepreneurs of Budapest Jewry – and the less urbanized and industrial neighborhoods, which only became primarily residential in the interwar period. The rate of Jewish population seems to be steady in these "core" districts between the 1870s and 1880s, which is an indication of both previous settlement and continuing popularity among first-generation Budapest Jews who decided on settling in these districts.

One less predictable change within these three decades was the increase in Jewish population in those previous *Vorstädte* which were previously overwhelmingly Catholic. In Józsefváros, there was a hundred percent increase in Jewish population by 1891, while in the neighboring Ferencváros – District IX – Jewish residents comprised 4,6% of the population 1871, while 7,8% in 1891. The showcase for this increase was the working class suburb Kőbánya, which registered a two-and-a-half-time increase, although within an initially very small community. Though Catholics comprised a majority in every single district throughout the period, they were almost outnumbered by other religions in many of the Pest side districts

with a strong Jewish population. There was only one part of the city where the number of Catholics was steadily around 80%, with almost no increase in Jewish population within the period, and these were the districts in Buda.

It is important to add, however, that the concentration of Jewish population in certain neighborhoods and districts almost never meant concentration on the level of the apartment building, which was arguably an important – historically rooted – specificity of Budapest during the persecution of Jews in 1944. In other words: Jews almost never lived in homogenous apartment buildings, and almost every building was mixed in terms of religious denominations. This stems from the Berlin-type design of the Budapest tenement house, which was planned in a way as to house socially different groups within one building, ranging from the upper middle to the working classes.[26] These social differences often correlated with religious differences, especially in view of Jewish concentration in the entrepreneurial and free-market professions.

In 1910, only slight changes occurred as compared to the 1890s. Most importantly Jewish population increased in downtown (district IV), an area where Jews were only exceptionally allowed to settle till the 1860s.[27] Jews almost doubled there ratio in districts I and II, while their percentage decreased slightly in Óbuda (district III). Interestingly, there is a significant decrease in Lipótváros (district V), while more Jews lived in district VII as a generation before.

[26] Hanák Péter, *The garden and the workshop: essays on the cultural history of Vienna and Budapest* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1998), 3-43.
Gyáni Gábor, *Parlor and kitchen: housing and domestic culture in Budapest, 1870-1940* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2002)
[27] Frojimovics Kinga, Géza Komoróczy et alt. 1999. Ibid.

District	Catholic	Reformed	Israelite
IV	62,5	10,8	17,2
V	54,9	8,4	28,9
VI	52,8	8,5	32,5
VII	46,4	8,8	38,5
III	76,5	8	10,8

Table 2. The ratio of Jewish Populaton in Budapest (1910). Source: Gusztáv Thirring, *A Fővárosi Statisztikai Hivatal statisztikai évkönyve,* (Budapest: Grill, 1904), 55.

The end of the "Great War" signified great changes in the demographic position of Budapest Jews within Hungary. First, within rump Hungary after the Trianon Treaty, almost (1920) half of the country's Jewry became concentrated in Budapest.[28] This more visible and clustered presence was combined with a scapegoating of Jews and Budapest – a popular association at the time – by the Horthy-regime, as a supporter of the 1918-19 revolutions.

District I.	7.2
District II.	10.2
District III.	8.8
District XI.	5.8
BUDA	**8.0 (19,632)**
District IV.	18.6
District V.	34.2
District VI.	25.5
District VII.	40.6
District VIII.	20.0
District IX.	10.3
District X.	4.4
PEST	**22.6 (181, 437)**
SUM	**19.4 (201, 069)**

Table 3. Ratio of Jewish denomination in Budapest, 1935. Source: Illyefalvy Lajos, Budapest Székesfőváros Statisztikai Évkönyve. (Budapest: Közp. Stat. Hiv. 1936), 48.

In terms of Jewish residential distribution, however, little had changed in the interwar period, as it is demonstrated by table 3. 90% of the city's Jewry lived on the Pest side, with a largest concentration in the outlying parts of district VII – that is, the area which did not become part of the designated Ghetto in 1944. While the

[28] cf. Ujvári Péter: *Zsidó Lexikon,* (Budapest, 1929), 158.

percentage of Jewry decreased in Terézváros from 32,5% (1910) to 25,5% (1935), there was a significant increase in the district V Jewish population within this time period from 28,9% to 34,2% which can be accounted for development of the Újlipótváros neighborhood in the district, built out in the 1920s and 1930s, housing mostly Jewish middle class population.[29]

In sum, it can be argued that when authorities struggled to establish Jewish houses and a Jewish Ghetto in 1944, there was no historical antecedent they could turn to in Budapest. While on a macro level there was a historically rooted concentration of the Jewish population on the Pest side of the city, this neither materialized in homogenous Jewish districts or neighborhoods, nor in the micro level of the apartment buildings. This was partially due to the fact that even in Pest Jews comprised only one-fifth of the total population. In addition to that, the floor plan of the Budapest tenement house prevented any class-based clustering on the level of the apartment building, and prompted for socially heterogeneous populations. As the outline of Jewish residential patterns in Budapest has shown, there was a historically rooted Jewish concentration in the inner parts of district VII, which still persisted in the interwar period, yet by this time the majority of Jewry lived in other parts of the city. This is why the establishment of yellow star houses and later the Ghetto entailed moving tens of thousands of non-Jews and Jews alike.

[29] Lackó Miklós, "A két világháború között," *Budapesti Negyed*, no. 2-3, 1998. http://www.bparchiv.hu/magyar/kiadvany/bpn/20_21/lacko.html

4. Institutionalized Antisemitism

The Official Press and the "Jews"in Budapest, 1944

Gradually after the occupation of Hungary by the German troops in March 19, 1944, a state-supported racial policy appeared that – after years of under privileging – threatened the country's "Jewish" population physically. In this chapter, I map the antisemitic discourse as apparent in governmental and Nyilas publications, in order to contextualize the common antisemitic themes and the context in which petitions to the city council (to be analyzed in the following chapter) were filed. This antisemitism in the press arguably influenced certain interactions of Jews and Gentiles at the time, as it is demonstrated in chapter 5.1. I am primarily in finding out how different antisemitic papers depicted the persecuted "Jewry" and how "Jewsish" – "non-Jewish" social interactions were portrayed, constructed and skewed in these papers?

Starting with definitions, Jacob Katz noted that "the term anti-Semitism was introduced in Germany at the end of the 1870s to describe the negative attitude toward the Jews held by part of the population at the time."[30] When discussing antisemitism as the "longest hatred" Robert Wystrich also contends that antisemitism originated in a certain historical context but he also stresses that the concept did not mean the same throughout history: "There is clearly a danger in using antisemitism in [an]… overly generalized way, extending it to all times and places regardless of specific circumstances, differences between historical epochs and cultures…Antisemitism is

[30] Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction, Antisemitism 1870-1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1.

not a natural, metahistorical or a metaphysical phenomenon whose essence has remained unchanged throughout all its manifestations over the centuries."[31]

Based on the assumptions cited above, I argue that the numerous antisemitic ordinances issued in the spring and summer of 1944 – among them the deportation of almost half million Jews to Auchwitz-Birkenau – had a strong influence on the officially supported discourse on "Jews"[32], which also impacted the ways "Jews" could position themselves when trying to influence their political-social – most of all residential – situation. Antisemitism literally got institutionalized in 1944, which changed both its meaning and its force. I start out from the assumption that in order to understand the language of petitions and vetting committee files analyzed in the following chapters, and to grasp the change in antisemitic discourse brought about by the German takeover, the examination of papers like *A Harc* – the official paper of the Hungarian Research Institute of the Jewish Question (Zsidókérdést Kutató Magyar Intézet) – is necessary. My main question is to what extent was the extreme right press satisfied with the antisemitic measures, and how did it view ghettoization and the ghettoized? I analyze how "the Jew" was depicted in the officially supported antisemitic press; besides *A Harc* (The Fight) I rely on the popular, government-subsidized daily, the *Esti Újság* (Evening Post) as well as another right wing paper, *Magyarság* (Hungarians).

Interestingly, not their extent of radicalism differentiated the three papers: while all of them were fiercely antisemitic to a similar extent, *A Harc* was entirely devoted to the "Jewish Question", and it was less high brow and contained many vulgar drawings and cartoons as well. On the other hand the *Magyarság* and the *Esti*

[31] Robert Wystrich, *Antisemitism, the Longest Hatred* (London: Mandarin, 1992), xvi-xvii.
[32] Following a practice in scholarship (see for instance Tim Cole, *Holocaust City, The Making of a Jewish Ghetto*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), when referring to those subject to racially discriminatory policy, I use the term Jewish in quotation marks to suggest the artificiality of racial policies.

Újság was more tailored to middle class expectations of propriety and *salonfähig* antisemitism.

The analysis of these papers reveals that antisemitism was used similarly to what Shulamith Volkov termed a "cultural code". In Helmuth Walser Smith's interpretation, antisemitism as a "cultural code" is "a cultural way of marking political space. The utility of the 'cultural code' as an analytic concept lay in showing how antisemitism permeated society even as the political fortunes of antisemitic parties declined." According to the papers analyzed, antisemitic reasoning was a common practice in right wing journalism of the time, even in explaining issues – like food shortage or the distribution of ice in the city – that were seemingly unrelated to Jewish – Gentile relations. There is a main difference, however, between the late-19th century German context to which Volkov first applied the term: namely that antisemitism was a state-supported discriminatory policy in the Hungary of the 1930s and 1940s. This is why it is extremely hard to discern to what extent the papers reflected antisemitism as a "cultural code" shared by the majority of the population, and to what extent was it a state-imposed propaganda on the press of the time that reflected little of the everyday people's sentiments? Based on the analysis of memoirs, vetting committee files (see chapter 5) as well as oral history interviews and petitions (see chapters 4 and 5), I argue that neither of the two extreme poles seem convincing: while parts of their readership and parts of the city population was influenced by antisemitism and tried to benefit from the state-supported antisemitic agenda, many regarded the persecution of the Jews as an unnecessary hassle and did not adopt the antisemitic worldview themselves, and became the passive by-standers of events.[33]

[33] Besides sources analyzed in chapter 4 and 5 see "Anka naplója – feljegyzések a háborús Budapestről" (Anka's Diary: Notes from Wartime Budapest) in *Budapesti Negyed*, no. 3, 2002, 5-216.

I am primarily interested in analyzing how the persecuted "Jews" were depicted in the papers, and how the press commented on Jewish – non-Jewish relations during the discriminative ordinances. Moreover, I discern the anthropology of the "Jew" according to these papers and I trace the main characteristics of depicting the "Jewish man" and "Jewish woman" in *A Harc*, and I analyze how antisemitic articles and caricatures served to legitimate discriminative state policy.

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A common approach in all the papers reporting on the "Jewish question" is that they treat "Jews" as a unified group, which still had more financial power than "non-Jews" even after the confiscation of their property and loss of their political rights. Consequently, they framed their antisemitic narratives along the lines of non-Jewish self-defense.

Similarly to other days, on May 13, 1944 *Esti Újság* published a series of articles in connection with the Jewish question. One of the articles was entitled "Self-defensive fight against the Jewry", while next to it an article reported the confiscation of 50,000 "Jewish radios". According to the author, the radios were of superior quality, and some families had five of them, which they used to listen to the London broadcast.[34]

This paradox of the deprived and discriminated but still powerful "Jew" is apparent in a June 13 article as well that was published in *Magyarság*, with the title of "Snapshots from the calmed down Új-Lipótváros".[35] The article stereotypically noted that former bank directors are sweeping the streets with yellow stars on their lap and that the formerly noisy – that is cosmopolitan and Jewish – neighborhood radiated a

[34] "50,000 zsidó rádiót vett ét a bíróság Budapesten" (50,000 Jewish radios were confiscated in Budapest), *Esti Újság*, May 13, 1944.
[35] "Pillanatképek a megcsendesedett Új-Lipótvárosból," (Snapshots from the calmed down Új-Lipótváros *Magyarság*), 1944, June 13.

more orderly and "normal" character. On the other hand the author of the article still expresses indignation over the fact that despite their inferior status, Jews are better catered for than the recently moved in Gentile population. The problem arose in connection with the ice supply: while Jews, who lived there longer and could afford it, ordered ice every single day according to *Magyarság*, and the suppliers delivered it up to their apartments. On the contrary, Gentiles who only wanted to buy ice in certain days are refused to be served, as Jews had reserved the stock in advance for their own benefits.

The similar motive of Gentile self defense against the "Jews" was highlighted in connection with antisemitic regulations. According to the articles appearing in *Esti Újság* and *Magyarság*, the yellow star made the majority population reveal the real enemy in the "Jew". According to the papers – and to testimonies in post-war trials as well – daily conflicts in shops were often addressed as "Jewish" – "non-Jewish" conflicts after the yellow star regulations were enforced. In *Esti Újság*, for instance, it was stressed that a group of the "Christian" population viewed the food shortage in antisemitic terms. In May 9, the paper published an article – allegedly based on letters to the editor written by "non-Jews" – that demanded the protection of "Christian" customers as some "Christian" vendors in the market halls retained certain goods for their "Jewish" customers. "Letter writers" suggested that "Jews" should only have access to the market halls after 11 a. m., after "Christians" did their shopping. In this case, it can be presumed that the paper conjured up the "letter" as a popular bottom-up initiative to curb the rights of Jewry, as when regulation came out in late May, they exactly followed the suggestions of the letter writer and limited "Jewish" shopping between 11. a.m. and 1 p.m. In view of the complicated bureaucratic system of 1944, it is highly unlikely that the lord major of Budapest, who requested the necessary

legislation from the ministry was influenced by popular initiative, thus in this case official paper was not used to express, but to manipulate popular sentiments, and to prepare "Jews" and "non-Jews" alike for the following restrictions.[36]

Another "letter", allegedly written by a Nagymező utca "Christian" complained that a certain "Jewish" family gets two liters of milk every day, while "Christian" babies only get a tiny amount, while adult Christians "have not even seen milk for quite a while".[37] Other articles in *Esti Újság* also portray "Jews" as still having considerable power even after the legal discriminations and it is a common theme that "Jews" are still better off than Christians, and that through "keeping together", they have access to vital information earlier than the Christians, while they can still capitalize on their "richness" acquired in the "liberal period".

The major, vulgarly antisemitic paper of the time, *A Harc* was only launched in mid-May after the almost total discrimination of "Jews" was a *fait accompli* and when the deportation of provincial Jewry had already started. As opposed to *Esti Újság*, it was completely devoted to portray the past "mischievous" acts of the "Jewry", and it was also committed to present the radical change in the status of "Jews" during 1944. Edited by Zoltán Bosnyák – a former elementary school teacher and author of an antisemitic treatise on Istóczy as well as the head of the Hungarian Research Institute of the Jewish Question – , the weekly combined pseudo-scientific historical analyses with publishing aggressively antisemitic drawings and cartoons. *A Harc* appeared from May to the end of December 1944, and each issue consisted of eight pages, with

[36] "Budapest főpolgármesterének felterjesztése a belügyminiszterhez a zsidók piaci bevásárlási idejének szabályozása ügyében" (Request of the Budapest major to the interior minister in connection with restricting the shopping time of Jews in markets) in *Vádirat a nácizmus ellen* ed. Elek Karsai and Benoschofsky Ilona (Budapest: MIOK, 1960), 123-124.
"A zsidók bevárlásának a nap meghatározott szakára való korláttozása" (Restriction of Jewish shopping time) in ed. Karsai and Benoschofsky, *Vádirat a nácizmus ellen*, 1960, 127-128.

[37] "Keresztény fogyasztók kívánsága: Akadályozzák meg, hogy a zsidók felvásárolják az élelmiszereket a keresztények elől, Szigorú vizsgálatot a zsidók tejellátási visszaélélsei ügyében" (The desire of Christian consumers: Jews should be incapacitated to buy up food before Christians, dire investigation needed to examine the Jewish abuses in milk provisions) *Esti Újság*, May 9, 1944.

a few articles and pictures being republished by the end of the year.[38] Given that it only appeared in 1944, it did not have to conform to its previous journalistic tradition and to censorship, so it could freely echo the Arrow Cross view of the Jewish Question.

What is clear is that despite the heavily deteriorated position of the "Jews" in 1944, *A Harc* still demonized them as the arch enemy that was to be feared even at that time. Similarly to the Nazi view, the articles published in the paper portrayed human history as a constant fight between "Jews" and "non-Jews", which worldview was adopted to interpret Hungarian history and the present war efforts as well. The paper's view on the Jewish question is summarized by Zoltán Bosnyák's opening editorial in the first issue. In the following, I briefly analyze how Bosnyák portrayed the "Jews" in his editorial, and I connect it to other articles in *A Harc*, which elaborate on his views.

According to Bosnyák, the pure discrimination of the "Jews" cannot be the goal of the "Hungarians": as "in terms of race, blood and morals "Jews" are a foreign, newly arrived minority" which had debauched the indigenous population. He argues that society has to be cured from this illness caused by "Jews", and the only solution to this "is the final parting of the ways" of "Jews" and "Hungarians". Bosnyák and other contributors to *A Harc* are not explicit about how they imagine this separation of Hungarians and "Jews", which also characterizes the ideologically chaotic nature of antisemitism in general. Not in any single issue can one find a reference to the physical annihilation of the "Jews". The reasons for this can be the adherence to the official German policy to suppress the reality behind the concentration camps, so as

[38] Bosnyák Zoltán, *Istóczy Győző élete és küzdelmei* (Budapest: Könyv- és Lapkiadó Rt., 1940)

not to provoke wider international condemnation and internal unrest.[39] On the other hand, Bosnyák – partially influenced by Istóczy – never excluded the possibility of the expatriation of the "Jews" to Mandatory Palestine. During the course of the year, occasional articles were published on Jewish immigration to Palestine, which suggested that "Jews" are rooted there, and not in Hungary, or Europe in general.

The rest of Bosnyák's article unites several themes and elements of modern antisemitism and it is very much centered on proving why "Jews" deserve the severe measures of 1944. Corroborating his argument that "Jews" and "Hungarians" can never be reconciled, he portrays "Jewish" characteristics as demonic and eternal, which endure even after their harshest discrimination.

Figure 1. "Jews" in the internment camp.[40]

He addresses "Jews" in third person singular ("a zsidó"), which suggests that they stand united and share similar characteristics. Bosnyák portrays the Jews as a genuinely *raffendes*, exploitive and not as a *schaffendes*, productive race.[41] Several articles appeared which portrayed wealthy "Jews" in the internment camps doing "real", meaning physical work, but even than, it is emphasized how "Jews" are prone to frequent "coffee breaks" and not being committed to work (see picture 1.).

The main accusations of Bosnyák against Hungarian "Jewry" is that it implanted Marxism and thus generated hostility among social groups. Moreover, they destroyed

[39] Heinrich Himmler. "A Secret Speech on the Jewish Question" in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*. ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. 684-685.
[40] *A Harc*, May 15, 1944.
[41] On the concept of "schaffendes-raffendes" see Maria M. Kovacs, "Interwar Anti-Semitism in the Professions: The Case of the Engineers" in *Jews in the Hungarian Economy, 1760-1945. Studies Dedicated to Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger on His Eightieth Birthday*, edited by Michel K. Silber (Hebrew University Press, Jerusalem 1992.),

"indigenous Hungarian spirituality" ("szétrombolta a magyar lelkiséget"). Bosnyák also adopted the Wagnerian cultural critique of the "Jews" – according to which "Jews" produce essentially rootless and superficial culture – and he topped it with an implicit critique of psychoanalysis as a "Jewish" scientific paradigm as well. Bosnyák argues that "Jews" had corrupted Hungarian culture, as in the name of *Zeitgeist* and modernity, "it [the Jewry] filled Hungarian culture with lowly thoughts speculating to instinctual desires" and it "greeted as literature the basest form of pornography" and made sexuality the single most important question.[42] By this, "Jewry" – that proudly identified itself as "Hungarian" – slandered the country's name abroad, while at home it followed a policy of "racial counter-selection" and did not let Hungarians to leading positions, or when it did, they had to serve "Jewish" interests. His final argument – the only one that specifically refers to his time – accuses "Jews" "who sneaked into our ranks" of taking the side of "our arch enemies" and of producing spiritual chaos in Hungarians by scaremongering on the situation of the war.[43]

Figure 2. A Harc, May 1944

As opposed to the antisemitic cartoons of the Dualist period, *A Harc* described "Jewish" men – at this time yellow-star wearing and spatially restricted – as physically dangerous to the "Christian" population.[44] In an article that appeared in the June 10th issue, the author argued that the insolence of the "Jews" made the restrictions banning them from most of the restaurants necessary. It described how a "Jew" was reluctant to take off his hat upon entering a restaurant, thus offending the

[42] Bosnyák Zoltán, "Vádirat a zsidóság ellen!," *A Harc*, June 10, 1944. 1-2. Cf. "A korszellem és a haladás nevében egész kultúréletünket alantas, ösztönéletre spekuláló gondolatokkal telítette…irodalommá avatta kultúréletünkben a legsilányabb pornográfiát".
[43] "Vádoljuk a zsidóságot azzal is, hogy ebben a háborúban, amely a mi élet-halál harcunk is, a közénk beszabadult zsidóság zárt egységben, teljes hittel ellenségeink oldalára állt és az ő érdekeiket szolgálta. Rémhírterjesztéssel szervezett suttogó propagandájával lelki zűrzavart igyekezett felkelteni" Ibid. 2.
[44] "'A pofájába vágtam az öklömmel':A támadó sárgacsillagos" ("'I smashed him in the face': The attacking yellow star man"), *A Harc*, June 26, 1944.

"Christian" guests.[45] In a drawing that appeared on the same page two visibly "Jewish", yellow-star wearing men tell off a smaller "Christian" man. The picture suggests that despite the regulations, "Jews" are still dominant both physically and socially, and they do not cease to vindicate their presumed conviction of superiority over "Christians". The drawing is made more explicit in an article that appeared in a subsequent issue with the title of "'I smashed him in the face': The attacking yellow star man" ("'A pofájába vágtam az öklömmel':A támadó sárgacsillagos"). In this conjured fable, a "Jew" marked with a yellow star is beating up an innocent Christian, and also corrupts a younger soldier by talking to him in a "Jewish" way.[46]

Figure 3. *A Harc*, May 1944

"Jewish" men are not only depicted as powerful, but as having used their dominant social position to sexually exploit "Christian" employees and servants whenever they could. The caricatures above show the situation before the anti-Jewish laws, with the inscription to the left scene saying that "You can get the job, sonny, but…you have to do me a little favor", while on the right it reads "Should I get to know again that when my son visits you at night and … behaves a little oddly…and you slap him in the face again…you're sacked, right? And than where will you find such an elegant position?"

[45] "Zsidó kalapbotrány a Balaton-kávéházban," *A Harc*, June 10, 1944. 2.
[46] „'A pofájába vágtam az öklömmel':A támadó sárgacsillagos", *A Harc*, June 26, 1944.

The "Jewish" man is depicted as ugly, middle-aged and bold, with an enlarged nose and lascivious lips. While several physical characteristics of the "Jew" are inherited from the early stages of modern antisemitism, the "Jew" is not primarily portrayed as speaking a distorted language or having an abnormal built-up as the pipsqueak hero of Oscar Panizza's *The Operated Jew* (1893), or the similar "Jewish" caricatures of the Dualist period [47]; the "Jew" is not primarily depicted as a parvenu and as an odd character either, but as an insolent, prideful parasite who feels too comfortable in society. These Jewish traits, however, are presented as being eternal, and as remaining even after draconic measures in the 1940s.

Whereas according to Kati Vörös the antisemitic sketches in the decades after the Law of Emancipation portray "the Jew" essentially as a male, and present Jewish women as being exempt from the negative "Jewish" characteristics[48], the violently antisemitic drawings and articles present the "Jewess" as being similarly dangerous and parasitic as the male "Jew": even more dangerous in some ways.

Within the portrayal of "Jewish" women in *A Harc* two groups can be distinguished: firstly, the "Jewess" ("zsidó nő", "Hebron rózsája") as a sexual danger, secondly, the older "Jewess" as a social parasite. According to the drawings and articles in *A Harc,* Jewish women are over-sexualized *and* ugly, and they pose a great threat to Hungarian males. The Jewish women is represented in the sketches of the paper as "Kohn Röné", very likely an allusion to René Erdős, interwar Jewish-born Hungarian writer. Erdős was born as a sixth daughter in a poor Orthodox family near Győr, and she soon made her name in the Hungarian avant-garde with pursuing an expressively erotic poetry. Erdős was wavering herself between Catholicism and her

[47] Jack Zipes, *The Operated Jew: Two Tales of Anti-Semitism*. (New York and London: Routledge 1991), 47-74. Kati Vörös: "Judapesti Buleváron," *Médiakutató*, no. 3. (2007) http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2003_01_tavasz/02_judapesti_bulevaron/01.html
[48] Ibid.

inherited Jewish tradition, finally converting in 1909 and adopting traces of anti-Judaism and antisemitism herself; she claimed for instance that her eroticism is closely linked to her Jewish extraction.As Erdős only had Christian lovers and husbands, she became an easy target as a *femme fatal* who corrupts Hungarian men.[49]

Kohn René becomes a representation of the middle aged, parasitic "Jewish" women, who strived to look attractive with the help of money, yet in the end she is unable to. In a cartoon entitled "Kohn René buys a new pair of stockings (1942)" the "Jewess" as a social parasite comes into the foreground. The antisemitic poem that accompanied the cartoon stresses that the lazy, fat and ugly Kohn René, being a Jewess, is very hairy; for this reason, she wants to buy a new pair of stockings to cover the hair on her legs after getting up as late as 10 a.m. Nevertheless once she makes it to the shop, she starts criticizing the lack of varieties that the shop-keeper can offer her, and she does not end up buying the stockings. When coming out of the shop, she catches sight of a billboard that advertises "leg paints". She immediately buys it and paints her leg at home: the poem claims that she already had several artificial colors on herself, so it is not unusual for Kohn René to paint her leg.

Figure 4. *A Harc*, June 1944

20 "Erdős René", *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, ed. Ujváry Péter. (Budapest : S. n., 1929) Retrieved on April 2, 2009. from URL: http://mek.oszk.hu/04000/04093/html/szocikk/11269.htm; Kádár Judit, "Elsüllyedt szerzők V.: Erotikus, katolikus (Erdős Renée, 1879-1956)", *Magyar Narancs*, XVIII/ 45. November 11, 2006.

The remarkable feature of this particular cartoon is that it marks "Jews" with a yellow star even in 1942, thus emphasizing that the segregation attempt is not only the result of the policy of the extreme right regime, but it had always been there. It suggests that "Jews" were always visible and discernible from "non-Jews".

Another, this time more sexualized representation of Kohn René – in this occasion a drawing of a woman resembling René Erdős – portrays her as a middle-aged, fat woman on the Margharet Island beach Palatinus, with another woman – quite salaciously – leaning her head in René's lap. This again, stresses that "Jewish" women did not work, and that they are highly erotic. There is a record player next to the "Jewess" in this drawing, from which a popular song of the time can be heard; the article suggests that the popular song "Hamvadó cigarettavég" (Smoldering Cigarette End) stands for modern urban decay that Jewry has brought into Hungarian culture. This is why there were repeated articles in *A Harc* hailing that Jewish women can no longer pursue their disruptive activities among Hungarians. The article written on the results of eliminating Jews from bathhouses, however, ended with a quite sad note: the price of admission had doubled since the exclusion of "Jews".[50]

Figure 5, *A Harc*, July 1944

[50] "Akik az idén már hiányoznak a strandról" (Those missing from the bathhouse this year"). *A Harc*, May 9, 1944.

While the drawings in the paper could successfully portray Jewish women as ugly, these images represented a sharp contrast with the photos in the paper, on which "Jewish" women neither appeared as ugly nor as conspicuously "Jewish".


Akik az idén már hiányzanak a strandról

Figure 6. Article in *A Harc*, June 1944.

I do not only base this assumption on the article that appeared in connection with the "Jews" being shut out from bathhouses: the paper was repeatedly published with a heading entitled "Music from the Past" ("Muzsikál a múlt"), in which the journalists aimed to reveal the corruption of interwar cultural life by "Jews". In a series of articles, the Jewish influence is depicted as being contrary to "Hungarian" values: according to the articles, in the "liberal" times Hungarian culture got "jewified" ("elzsidósodott"), and as a result of this mediocre talents of "Jewish" origin could easily acquire high positions, for instance in theaters and the Opera House, while "Hungarians" were excluded by the "Jewish" directors. On actress Erzsi Verő, for instance, one article notes that "only her typical Jewish appearance superseded her insignificance"[51]. Similarly to the figure of "Kohn Röné", a regularly appearing character in the paper was actress Frida Gombaszögi, who represented the luxurious, urban and high class "Jewish" woman, who was completely uprooted from

[51] „Muzsikál a múlt", *A Harc*, 1944. június 18.

the daily misery of the average Hungarian. Quite paradoxically, however, *A Harc* did not possess insinuating pictures of the "Jewish" actors; this is why they had to rely on "Jewish" publications from the interwar period, so they used the official – according to their standards the "Jewish" – press releases. By this, *A Harc* attempted to reinterpret interwar cultural life by making its "Jewish" element visible and by putting it into a narrative of a constant fight between "Jews" and "non-Jews". The amateur journalism, however, that the paper pursued, makes it questionable how successful their attempts were to portray the "Jew" as dangerous and unattractive, since there was a huge discrepancy between the drawings and the photos. The ugly "Kohn Röné" was in sharp contrast with the pictures of mostly young, well-dressed and attractive "Jews".

When "Jewish" men and "Jewish" women are depicted together in a drawing, the emphasis is on how they both exploited the "Hungarian" physically, though in different ways. In a cartoon entitled "They Worked Like This" ("Ők így dolgoztak"), a middle-aged Jewess, possibly a middle class housewife is depicted with a Christian servant, while it reads under the drawing that "the Jewess thought that Hungarian women are only fit for this kind of work".

Below this a Jewish doctor with a characteristic, Stürmer-type "Jewish" nose is portrayed with a "Nordic", younger girl, while the inscription tells that she needed to grant the doctor sexual favors in order to get the position. In the last drawing, a "Jewish", middle aged peddler is depicted with a Christian girl, while the inscription tells that "when the Jew had no other possibility, he could get the Hungarian" by giving her a nice dress.

Investigating how antisemitic papers depicted "Hungarians" as opposed to "Jews" could form a separate monograph, yet it is important to mention that they are

often portrayed as weaker, smaller, socially more disadvantaged and poor and altogether less powerful than the "Jews". The former power of the Jews in the "liberal era" was portrayed as being so strong that "Hungarians" had no chance to evade being corrupted by "Jews", and the fight against Jewry is portrayed as constant even in 1944.

Figure 6, *A Harc*, June 1944.

*

In sum, I argue that the antisemitism of the 1944 press is significantly different from the previous antisemitic journalism. Published at a time of the implementation of genocidal and antisemitic policies, papers like *Esti Újság* and *A Harc* had a crucial role in legitimizing these policies, as well as in providing vulgar and primitive clichés to the "non-Jewish" readership, prompting them to view the world along the lines of the eternal "Jewish" – "non-Jewish" opposition. This chapter demonstrated that discriminative antisemitic policy was not legitimated as an attack against evil "Jews", but as a self-defense mechanism of the weaker majority.

I argued that the antisemitic press legitimized "anti-Jewish" measures and it also prompted for more serious discrimination, primarily because according to the articles and cartoons the "Jew" was still having the upper hand over Hungarians, as the restrictions could not alter the eternal "Jewish" characteristics. Although never being explicit about wanting to slaughter "the Jews", it can be argued that according to these papers, this would have been the only real solution to the "Jewish question". Presumably strengthened in their hostility towards the "Jews" by reading these papers, certain "non-Jews" easily came to the conclusion that committing crimes against the "Jew" cannot even be considered a violation at all – as it is demonstrated by the following chapter. In this way the papers analyzed above might have been crucial in inciting "non-Jews" to commit crimes against the "Jews".

3. Shaping the Ghetto in Budapest

Petitions and the Possibility of Contesting Urban Policy in 1944

In this chapter I analyze the steps of spatial segregation of the Jewish population between March and December 1944 in Budapest, and I also investigate what kind of strategies these changing policies induced from the "Jewish" and "non-Jewish" population of the city. To what extent were these policies enforceable in a socially-denominationally heterogeneous metropolis as Budapest? How did the citizens of wartime Budapest – "Jews" and "non-Jews" alike – respond to the official policy of ghettoization that reshaped their city and how did these bottom-up responses effect

official policies? [52] This chapter also serves as an introduction to chapters 4 and 5, as it provides a framework of the establishment of yellow star houses and points out the difficulties of separating the "Jewish" and "non-Jewish" population, which provided many loopholes to contest these policies.

Some historians argue that during the Holocaust Jews went to the death camps as "sheep to the slaughter", without any agency and there is a general belief – probably influenced by the myth of the Wehrmacht as a cutting-edge super army – that once the Germans occupied Hungary, the faith of Budapest Jews was sealed.[53] According to this view, there was no real venue for contesting the policies of a Nazi regime that exterminated millions of Europeans[54]. As opposed to this view , it seems that the limited amount of German occupying forces, their devastating military achievements on the Eastern front, as well as the retained autonomy of Budapest created a peculiar situation which left much space for both residents and various municipal and ministerial authorities to articulate their interests and achieve their goals, highlighting the uniqueness of the Holocaust in Budapest. Moreover, this situation created much space for developing and implementing personal survival strategies, that are investigated in the ensuing chapters.

Similarly to Cole, this paper also starts out from the assumption that city space was a key factor in the implementation of these policies, yet it also strives to go beyond the somewhat schematic approach on Nazi policies that Cole proposed. As opposed to Cole's thesis that stresses the success of bureacrats, it seems that it is worth starting out from the assumption that ghettoization in Budapest was a failed

[52] Following a practice in scholarship, I use the both Jews and non-Jews in quotation marks when referring to those subject to racial policies, thus emphasizing the constructed nature of these distinctions.
[53] Braham, The Politics of Genocide, vol. 1. 225; Tim Cole: *Holocaust City. The Making of a Jewish Ghetto.* (New York: Routledge), 2003. 50.
[54] Ibid.

attempt at reshaping Budapest along the "Jewish" – "non-Jewish" dividing line, as the separation of Jewish and non-Jewish populations never completely materialized. As Hanák and Gyáni demonstrated it through examining the housing stock from the late-19th century onwards, Budapest – quite uniquely as compared to other European capitals, especially Paris and Vienna –was characterized by socially mixed residential patterns due to the floor plan of the tenements that made luxurious and modest apartments available on every floor[55]. This was accompanied with the residential mixing of those who counted as "Jews" and as "non-Jews" in Budapest, in a period when "Jews" no longer constituted a unified, naturally visible social group in the city.

As Gerő pointed out boldly and controversially, only in the cattle cars rolling out of provincial Hungary's train station had the "Jews" in Hungary started to experience any sense of common faith and community in the 20th century[56]. While he is right in emphasizing the artificiality and arbitrariness of racial policies, which united for instance an orthodox caftan Jew from north-east Hungary with a converted, Budapest-based and "modernized" intellectual, one must not forget that what Shulamit Volkov termed antisemitism as a "cultural code" was part and parcel of not just the 1938-1945 period of anti-Jewish legislation, but arguably the whole interwar period[57]: this was able to form a vague community out of those who never had thought of themselves as Jews before. In my opinion the prevalent interwar anti-Semitism topped with contemporaneous antisemitic papers (analyzed in chapter 4) explains why Budapest residents – "Jews" and "non-Jews" alike – had a whole arsenal of anti-Semitic vocabulary at their disposal when trying to reshape their city through petitions in the summer of 1944, when the municipality designated each

[55]Hanák Péter, *The garden and the workshop: essays on the cultural history of Vienna and Budapest.* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press), 1998. 20-21.
[56] Gerő, Andras: *The Jewish Criterion in Hungary.* Boulder: Social Science Monographs. 2007. 51.
[57] Shulamit Volkov. *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2006.)

Budapest apartment building as a "Christian" or "Jewish" house, which prompted many citizens to express opinion about this act of city planning.

The 1944 petitions to the city council, as expressions of the civic consciousness of local residents as well as the manifestation of their desire to have a right to their city is a quite unique phenomenon in Hungarian urban history, which is not usually characterized by such bottom-up approaches to urban policy. In fact, petitions came only after months of debate between the Budapest city council, the Nazi occupational forces and the Quisling post-March 19 government about the shape of the Budapest ghetto and the faiths of the capitals' Jews.

After the German occupation Budapest maintained its autonomy as an independent municipality. A new pro-Nazi lord mayor, Tibor Keledy was only appointed almost three weeks after the occupation on April 8, with the only expectation to cooperate with German authorities and to purge the administration of potentially hostile elements.[58]

"Jews" were obliged to wear a canary yellow star after April 5, and by early May, they were restricted to "Jewish" cinemas, restaurants and bathhouses, being shut out from the most desirable spots.[59]

[58] Szita Szabolcs, *A zsidók üldöztetése Budapesten* (Budapest: Magyar Auschwitz Alapítvány, 1994) 16-17.

[59] See for instance "Budapest polgármesterének határozata a zsidók által látogatható filmszínházak és előadások kijelöléséről" (The decree of the Budapest lord major on the designation of cinemas and days on which Jews are allowed to attend them") in *Vádirat a nácizmus ellen* ed. Elek Karsai and Benoschofsky Ilona (Budapest: MIOK, 1960), 89-91.


Akik az idén már hiányzanak a strandról

Figure 1. "Those missing from the beach this year"; article in *A Harc*, June 1944.

A flow of malevolent accusations appeared in *A Harc* – the weekly of the National Jewish Research Institute set up in Budapest after the German occupation – and in several other antisemitic papers, that all hailed that "Jews" were being put to their place. Despite the fact that *A Harc* detailed meticulously the fornications of "Jewish" women corrupting "non-Jewish" males, the article written on the results of eliminating Jews from bathhouses ended with a quite sad note: the price of admission had doubled since these measure[60].

It is almost sure that the first anti-"Jewish" spatial order that aimed to reshape residential patterns in the city was a local and not a German initiative.[61] On April 4, after days of incessant Allied raids, the city forced the Jewish Council to designate 500 Jewish homes for Christian bomb victims. While Cole argues that it is likely to have been the first step to concentrate "Jews" within worse housing conditions in the traditionally Jewish inner parts of districts VI and VII[62], this cannot be verified on remaining sources. I argue that at this time municipal officials were thinking in terms of class and not in terms of space to the solution of the "Jewish question" in the city:

[60] "Akik az idén már hiányoznak a strandról" (Those missing from the beach this year"). *A Harc*, May 9, 1944.
[61] See Cole, *Holocaust City*, 2003, 81.
[62] Cole: *Holocaust City*, 2003, 82.

they simply wanted to deprive "Jews" of their mostly middle-class homes and force them into the congestion characterizing working class housing. Large segments of the confiscated "Jewish" homes remained empty after April 5, so the decree was not likely to have been intended as a first phase of major relocations within the city along "Jewish" and "non-Jewish" lines. Moreover, many families got rooms in apartments closer to their homes, which counters Cole's hypothesis about the intention of concentrating the "Jews" in "their place". What in fact happened is that "Jews" got worse apartments – often just rooms – than the ones they possessed before, so many of them lost their alleged privileged status on the Budapest housing scene.

According to the petitions preserved in the Budapest City Archives, this happened to an elderly "Jewish" couple – living in the overwhelmingly Christian Fő utca in district II –, who saw their apartment confiscated on April 10, and a room allocated to them in a neighboring Csalogány utca apartment. The 68 year-old Móric Halmos, a former Ministry of Justice clerk petitioned to the lord mayor in May 10, mentioning that their original apartment is still empty, while his wife's mental illness and heart disease would require that they return. Similar petition was submitted by Éva Sarlós, a former school teacher who wanted to return to her empty district I home on the grounds that she was taking care of her 77-year-old step-mother. Both petitioners were turned down by the same municipal official without any further explanation[63]. More than anything else, this April 4 municipal order can be seen as the first irresolute step to show the city's determination to solve the Jewish question on an economic level, by privileging "non-Jews" in the wartime housing market.

It is also highly likely that at this first stage of German occupation, Hungarian authorities had the upper-hand over Jewish policy, who were far more irresolute than

[63] BFL IV. 1409/c. Box 1857. IX-1621/1944.

the Germans prompting them: provincial ghettoization came almost a month after the German occupation, while a partial segregation – and not ghettoization – of Budapest Jewry came only in mid-June, three months after Veesenmayer's arrival to the country. Similarly to Salonica, Lodz, Warsaw and many other cities, the outcome of genocidal policies was contingent upon local processes.[64]

[64] Mark Mazower: *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews.* (New York: Harper Perennial. 2006.); Alan Adelson and Robert Lapides, *Lodz ghetto: inside a community under siege* **(**New York : Penguin Books, 1991); Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943 : ghetto, underground, revolt* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1982).

Figure 2. The Plan of Dispersed Ghettoization[65]

What is particularly interesting in the case of Budapest is that despite the oversized city bureaucracy, it took two months after the German occupation and one month after the decision on ghettoizing provincial Jewry to decide on the shape of the Budapest ghetto. The May 9 Plan of ghettoization envisaged seven smaller ghetto areas within the city, within which "Jews" could live among "non-Jews": all of them close to the major railway lines of the city (see figure 2). "Jews" were not allowed to reside on main streets and thoroughfares, and they were to occupy the older and more dilapidated houses and apartments. There is no reference to this plan in the contemporary press, and presumably only a limited amount of officials knew about it. Without aiming to whitewash the city bureaucracy's role in implementing ghettoization, it can be pointed out that municipal officials saw it more as a

[65] Map based on Illyefalvy Lajos., Bp. Székesfőváros Statisztikai Évkönyve. (Bp: Közp. Stat. Hiv. 1936.) p. 173. Cole: *Holocaust City*, 87.

bureaucratic obstacle than as an opportunity of putting the "Jews" in their place[66]. While Ministry of Interior Andor Jaross imagined the relocation of "Jews" into "Jewish" houses within the ghetto area to take only a few days, with "non-Jews" having 30 days to move into better, formerly "Jewish" apartments, the lord mayor operated with a much longer, three-month timescale, emphasizing the difficulty of telescoping the events. What is clear is that the debate between the two institutions ended with a compromise: the whole process of concentrating the "Jews" only got kick-started in mid-June, according to the lord major's original idea, yet the process of moving had to be accomplished within a few days. On a regional level, however, one must note that while the deportations were going on with utmost intensity in May and June, and Hungarian "Jews" were being gassed upon arrival to Auschwitz-Birkenau, the "Jews" of the capital continued to live as they did in March and April.

In the meanwhile, several changes occurred to the plan of the seven minighettoes. The new plans acknowledged the impossibility of making whole areas of Budapest "Jewless", and it continued to operate only on one level: the apartment building. When the designations of the so-called "yellow-star" houses came in mid-June, the main objective was to concentrate "Jews" into separate, decrepit and old houses within their districts, preferably off the main and visible thoroughfares. By this, policy makers aimed to reduce the costs of moving for the "non-Jews" and aimed to provide them more preferable housing that would serve as an incentive of relocation. Moreover, the change in plans can be attributed to the fact that ministry and municipal officials on both levels realized the sheer complexity and impossibility of completely reshaping the residential patterns of Budapest – even with the

[66] Cole: *Holocaust City*. 95.

cooperation of occupying Nazi forces, the gendarmerie and the city and state bureaucracy.

The extreme right press embraced the idea of "yellow-star" houses as well. Their often-surfacing, somewhat absurd argument was that Allied bombers would not be able to spare "yellow-star" houses, whereas they could easily leave the "Jews" – their fifth columnists – out of the "terror bombings" if there was a separate ghetto.

The designation of altogether 2639 "Jewish" houses in Budapest was made public in June 16 with all major newspapers and street posters containing their list. Immediately hundreds of petitions flooded municipal officials: they contained the petitions of "Jews" for the designation of their houses as well as the Christians pleading for exemption of their house's yellow-star status. This was the first measure that separated "Jewish" and "non-Jewish" family members, spouses among them.

Cole focuses his analysis of petitions on coalitions and contestations between "Jews" – "non-Jewish", which is a good analytical method in this case, as this was probably the most relevant dividing line. What made me revisit these petitions is to examine them from a less racial perspective, and to focus on how petitioners envisaged their idealized Budapest in 1944 and to investigate the antisemitic arguments that were operationalized in these petitions. Out of the petitions investigated three groups can be distinguished: in the first belong those who envisaged the radical transformation of the city's residential patterns. In the second belong those who used ghettoization to advance their mobility on the housing market, while the largest, third group is constituted by those who pleaded for the status quo. While those belonging to the two latter groups filed their petitions in mid-June when the status of actual houses was being contested, the plans to reshape the entire city were not strictly time-bound and were coming in throughout May and June. This also

meant that – despite Cole's allegation – the protracted debates over the capital's "Jews" were not confined within the walls of municipal and ministry authorities, but there existed a certain audience which could sense that something is in the air in terms of the solving the problem of "Jewish" housing.

It is clear that the "non-Jewish" lower class felt that time was ripe to create their idealized Budapest with the help of municipal authorities. Károly Csapó – a reservist major living in the 36% Jewish district VI – served with a number of propositions to the city council. He argued that Jews are not to be moved out from Budapest, nor to be concentrated in ghettoes as it would spare them from bombings. His monumental plan – which is more or less an anti-Semitic manifesto – proposed to relocate the "Jews" into the top floors of tenements, with their homes being completely sealed off, so that they would not be able to open the windows at times of air raids and they would have no access to air red shelters located at the cellars of the buildings. Should they try fleeing from their apartments "the whole company of Jews and house commanders should be court-martialed". [67] According to him, electricity cables should be winded up in "Jewish" homes and their houses completely cut off from power if possible so that they cannot produce make-shift radios. In order that they cannot signal to the enemy airplanes, no torches should be allowed at "Jewish" possession. As a raison d'être of his plan, Csapó concludes that if the municipality sticked to his plan, less "Hungarians" and more "Jews" would perish, which "should be the goal of every Hungarian".

A similar fear is articulated in a type-written petition signed as "Szabó Jánosné" which allegedly expressed the desire of 120 Gentile women. It articulated the strong fear that if Jews were settled in separate apartments the remainder of the

[67] All translations mine (M.R.).

houses will be exposed to Allied attacks. Moving into houses that were previously "Jewish" would be dreadful according to the petitioner, as those Christians occupying these apartments would be subject to "assassination" by the "Jews". Having an apartment in each house with several "Jews" congested in it would be advisable, as it would provide the possibility of "non-Jews" to closely supervise the hideous affairs ("galád üzelmeiket") of the "Jews". As the final argument, the petitioner claims that Jews are only needed so long as the war is going on so as to protect the rest of the population from "the terror attacks of the bandits".

Another highly malevolent petition arrived to the municipality in these days, written in ink on a checked piece of paper, and it proposed – among others – a more strict control of house supervisors and building managers, who – being bribed by the "Jews" – submit false data to the municipality. Dr. Béla Nagy, the author of the petition suggested that the air raid commander of each city block double-check the information submitted by the house supervisors, and moreover, he came up with his own plan to solve the Jewish question in spatial terms. Going against the current of the popular Arrow Cross and rightist opinion as well as the previous petitioners, he did not advocate dispersed ghettoization, but suggested that all the Jews be removed in the forest of Királyerdő near Csepel village, where there are plenty of barracks which could house the entire Budapest Jewry.

The common in all these quite eerie petitions on reshaping the city is that the Jewish question appears essentially as a spatial problem in them. Following the stereotypes of modern racial antisemitism, Jews are demonized as forming a unified social group with a common agency that is plotting against "non-Jews": antisemitism appears as a pure self-defense measure in them. Going beyond these tenets, petitioners do not simply want the legal deprivation of "Jews" – articulated in the Jewish laws

between 1938 and 1941 – but they addressed them as infectious, half-human pariahs, who can be utilized either to protect the rest of the city as some kind of a living shield, or as being totally removed from the city to which they can have no claims, thus allowing the rest of the population to remain "healthy".

The second group of petitioners tried to seize the opportunity to assure its upward mobility on the Budapest housing market. Oftentimes, they embarked on petitioning through a powerful institution – like their company – since by doing so, they could claim that their more preferable housing conditions are also the interest of the war industry. This happened in the case of the personal assistant to the CEO of the Hungarian Royal Naval Company (Magyar Királyi Folyam- és Tengerhajózási Részvénytársaság), who petitioned for getting a former "Jewish" apartment in the company's Vigadó utca headquarters, that had been empty since early April, when Béla Grimm, its former tenant had to move out. János Érczy, the personal assistant argued that the war efforts required his presence in the company's headquarters all day and night, and he offered his Buda apartment as an exchange. Three days after filing his claim, the IXth Ward of the City Municipality rejected it on the grounds that Érczy already had an apartment and that the sealed – formerly Jewish home – in Vigadó utca is reserved for bomb victims[68]. Presumably, the city officials wanted to avoid such individual claims for better – formerly Jewish – housing, even though it resulted in having hundreds of prime Budapest apartments stay empty throughout the whole 1944-45 period.

The designation of yellow-star houses also provided venues for larger companies to provide more preferential treatment for their non-Jewish employees. This happened in the case of an Óbuda textile works, which petitioned for the

[68] BFL 1409/c., Box 1855, IX-1078/ 1944.

additional designation of a dilapidated company tenement as a yellow-star house. According to their plan, non-Jewish residents would be evicted from these apartments that lacked running water, privies, and an air-raid shelter, and the Jewish intellectual and manual laborers would be moved in. By this, the company aimed to compensate for the scanty number of houses that were designated in Óbuda, and provide its "Jewish" workers with a closer home to their workplace – even though it also implied the confiscation of their previous, better apartments. The municipality, however, rejected their petition, and did not designate the requested Apáti utca building as a yellow-star house[69].

As "Jews" had no chance to get better housing in 1944, the best solution for them was to remain in their previous homes, that is, to petition for yellow-star status if their property was not designated. This happened in Nagydiófa utca 11, where "Jews" cooperated with "non-Jews", who wanted to get better, "Jewish" apartments elsewhere. Their main argument was that despite the "non-Jewish" majority in the building, it should be a yellow-star house as it is "unfit for the protection of the nation and the families": a morally corrupt building – a former red-light house – from which "non-Jews" should have the right to move out[70].

Despite some extravagant petitions to reshape the city along the "Jewish" and "non-Jewish" line and the efforts of certain "non-Jews" to advance their housing conditions, most Budapest residents simply wanted to stay wherever they lived in the city: this created an unspoken link between Jews and Gentiles, the majority of whom agreed on that matter. The most frequent claim was that moving their property and having their new apartments painted and sanitized would be a cost that they could not

[69] BFL IV. 1409/c. 1861. kisdoboz. IX-2339/1944.
Az Esti Újság, 1944. 21. 06.

[70] Ibid.

bear; single women with their husband conscripted argued that they are physically unable to move. This is why many petitioners argued that it is better to have a "Jew" in every house than not to have one, and this partially explains the frequent references to "Jews" as physical shields: by this, "non-Jews" wanted to substantiate their desire to stay put in a building. This happened in the case of a district VII (3 Alpár street) building, where the Gentile owners, Mr. and Mrs. Ákos Berde wrote to the municipality even before official designations were made public, on June 15. In their letter written in the name of the 31 Christian tenants they consented to the 9 Jewish tenants remaining in the building, as well as to the possibility of further Jewish residents moving in. On June 15, a similar petition was filed by the residents of a Buda apartment building (96 Horthy Miklós út), who argued that they "do not raise any objections" to the six Jewish tenants – among them two medical doctors – remaining in the building. Five days later the district XI municipality sent out an official who reported that one of the Jewish tenants had moved out, and due to the low ratio of Jews he does not support the designation of the building as a mixed, Christian – Jewish building.

It is no wonder that such petitions aroused the anger of *Esti Újság*, which argued that these were part of yet another Jewish plot against which Christians have to defend themselves. *Magyarság*, another strongly antisemitic daily claimed that Christian petitions are part of "the newest Jewish trick". Considering the amount of petitions that arrived to the city council, however, it can be argued that contrary to the antisemitic worldview of these papers, most Budapest residents were unwilling to support antisemitic policy with actions when it came to reshaping the city according to the antisemitic wishes of the municipality and the ministry.

The paper most heavily attacked petitioners cited above, who wanted to continue on living amidst "Jews". *Esti Újság* tagged them "lakásaladár", similarly to those Gentiles who masked Jewish rule in a company after its arianization in the late 1930s. The paper argued in its June 19 issue that Jews want to take advantage of the naivety of "Aladár" the Gentile, and try to make him sign petitions in which it is stated that Jews are not harmful to the public order.[71] Next day another article appeared which reported that moving Jews destroy "national property", meaning their own valuables.[72] Another rampant accusation against Jews was that they used their wealth and money to buy the sympathy of Gentiles, mostly their former maids[73], whom they bribe to help them moving and to feel pity for them, thus aiming to clear past grievances out of the maid's mind. More importantly, as an article pointed out, Jews pay rents one year in advance to bribe Christians in order to get the best parts of their apartments, and they also offer to pay for the moving of the Gentile family.[74]

The papers, however, did not address the issue that most Christians, even the antisemites were discomforted about having to move, yet they blamed the "Jews" for having to do so. The antisemitic stereotypes of the previous decades were articulated in an ongoing fashion in the papers (as it is further analyzed in chapter 4): "Jews" were alleged to be better informed on the new housing laws than Christians, and they stood united to undermine Christian interests and they managed to seize the best housing even at this time.

[71] "A lakásfronton is megjelent régi ismerősünk:Aladár," (Our old acquaintance Aladár appears on the apartment front as well) *Esti Újság*, June 19, 1944.
[72] "A zsidóság nagyobb része vár a költözködéssel?" *Esti Újság*, June 20, 1944.
[73] Jews were forbidden to have Gentile servants and maids since May 5. See "Vérvörös karmokal előszobát súrol egy zsidó delnő" (With glaring red claws a Jewish demimonde cleans the floor of the anteroom), *Magyarság*, May 5, 1944.
[74] "Június 24-ig be kell fejezni a zsidó lakásokban lévő ingóságok leltárazását" (The inventory of assets remaining in Jewish apartments needs to be compiled by June 24), *Esti Újság*, June 23, 1944.


Vissza kell verni a zsidóság utolsó rohamát a budapesti lakásfronton
Villalakásokban nem lakhatnak zsidók

Figure 3. Article in *Esti Újság*, 1944.

It seems, however, that more than anything else, these municipal orders brought suffering and deprivation for the "Jewish" population. Probably the most moving accounts came from mixed-marriage families that were divided for the first time by the June designations. Presumably parents thought that if they prompt their children to write the petitions, they will be more likely to be helped out. A ten year-old girl, whose parents were long-divorced and who was previously living with her Christian mother and stepfather, was suddenly set apart from her family due to the fact that her father was a "Jew". "I cannot eat and drink just cry in this terrible yellow-star house" wrote Éva Hirsch to the municipality, and she requested that "if I have to suffer for the sins of my father's progenitors, I want to be close to my mom" on the grounds that "…my father is a truly outstanding man who suffered for the homeland in the First World War, damaging his left arm, so he could not have hurt anybody".[75]

The example above shows that while probably tens of thousands of "Jews" had the opportunity to go hiding in Budapest and find refuge among non-Jewish relatives, families who did not have the means to obtain false papers or who were not well-networked and did not have relatives in the capital had no other choice than to put up with discriminatory policies. Examining the flood of petitions similar to the one above, the office of the lord major washed its hands and claimed that it has no authority to judge them: on July 13 they sent all the petitions to the Minister of Interior. More than a month had passed when answer came from a low-ranking

[75] BFL IV. 1409/c., 1864. kisdoboz. IX-2785/1944.

ministry official to the request of the major which explained that the law provides no possibility of exempting anybody from its provisions.

Petitions, however, which were in the interest of "non-Jews" or which revealed the mistakes and fallacies that the municipality had made in designating yellow-star houses were taken into consideration, and less than a week after the original designations on June 22 the lord major's office came up with a revised list of houses. As opposed to the 2639 houses originally designated, the new list contained 1948 houses, which was a result of a substantial deduction and minor addition to the original list[76]. This amounted to a more heavy concentration of Budapest Jewry in the central districts and larger apartment blocks, while properties in the outlying areas and in Buda were cancelled with a higher rate[77]. In my opinion it is quite remarkable that authorities could not live up to the expectations of the extreme right press according to which all the villas should be cancelled as yellow-star houses. Till November 1944, though in congested housing, a minority of "Jews" continued to be housed in Rosehill and Svábhegy villas – the very top of the city's housing market.[78]

[76] Randolph R. Braham: *Politics of Genocide: the Holocaust in Hungary*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. 371.
[77] Cole: *Holocaust City*, 164.
[78] See the list of final designations in *Esti Újság*, 21. 06. 1944.

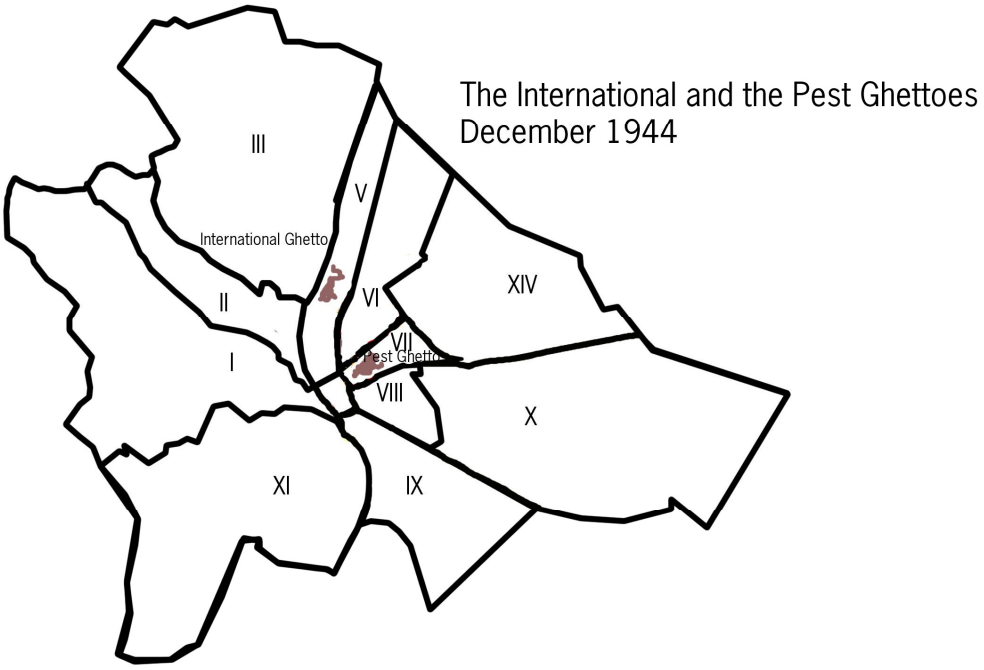

Figure 4. The final ghettoization plan[79].

The major change in "Jewish" residential patterns came only with the Arrow Cross government coming to power in mid-October, which period is, however, less interesting from the point of view of contestations. This time anti-"Jewish" physical violence was made to be a key objective of state policy, which left no room for legal contestations, that were, at least in a rudimentary form, possible under the previous regime. Even at this point, a definite endpoint to the spatial solution of the city's "Jewish question" came only at the end of November and early December. First, a so called International Ghetto was set up along Pozsonyi út, which was based on the privileging of "Jews" with protective passes. The bulk of the city's "Jews", however – more than a hundred thousand people – were congested in a ghetto island formed in the inner parts of district VII. At this time, no exceptions were made, all the "non-Jews" and other state institutions had to move out. The only concession was made to

[79] Map based on Illyefalvy Lajos., Bp. Székesfőváros Statisztikai Évkönyve. (Bp: Közp. Stat. Hiv. 1936.) 173.

the Budapest Metropolitan Transportation Authority (BSzKRt), which had its headquarters in Akácfa utca: the walls of the ghetto were set back on the north side to allow the powerful institution to stay put.

Similarly to the BSzKRt company that could successfully contest ghettoization orders, this chapter pointed out that many actors were able to let their voices heard during the various stages of the ghettoization process. The unique and unfinished nature of the Holocaust in Budapest manifested itself in the lack of any strong authority that could carry out ghettoization by force within a matter of weeks, which provided a maneuvering ground for the ministry, for the city hall as well as for the various groups of the Budapest population to express and implement their desires. I argued throughout the chapter that depending on the specificity of time and place, these contestations could effectively influence the policies being implemented, especially in the case of the designation of yellow star houses. For the "Jewish" population of the city, the months of institutional contestations did not only provide additional moratorium – a unique chance in 1944 – till the establishment of the Ghetto, but also provided a ground to articulate their interests.

5.Personal Strategies of Survival

5.1 Strategies of Survival in the Budapest Yellow Star Houses

Further elaborating on the problem of different survival and cooperation strategies applied by "Jew" and Gentiles" alike, I now embark on the analysis of how two persecuted memoir writers remembered the German occupation and Arrow Cross

rule in Budapest. The memoirs of Tivadar Soros (1894 –1968)[80] and Ernő Szép (1884 – 1953)[81] serve as a third vantage point to investigate survival strategies and survival narratives besides vetting committee testimonies and oral history interviews investigated above. [82] The reason to include these personal testimonies is to be able to look at how and why different types of narratives diverge on the same events and how narrators construct their accounts differently on yellow star houses, on persecution and on city life in extreme conditions based on their social and religious background as well as their different personality.

While the previous chapter showed how multiple residents of an apartment building memorialized their recent pasts in connection with a building manager, the present chapter investigates two longer and more detailed accounts on their authors' 1944 experience. The length and the similarity of themes and issues brought up by the two memoir writers lend themselves to a comparative analysis: I investigate how their respective family backgrounds, occupation, and social networks influenced the strategies that they chose to survive, and I analyze how these different strategies played out on the level of the apartment building they were living at. I primarily concentrate on social networks as an organizing theme of the chapter, and I analyze how the respective networks of Szép and Soros influenced their survival strategies throughout the changing situation in 1944. First, I compare their situation at the time of the occupation, than their choices in the weeks following the occupation, as well as after the establishment of yellow star houses in June 1944.

[80] On Tivadar Soros' biography and memoir see Humphrey Tomkin, "Editor's Afterword" in Soros Tivadar, *Maskerado, Dancing Around Death in Nazi Hungary* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2000), 211-226.
[81] László Rónay, "Szép Ernő" in *Új Magyar Irodalmi Lexikon* [CD-ROM] ed. László Péter, (Budapest: Disclosure, 1995).
[82] Soros Tivadar, *Maskerado, Dancing Around Death in Nazi Hungary* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2000); Szép Ernő, *The Smell of Humans, A Memoir of the Holocaust in Hungary* (Budapest: CEU-Corvina, 1994)

Though the social networks of Soros and Szép analyzed below have many common elements with the vetting committee files, I neither wish to come up with a universalized narrative of the Holocaust in Budapest nor with a common ground being forged from these various accounts. In addition, I do not wish to regard either of the different types of narratives and sources – like diaries, memoirs or oral history interviews – as untainted pure mediations of the Holocaust experience. Zoë Vania Waxman's remark applies to the diversity of the Budapest experience as well when she stresses that the "Holocaust was not just one event but many different events, witnessed by many different people, over a time span of several years and covering an expansive geographical area."[83] Addressing the scholarly canonization of Holocaust testimonies, Waxman has recently stressed that "the accepted concept of the Holocaust and the role of collective memory place two demands on the survivor. First, they seek to homogenize survivors' experiences, and secondly, they assume that, in adopting the role of the witness, survivors will adopt a universal identity. But, in negotiating the hegemony of accepted Holocaust narratives, some survivors' experiences are either pushed towards the margins or neglected altogether".[84] Acknowledging the lack of a common narrative also reveals that the accounts on events like the Holocaust in Budapest diverge significantly based on the geographical and social position of the witnesses, their level of education, religiosity and social networks with "non-Jewish", non-persecuted population. Moreover, these accounts are significantly different from other Holocaust or Ghetto accounts as well. It can be argued that both Ernő Szép's and Tivadar Soros' memoirs challenge the dominant narratives of the Holocaust and present atypical accounts of the Shoah, as both are essentially "happy end" narratives as defined by the genre, in which the significance

[83] Zoë Vania Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust, Identity, Testimony, Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.
[84] Ibid.158.

of humiliation is distanced either by irony (Szép), or by a Robinson Crusoesque optimism and creativity (Soros). This partially stems from the peculiarity of the Holocaust experience of Budapest Jewry, which lived in relative freedom till October 1944 and witnessed a belated establishment of the Ghetto, which itself proved to be short lived, whereas mass deportations never occurred in the Hungarian capital. On the other hand, after the *Nyilas* takeover the most brutal violence and massacres were carried out on the capital's Jewry by the various *Nyilas* militias and partially by the SS and the Gestapo: this part of the story, however, is missing from both memoirs, as Szép was marched to the countryside whereas Soros was successfully hiding with Christian documents and never experienced persecution himself.

As for physical suffering it is present in Szép's account when the forced labor experience is addressed, nevertheless the mass killings, deportations and the death camps – three paradigmatic features of the Holocaust canon – do not appear in *The Smell of Humans*, which make it different from the often-quoted and canonized mainstream narratives.[85] It comes as no surprise that neither do these paradigmatic features of the Holocaust narrative surface in Soros's account, in which the stress is on showing how his family lived a relatively normal life during the persecutions; consequently the tragedies of Hungarian Jewry and the suffering that accompanied it are almost entirely missing from his text.

Besides the fact that these memoirs present atypical accounts of the Holocaust, another reason that explains why neither of them has so far been widely quoted in English-language scholarship is quite practical. Namely that the English editions came relatively late: *The Smell of Humans* by Szép was published in 1994, though the

[85] On a digest of published Holocaust memoirs see Esther Goldberg, *Holocaust Memoir Digest, Vol. 1-2: A Digest of Published Survivor Memoirs with Study Guide and Maps* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2004).

Hungarian original came out with the title *Emberszag, emlékirat* as early as 1945[86], whereas the Esperanto version of Soros's *Maskerado* was published first in 1965, with the English translation coming only in 2000.

Though both Szép and Soros relied on tactics to get beyond official policies, based on the different strategies they adopted, their stories differ significantly. I emphasize how both authors depicted Jewish – non-Jewish cooperation in Budapest 1944: in the case of Szép, the emphasis is on the reconstruction of daily life in a yellow star house, while in the case of Soros, I concentrate on why and how his "maskerado" could be successful. Namely, I argue that survival was not a streak of good luck, yet it depended on social networks, material conditions, knowledge of city space and psychological fitness, just to mention the most important characteristics.

First, it is worth comparing the social background of Szép and Soros. Interestingly, they were born some twenty miles from each other in Northeastern-Hungary at the end of the 19th century in pro-assimilationist Hungarian speaking Jewish middle class families, and none of them had a particularly religious upbringing. Szép was the son of an elementary school teacher, who frequently changed the family's residence, this is why Szép had schooling in several towns (in Hajdúszoboszló, Debrecen and Mezőtúr for instance), though he finally moved to the capital at 18 where he soon established himself as a popular poet who belonged to the circle of the progressive liberal *A Hét* and *Nyugat* groups. Not surprisingly, similarly to other major writers like Ferenc Molnár, he was conscripted as a front correspondent and as a medic when the First World War came.

Tivadar Soros – who magyarized his name in 1936 – was born as Tivadar (or Theodor) Schwartz ten years after Szép in 1894. His family ran a grocery store in

[86] Szép Ernő, *Emberszag, emlékirat* (Budapest: Keresztes, 1945).

Nyíregyháza and was moderately well-off despite the nine siblings Tivadar had.[87] Though Soros started his university studies in law, he had to interrupt them when volunteering for front service in the First World War, from which he came back only in the early 1920s, after fleeing from a Russian POW camp.

Despite the geographical and social similarities of their communities of origin and early years, by the time of the German occupation in 1944, Szép and Soros were in different stages of their life cycle and in terms of their social position.

Major differences between them were their housing and family situation, financial situation and social networks, factors that influenced the number of choices available to them in such an extreme situation. Szép was a bachelor, Soros had an affluent wife and two kids. Whereas the renowned writer was known and venerated by many, in *The Smell of Humans* he does not mention any close friends or allies that could be of help for him when the occupation came. On the contrary, Budapest-based lawyer Tivadar Soros had a wide network of Jews and Gentiles alike from various social groups ranging from the working classes to some prominents of the aristocracy, many of which he could use in the hour of need.

Ernő Szép had lived on Margaret Island between Pest and Buda for 33 years: in 1944 he had a residence in the prestigious Hotel Palatinus, which immediately prompted him to face German occupation: "everyone had to clear out…on Sunday 19 March….Two hundred and seventy German officers were billeted at the Hotel Palatinus. I was the only guest permitted to stay until Monday for, unlike the transients, who had a suitcase or two, I was loaded down with books, pictures and all my belongings."[88] Being shocked and clueless about the future, he tried to stick to the explanation provided by the hotel's desk clerk, according to whom "I would be back

[87] Thomkin, 215.
[88] Szép Ernő, *The Smell of Humans, A Memoir of the Holocaust in Hungary* (Budapest: CEU-Corvina, 1994), 10.

in a couple of weeks. This was not a real military occupation, he said; oh no, not at all, it was only *a transitory passage to secure supply lines.* He had it in strict confidence straight from the quartermaster's corps".[89] It is clear from this narrative that the cheerful manner is used to ease the brutality by which he was evicted from his home. Despite the non-emotional and detached style, it is clearly emphasized how a lonely figure like Ernő Szép was at the mercy of those power structures in 1944 that no longer acknowledged his secure social position that he enjoyed before as a writer.

While the similar discrimination applied to Tivadar Soros, a "Jewish" lawyer, he could use his networks to counter the official policy enforced on him and his family. The protagonist, narrator and author of *Maskerado* remembers that he was dead set on not obeying any regulations that came from the Jewish Council, yet he wavered for weeks before making the decision to adopt a false, Christian identity for himself and his family. Writing the original Esperanto version of his study in 1965, in the aftermath of the Eichmann trial and two years after Hannah Arendt's seminal and later contested study was first published on the negative role of Jewish Councils in the Final Solution[90] – Soros clearly condemned the Budapest *Judenrat*, claiming as a lawyer that they have no right to issue orders.[91]

Though Soros was resolute about obtaining false documentation, all his Christian and Esperantist friends whom he approached with the plan to buy their documents – which they could claim to have lost – backed out with various excuses; among the persons who refused were a chimney sweep, a destitute intellectual and a left-wing journalist.

[89] Ibid.
[90] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979),118.
[91] See Chapter 3 of *Maskerado* on his opinion on the Jewish Council.

While his uniquely wide social network among Gentiles as an assimilated Hungarian-Jewish lawyer did not yield immediate results, he finally ended up obtaining the necessary documentation for his family members, though from various sources. Interestingly, the first main help came from a building manager and his family, who immediately handed over their documents to Soros. He could count on their help, as being a legal representative and administrator of their building, he did important favors for the building manager. When, for instance, he applied for the position, Soros granted him the job even though he did not possess the necessary deposit. At another instance, around early April 1944 Soros was summoned to the police after getting into a debate with an influential tenant of the building – a member of parliament according to the author – who criticized that the building is not heated properly. At the police, Soros, – whom the police agent did not dare to criticize due to his higher social standing as a lawyer – successfully defended the building manager, who was blamed for the situation by the police. After this, Soros dared to request their documents as an exchange for his help: this is how his son Paul and wife Julia obtained false identities.

Moreover, Soros decided on making a hiding place in the very same Eskű square (today Március 15 square) building where the helpful and reliable building manager held his position, and where Soros's mother-in-law lived as well. For the residents, the establishment of the safe and comfortable hiding place with a huge iron door was camouflaged as renovation activity. The place, designed by prominent architect Lajos Kozma, Soros' friend and hiding partner, had a built-in safety buzzer to the house manager and proper ventilation, as well as two separate openings; the meals were brought daily from a different upscale restaurant by the building manager.

Soros rightly comments on the establishment of their bunker that "the arrangements showed that we had both been avid readers of Jules Verne in our youth"[92]. When investigated in more detail, however, the key to their success seems more intricate. What is clear is that going into hiding was not a decision made on the spur of the moment, and it was a decision contingent upon social position, personal networks and financial means, which all delimited both the number of those "Jews" who could engage in it, and those who could successfully carry on this practice possibly for months. The case of Soros shows that not simply Gentile acquaintances and friends were necessary – which many assimilated "Jews" had – but the presence of previous exchanges (in this case, of positions) that rendered requests for papers or for a hiding place at a Gentile family a successful enterprise. Moreover, an operationalizable knowledge of possible hideout places in the city, as well as the means to construct such a hiding place, with at least the tacit approval of the Gentile majority was also essential in this venture.

Besides networks with Gentiles, the importance of family connections is emphasized by the fact that Soros obtained false papers for himself through his Nyíregyháza brother, who considered that it will be safer for him to hide in the countryside, and sent Gentile identification papers (in the name of Elek Szabó) through an agent, which enabled Soros to live under false documents in Budapest.

Contrary to Soros' strategy of using his social capital to establish a hide-out for himself, Szép joined his sister at Thököly út after being evicted from Margaret Island and in June he duly moved to a yellow star house in Újlipótváros –where the privileged International Ghetto for Jews protected by foreign countries was later established – and he never tried to engage in going against official policy. Similarly

[92] Ibid. 51.

to the majority of Jews – including the leaders of the Jewish Council – Szép did not have any long-term strategy to contest Nazi rule in the first few month, and he did not do anything extraordinary to assure his survival: he followed regulations and tried to normalize his life under these conditions, though he never ceased to view himself – and represent himself in the memoir – as a conscientious outsider and a *voyeur* of social absurdity turning into reality around him.

According to his memoirs the major obstacle to this strategy of ignoring outside reality and retaining normalcy within himself was the highly material sign of being discriminated: the ten by ten centimeter yellow star that he had to put up whenever going out to the street. The way he got around this regulation in Thököly út was by not venturing out to the street for three months, having his barber come to his home every second week, and by only going out to the building's courtyard, where it was allowed not to wear a star. When moving to Pozsonyi út, new regulations came which made it obligatory to wear the star even in the corridor and the vestibule, yet it was not enforced by the Gentile building manager. Here in Pozsonyi út he had to cross the street in order to go to a barber, and he also made larger trips in the city; whenever this happened, he tried to hide himself behind his hat, and was always embarrassed when passers-by noticed him as the "writer" who is humiliated.[93]

When commenting on daily life in a yellow star house, Szép serves with many enlightening comments that explain conflicts and cooperation between tenants, and it also highlights why the crammed population who came from different religious and social backgrounds turned to sometimes opposing survival strategies. The Újlipótváros house that Szép lived in near the Danube and the major park of the neighborhood housed a socially more upscale Jewish population than district VII

[93] Ibid. 39.

analyzed in the previous chapter. Most importantly, it represented the most modern and highly expensive, Bauhaus-type housing of the city, mainly built in the 1930s. No wonder that the neighborhood, which was heavily populated by the Jewish middle and upper middle class in the interwar period, served as a natural site for the designation of the International Ghetto, mostly housing well-to-do and prominent Jews already clustered in the area. On the other hand, these houses in Újlipótváros were also congested similarly to Jewish apartments in yellow star houses elsewhere, as each Jewish family was assigned one room, shared often by four or more people, which sometimes led to complicated situations:

> …a recently divorced woman lived there with her little daughter. Her boyfriend had moved in, with intentions to marry her. Then she took in two of her women friends and their families. Finally came the divorced husband who could not find an apartment elsewhere, and took the maid's room in that big apartment. They said the divorced husband was head over heels in love with her ex-wife".[94]

The designation of yellow star houses also effected Soros. Till mid-June, however, everything seemed to be fine with their tactics: while Soros and Lajos Kozma found refuge in their bunker, his wife stayed at a Gentile family's one-room apartment, his 18-year old son pretended to be a Gentile student with false documents and George stayed with an ethnic German family friend in Buda. The boys would meet their fathers in Rudas spa every day for a swim, long after it was banned for Jews; after a while a locker-room attendant made an insinuating (or joking) remark that might have been understood as a sign that he knows that they are Jews. When

[94] Ibid. 30.

George tipped him, he thanked it in the name of the Jewish religious community. After this event they decided never to set foot in the spa again.[95]

A major blow to the tactics of Soros came, however, when the building of his bunker was designated as a yellow star house in June 16, which prompted them to find another place: similarly to the establishment of the bunker, Lajos Kozma, his hiding partner solved the situation by finding a room through an aunt recently fled from Slovakia in an apartment near Blaha Lujza square. With this move, Soros possibly chose a riskier path than by staying at a designated yellow star house. By remaining in the bunker they could have risked being identified as Jews more easily and if the building manager did not supply them with food, they would have had to leave their shelter occasionally. On the other hand, if they stored enough food in the place, they could have safely survived by literally incarcerating themselves: this was, however, not an option for Soros, who took responsibility for a whole family and who enjoyed being around people in the city these days. While Szép moved into a crammed yellow star house, Soros and Kozma – trusting their documents – took a riskier path and moved into a designated Christian building, where they experienced the same kind of crowdedness as Jews, though they could move freely in the in the city.

[95] Soros, *Maskerado*, 96.

Both Szép and Soros comment on the role of antisemitism in everyday interaction in 1944: despite the different social milieus they were trying to survive the German occupation, both emphasize that it played a significant role in organizing social interactions. According to Szép, who drew his conclusions based on his Thököly and Pozsonyi út experience, the main division between discriminated Jews was whether and for how long they had converted to Christianity. As he noted, besides social differences, the main distinction within the population was between old Christians – those converted before the anti-Jewish measures – and new Christians and the Jews of Jewish persuasion. This was because old Christians were often antisemitic themselves, and they did not want anything in common with the rest of the residents:

> They wouldn't even allow their children play with those of recent converts. At the Thököly Road air-raid shelter a woman, a postal employee, would not sit next to my sister, a teacher of Hungarian. Here on Pozsonyi Road…One lady jumped up from her seat, shouting: 'I'm not sitting next to that Jew!' The other lady, who had sat there with her husband, turned to us plaintively: …We have been Catholics for over two years. Both women wore diamond crosses on a chain'[96].

This strategy of dealing with anti-Jewish policies by alienating them is similar to Szép's strategy to distance himself from the base reality by avoiding contacts in the streets and regarding the world around him with sarcasm. Yet there is a crucial difference: namely that Szép did not legitimate the enforced racial policy, whereas the attitude of old Christian Jews cited above did. The following story might also shed light to the varied, positive and negative accounts on the same janitor provided by

[96] Ibid. 22.

various yellow star house inhabitants in 1945 analyzed in the previous chapter: Old Christians might have received preferential treatment, and they themselves might have had little solidarity in store for the rest of the discriminated population, and thus antisemitism could paradoxically have created a common ground between antisemitic Gentiles and old Christians.[97]

While Szép experienced antisemitism within the Jewish population, Soros stresses how "non-Jews" tried to "defend themselves" from Jews, similarly to the rhetoric of antisemitic papers analyzed before that stressed that not "Jews", but "non-Jews" are defenseless, and this is why they have to be alert to fend off every attack coming from the "Jewish" side. In their new apartment as subtenants at a family which soon turned out to be *Nyilas*, however, they had to prove that they were not "Jews" at every moment, and their fate was at the mercy of their landlord and his wife. For Lajos Kozma – who according to Soros did not have the characteristic "Jewish" features and who looked "more like a Chinese mandarin than a Budapest Jew"[98] – concealing the fact that he was persecuted posed no problem. Concealing the fact that Soros was Jewish posed a larger problem, especially when it turned out that the previous tenants were hauled by the police on a report by the landlady, who suspected that they were Jewish. Again, it was Kozma who saved Soros by turning the accusation of landlady into farce and irony:

> At this point the conversation took an unexpected turn. The landlady was speaking: 'You should take a good look at that Lexi [nickname of Elek Szabó, the *alter ego* of Tivadar Soros], you know, Lajos. It looks to me as if there's something a bit Jewish about him.'

[97] On the divergence of Hungarian Jewish experience during the Shoah see Gerő András, *The Jewish Criterion in Hungary* (Boulder: New York, 2007) as well as Rigó Máté "A zsidó szempont," *East Central Europe* (online edition), http://www.ece.ceu.hu/?q=node/61 (accessed June 1, 2009).
[98] Ibid. 50.

> We'd better tell him that to his face,' said Lajos, opening the door wide and smilingly repeating what the landlady had said. I was not entirely prepared for the question, but instinctively felt that I could defend myself by laughing it off.
>
> 'It could be,' I replied good-humoredly. 'The Latin proverb says, "*Mater simper certa est*: the mother is always certain." But the father never.[99]

Irony and laughing in itself, however, would not have worked on their own. When moving to the building, Soros introduced himself as a wine trader to the landlords, and offered them 20 liters of wine, with an agreement on future bargain price deliveries. While he contended in his memoirs on this deal as something that "ought to have aroused their suspicions"[100] he felt reassured by the fact that it was such a great opportunity for the landlords to have him that they would not bother deciphering his seemingly false identity. After the Nyilas couple would spend evenings discussing the front situation with the "Jewish" Soros who seemed to possess an expert opinion, they concluded that he must be part of the Hungarian Defense Section, a secret governmental intelligence agency.[101]

In the case of Szép and Soros as well, building managers were not memorialized as antisemites who tried to profiteer from the tribulations of "their" Jews. While Soros as a "Christian" could not directly feel antisemitism, he mentions that bribing the house manager was a tool in acquiring their sympathy. In the case of, the positive attitude to the building manager can be accounted for the fact that Jews in Pozsonyi út were affluent, which might have appealed to the house manager; besides that, "Jews" only moved in the house as late as June 1944, thus they could not have any previous conflicts. Moreover, Szép was lucky as temporarily one of the house

[99] Ibid. 111.
[100] Ibid. 127.
[101] Ibid.

managers turned out to be an anti-Nazi Gentile. According to *The Smell of Humans* there were two house managers sharing responsibilities: one of them was an Austrian-born Nazi-hater baron and a certain "Mr. K". The baron would be responsible for counting the Jews when they had to get back in the afternoon, and he was the one who granted "Jews" the right of not wearing a yellow star within the building. As the Jewish population of the house was comprised of former company owners, inventors and intellectuals, there was an immediate solidarity between the well-educated and wealthy baron and the rest of the residents. Szép, however, does not analyze how and why the Baron took up the position of the building manager. Showing the friendships that developed between him and the Jews, the Baron even let a "Jewish" friend ("Director V.") listen to the London broadcast at his place every night, which the privileged guest jotted down in shorthand, and than read aloud for the rest of the residents waiting at another apartment. The other building manager is also depicted as being decent and giving concessions to Jews. For instance, he condoned sunbathing on the rooftop:

> You can imagine what a blessing this was; lounge chairs from balconies appeared on the roof, and red-and-green striped beach umbrellas. Bathing suits were taken out, there was even a shower up there, just like at the beach".[102]

This episode shows the importance of the survival strategy characterized by creating normalcy within the extreme circumstances, which theme comes up in several narratives on survival in ghettoes and concentration camps.[103] Creating the

[102] Ibid. 28.

[103] While the various contexts differ significantly as well as the seriousness of risks taken, contesting and getting beyond discriminatory policies either by disregarding them or by trying to live a normal life is a common theme in ghetto diaries and memoirs, both those referring to the Nazi and the Communist regime. See for instance the episode in Ringelblum's *Diary* in which he comments on Lag b'Omer celebrations and other instances of normalcy within the Warsaw Ghetto (287), or for a similar story

illusion of normalcy within the yellow star house had a key role in preserving the dignity of Szép: the fact that he could continue reading till late at night, sunbathe on the roof and not wear a yellow star within the building were essential practices in achieving the narrator's psychological integrity.

Contrary to Szép, Soros did not emphasize that the building manager was a helpful character driven by humanism, yet he stressed that even as a "Jew" under cover, he felt that bribing him is needed. Wine was also a good tool to charm the building manager. Corroborating the vetting committee files analyzed in the previous chapter, Soros also emphasizes the importance of being in good terms with the building manager:

> Since the building manager in a Budapest apartment house knew everything that was going on, the building manager soon found out about this wine business too, and so he also had to receive his quota.
>
> To obtain it you had to take the streetcar, or, if the streetcars were not running, walk, to the outskirts of the city to Budafok. And if the air-raid sirens went off, it could take half the day to get back".[104]

Purchasing and delivering the wine involved multiple risks: being identified as having false papers, being pointed out as a "Jew" by passers-by or becoming suspicious as a black marketer were all risks that Tivadar Soros took according to his memoir. The question really is, however, whether he would have been safer as a Jew in hiding if he engaged in any other kinds of activity, like shopping, taking up a job or simply staying at home? Or putting it differently, did he take up a risk according to the social rules that applied in 1944, or do his deeds only seem risky in retrospect?

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depicting how inmates in Theresiendtadt simply disregarded the ban on smoking see Eva M Roubickoca, *We're Alive and Life Goes On: A Theresienstadt Diary* (New York: Holt& Company, 1998), 11. For resistance through returning to normalcy within a stalinist internment camp see Faludy György, *My Happy Days in Hell* (London : Andre Deutsch, c1962).

[104] Ibid. 110.

Again, the notion of "situated rationality" described in the previous chapter is revealing, as by this it is possible to highlight the coherence of his actions, and it also helps explain how the pre-war notion of risk changed in the extreme situation of 1944. As risk became the rule rather than the exception guiding daily life and influencing chances of survival, actors were more willing to take risks than before. A parallel to this scene on the altered perception of risk is present in Szép's memoir as well, who did not cease sunbathing on the rooftop when the air-raid siren went off, as he ceased to be frightened by the frequent bombings: "For us Jews the worst tribulations was our defenselessness, and our chief fear, deportation to a concentration camp. Death in a bomb explosion was no big deal, in comparison".[105]

Soros's account points to the fact that given the chaotic conditions in the city that was regularly bombed and which had an overlapping network of German, Arrow Cross leaning and old-stock conservative centers of power (analyzed in chapter 3), creating a bureaucratic miscommunication in Budapest, the strategy and actions of Soros had a significant chance of being crowned with success. While many Jews simple got a Schutzpass that did not help the majority during the Arrow Cross days, his strategy was to build up a complete identity with birth and marriage certificates and other documents with the help of forgers and paper laundries that provided all he needed: moreover, shortly after the German occupation he acted as a middleman between the forgers and his friends who needed papers, and through this business he earned the necessary amount of money his family needed. Some of these documents were not completely correct: they were either mistyped or the seal was wrong, nevertheless he never ran into any trouble with them. This proves that while lives could depend on having the necessary identification at hand in 1944, controlling

[105] Szép, *The Smell of Humans*, 15.

authorities – with a presumably low level of education and meager bureaucratic experience – easily put up with foolproof papers.

While Soros mobilized his networks and assets to get the papers he needed, Szép relied on the passive strategy to obtain them. Being a well-known journalist and a renowned writer, – that partially accounted for his satirically cheerful manner of narrating German occupation and subsequent Arrow Cross rule – was to implicitly rely on his fame and to hope deliverance through this. This passive strategy worked out for him until the world of at least limited rationality did not fade away. His experience – that many prominent and well-known Hungarian Jews might have shared – as a well-known writer, which represented a high social prestige at the time saved him from many troubles that "ordinary" Jews had. Among others it facilitated him getting a Swedish safe conduct pass for which hundreds were queuing:

> Five minutes later a boy of about fifteen stepped out of the villa and, on seeing me, motioned to me to come in on the right side. This young man led the writer through the neighboring villa and into the Legation, skillfully managing to shut the gate just before the others who ran after we got there. He happened to be the son of the gentleman who was issuing the protective passes. This Mr Forgács received me by reciting a stanza from one of my oldest poems.[106]

Whenever Szép had to get in touch with educated, middle class Hungarian authorities, his reputation paid off for him, and even saved him from being drafted:

> There had been a call-up of Jews on 1 October. The army physician, who recognized me, leaned close to examine my eyes for about twenty seconds before diagnosing an inflammation, and threw in a heart condition for a good

[106] Ibid. 40.

measure. That gave me a three month deferment, until January 1. And where would the war be by than?[107]

On the contrary, his sister, who was not widely known got into troubles easily. After meeting a colleague on a tram and telling her how her students still write her letters, an elderly woman "dressed in mourning" malignantly denounced her to a policeman as a Jewess who debased the Hungarian nation and who wishes the defeat of the national army.[108]

The extreme situation brought about by the Arrow Cross takeover is emphasized in *The Smell of Humans* by showing how this strategy – rooted in the Zweigian normalcy and the period of the "golden age of security" described in *The World of Yesterday* – is smashed to smithereens by the new social rules under the *Nyilas* regime.[109] Arguably the key to understand the Jewish policy of the *Nyilas* after mid-October is to take into consideration that the central authority was mainly manifest through different militias, which often disregarded state laws, previous practices as well as the Hungarian police and military forces, and took the solution of the Jewish question into their own hands. This manifested itself in massacring the population of a whole apartment building, or shooting a random selection of Jews into the Danube.[110] While the strategy to cooperate and to try to ameliorate one's situation through legal means – including petitions to the governor and to foreign embassies – or the practice of converting to a Christian denomination were on average safer strategies till October than going into hiding or illegal, after the Nyilas takeover these

[107] Ibid. 4.
[108] Ibid. 41.
[109] Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday, an autobiography* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964).
[110] See Lévai Jenő: *Fekete könyv a magyar zsidóság szenvedéseiről* (Budapest: Officina, 1946), 248-256.

strategies no longer made a difference. Though Szép was a well-known personality which set him apart from "common" discriminated "Jews", his strategy of relying on the goodwill of the Governor and on the humanity of authorities as well as on the orders of the Jewish Council was shared by the majority of Budapest Jews as well, who reasonably thought that obeying serves their benefit in the long run and leads to survival.

The absurdity of the Holocaust in Budapest – apparent in *The Smell of Humans* as well – is the rapidity of changes between paradigms: while following orders and trusting authorities made sense till the Nyilas takeover, it was absolutely fruitless after mid-October, as the majority of previous exemptions lost their validity. Szép himself was relatively protected till mid-October by a Swedish Schutzpass, nevertheless he got immediately rounded up for forced labor by teenager Nyilas "lads", along with "common" protected "Jews" in his building on October 16th.

In the final analysis it can be argued that the analysis of Szép's and Soros's memoirs prove that the major topics around which this chapter was centered – housing situation, social networks, the role of antisemitism and the relationship with the building manager – proved to be important factors influencing the strategies and chances of survival in Budapest 1944. While Soros relied on the help of acquaintances actively, Szép did it passively by letting his fame work for him. Both experienced fierce antisemitism but both found ways to survive it, or to minimize its influence on their daily lives as much as possible. One way of doing this was creating and maintaining pseudo-normalcy in their lives, by meeting with family, friends and talking to other people: as if their life continued undisturbed. They both lived amidst risks and took risks, cooperated and networked similarly to many other persecuted "Jews" in Budapest. They successfully found and exploited those assets they had –

fame and managerial skills respectively – in order to assure their survival. While their narratives testify that antisemitism played a key role in understanding the tragic events of 1944, they also prove that antisemitism was not the all-encompassing factor that decided on the fate of Budapest Jewry, despite wishes of the rabidly antisemitic press. As Ernő Szép's and Tivadar Soros' memoirs show, some Gentiles continued to be friendly with "Jews" despite the regulations, while others used the antisemitic agenda of the regimes to further their own goals. This maze of individualistic pursuits practiced by Gentiles and Jews in the partial chaos of the approaching front, however, left enough possibilities to save their lives through various means. Moreover, the fact that Szép and Soros could have such different narratives and experiences during the persecutions stems from the uniqueness of the Holocaust in Budapest, namely that contrary to other Eastern and Central European cities, in the Hungarian capital authorities could not brutally enforce the massive and rapid ghettoization and deportation of Jewry; moreover, in many cases they were not even in the position to track down and punish the breaching of the discriminatory policies.

5.2 Strategies of Survival in Budapest, 1944: the Memoir Writers' Perspective

Further elaborating on the problem of different survival and cooperation strategies applied by "Jew" and Gentiles" alike, I now embark on the analysis of how two persecuted memoir writers remembered the German occupation and Arrow Cross rule in Budapest. The memoirs of Tivadar Soros (1894 –1968)[111] and Ernő Szép (1884 – 1953)[112] serve as a third vantage point to investigate survival strategies and survival narratives besides vetting committee testimonies and oral history interviews exploited above. [113] The reason to include these personal testimonies is to be able to look at how and why different types of narratives diverge on the same events and how narrators construct their accounts differently on yellow star houses, on persecution and on city life in extreme conditions based on their social and religious background as well as their different personality.

While the previous chapter showed how multiple residents of an apartment building memorialized their recent pasts in connection with a building manager, the present chapter investigates two longer and more detailed accounts on their authors' 1944 experience. The length and the similarity of themes and issues brought up by the two memoir writers land themselves to a comparative analysis: I investigate how their respective family backgrounds, occupation, and social networks influenced the strategies that they chose to survive, and I analyze how these different strategies played out on the level of the apartment building they were living at.

[111] On Tivadar Soros' biography and memoir see Humphrey Tomkin, "Editor's Afterword" in Soros Tivadar, *Maskerado, Dancing Around Death in Nazi Hungary* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2000), 211-226.
[112] László Rónay, "Szép Ernő" in *Új Magyar Irodalmi Lexikon* [CD-ROM] ed. László Péter, (Budapest: Disclosure, 1995).
[113] Soros Tivadar, *Maskerado, Dancing Around Death in Nazi Hungary* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2000); Szép Ernő, *The Smell of Humans, A Memoir of the Holocaust in Hungary* (Budapest: CEU-Corvina, 1994)

Though there are many common elements between the two memoirs as well as the vetting committee files, I neither wish to come up with a universalized narrative of the Holocaust in Budapest nor with a common ground being forged from these various accounts. In addition, I do not wish to regard either of the different types of narratives and sources – like diaries, memoirs or oral history interviews – as untainted pure mediations of the Holocaust experience. Zoë Vania Waxman's remark applies to the diversity of the Budapest experience as well when she stresses that the "Holocaust was not just one event but many different events, witnessed by many different people, over a time span of several years and covering an expansive geographical area."[114] Addressing the scholarly canonization of Holocaust testimonies, Waxman has recently stressed that "the accepted concept of the Holocaust and the role of collective memory place two demands on the survivor. First, they seek to homogenize survivors' experiences, and secondly, they assume that, in adopting the role of the witness, survivors will adopt a universal identity. But, in negotiating the hegemony of accepted Holocaust narratives, some survivors' experiences are either pushed towards the margins or neglected altogether".[115] Acknowledging the lack of a common narrative also reveals that the accounts on events like the Holocaust in Budapest diverge significantly based on the geographical and social position of the witnesses, their level of education, religiosity and social networks with "non-Jewish", non-persecuted population. Moreover, these accounts are significantly different from other Holocaust or Ghetto accounts as well. It can be argued that both Ernő Szép's and Tivadar Soros' memoirs challenge the dominant narratives of the Holocaust and present atypical accounts of the Shoah, as both are essentially "happy end" narratives, in which the

[114] Zoë Vania Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust, Identity, Testimony, Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.
[115] Ibid.158.

significance of humiliation is distanced either by irony (Szép), or by a Robinson Crusoesque optimism and creativity (Soros). This partially stems from the peculiarity of the Holocaust experience of Budapest Jewry, which lived in relative freedom till October 1944 and witnessed a belated establishment of the Ghetto, which itself proved to be short lived, whereas mass deportations never occurred in the Hungarian capital. On the other hand, after the *Nyilas* takeover the most brutal violence and massacres were carried out on the capital's Jewry by the various *Nyilas* militias and partially by the SS and the Gestapo: this part of the story, however, is missing from both memoirs, as Szép was marched to the countryside whereas Soros was successfully hiding with Christian documents and never experienced persecution himself.

As for physical suffering it is present in Szép's account when the forced labor experience is addressed, nevertheless the mass killings, deportations and the death camps – three paradigmatic features of the Holocaust canon – do not appear in *The Smell of Humans*, which make it different from the often-quoted and canonized mainstream narratives.[116] It comes as no surprise that neither do these paradigmatic features of the Holocaust narrative surface in Soros's account, in which the stress is on showing how his family lived a relatively normal life during the persecutions; consequently the tragedies of Hungarian Jewry and the suffering that accompanied it are almost entirely missing from his text.

Besides the fact that these memoirs present atypical accounts of the Holocaust, another reason that explains why neither of them has so far been widely quoted in scholarship is quite practical. Namely that the English editions came relatively late:

[116] On a digest of published Holocaust memoirs see Esther Goldberg, *Holocaust Memoir Digest, Vol. 1-2: A Digest of Published Survivor Memoirs with Study Guide and Maps* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2004).

The Smell of Humans by Szép was published in 1994, though the Hungarian original came out with the title *Emberszag, emlékirat* as early as 1945[117], whereas the Esperanto version of Soros's *Maskerado* was published first in 1965, with the English translation coming as late as in 2000.

Though both Szép and Soros relied on tactics to get beyond official policies, based on the different strategies they adopted, their stories differ significantly. I emphasize how both authors depicted Jewish – non-Jewish cooperation in Budapest 1944: in the case of Szép, the emphasis is on the reconstruction of daily life in a yellow star house, while in the case of Soros, I concentrate on why and how his "maskerado" could be successful. Namely, I argue that survival was not a streak of good luck, yet it depended on social networks, material conditions, knowledge of city space and psychic fitness, just to mention the most important characteristics.

First, it is worth comparing the social background of Szép and Soros. Interestingly, both of them were born in Northeastern-Hungary at the end of the 19th century in pro-assimilationist Hungarian speaking Jewish middle class families, and none of them had a particularly religious upbringing. Szép was the son of an elementary school teacher, who frequently changed the family's residence, this is why Szép had schooling in several towns (in Hajdúszoboszló, Debrecen and Mezőtúr for instance), though he finally moved to the capital at 18 where he soon established himself as a popular poet who belonged to the circle of the progressive liberal *A Hét* and *Nyugat* groups. Not surprisingly, similarly to other major writers like Ferenc Molnár, he was conscripted as a front correspondent and as a nurse when the First World War came.

[117] Szép Ernő, *Emberszag, emlékirat* (Budapest: Keresztes, 1945).

Tivadar Soros – who magyarized his name in 1936 – was born as Tivadar (or Teodor) Schwartz ten years after Szép in 1894. His family ran a grocery store in Nyíregyháza and was moderately well-off despite the nine siblings Tivadar had.[118] Though Soros started his university studies in law, he had to interrupt them when volunteering for front service in the First World War, from which he came back only in the early 1920s, after fleeing from a Russian POW camp.

Despite the geographical and social similarities of their emitting communities and early years, by the time of the German occupation in 1944, Szép and Soros were in different stages of their life cycle and in terms of their social position.

Major differences between them were their housing and family situation, financial situation and social networks, which factors influenced the number of choices available to them in such an extreme situation. Szép was a bachelor, Soros had an affluent wife and two kids. Whereas the renowned writer was known and venerated by many, in *The Smell of Humans* he does not mention any close friends or allies that could be of help for him when the occupation came. On the contrary, Budapest-based lawyer Tivadar Soros had a wide network of Jews and Gentiles alike from various social groups ranging from the working classes to some prominents of the aristocracy, many of which he could use in the hour of need.

Ernő Szép had lived in Margaret Island between Pest and Buda for 33 years: in 1944 he had a residence in the prestigious Hotel Palatinus, which immediately prompted him to face German occupation: "everyone had to clear out…on Sunday 19 March….Two hundred and seventy German officers were billeted at the Hotel Palatinus. I was the only guest permitted to stay until Monday for, unlike the transients, who had a suitcase or two, I was loaded down with books, pictures and all

[118] Thomkin, 215.

my belongings."[119] Being shocked and clueless about the future, he tried to stick to the explanation provided by the hotel's desk clerk, according to whom "I would be back in a couple of weeks. This was not a real military occupation, he said; oh no, not at all, it was only *a transitory passage to secure supply lines.* He had it in strict confidence straight from the quartermaster's corps".[120] Szép would join his sister at Thököly út; in June he duly moved to a yellow star house in Újlipótváros –where the privileged International Ghetto for Jews protected by foreign countries was later established – and he never tried to engage in going against official policy. Similarly to the majority of Jews – including the leaders of the Jewish Council – Szép did not have any long-term strategy to contest Nazi rule in the first few month, and he did not do anything extraordinary to assure his survival: he followed regulations and tried to normalize his life under these conditions, though he never ceased to view himself – and represent himself in the memoir – as a conscientious outsider and a *voyeur* of social absurdity turning into reality around him.

According to his memoirs the major obstacle to this strategy of ignoring outside reality and retaining normalcy within himself was the highly material sign of being discriminated: the ten by ten centimeter yellow star that he had to put up whenever going out to the street. The way he got around this regulation at Thököly út was by not venturing out to the street for three months, having his barber come to his home every second week, and by only going out to the building's courtyard, where it was allowed not to wear a star. When moving to Pozsonyi út, new regulations came which made it obligatory to wear the star even in the corridor and the vestibule, yet it was not enforced by the Gentile building manager. Here in Pozsonyi he had to cross the street in order to go to a barber, and he also had make larger trips in the city;

[119] Szép Ernő, *The Smell of Humans, A Memoir of the Holocaust in Hungary* (Budapest: CEU-Corvina, 1994), 10.
[120] Ibid.

whenever this happened, he tried to hide himself behind his hat, and was always embarrassed when passers-by noticed him as the "writer" who is humiliated.[121]

When commenting on daily life in a yellow star house, Szép serves with many enlightening comments that explain conflicts and cooperation between tenants, and it also highlights why the crammed population who came from different religious and social backgrounds turned to sometimes opposing survival strategies. The Újlipótváros house that Szép lived in near the Danube and the major park of the neighborhood housed a socially more upscale Jewish population than district VII analyzed in the previous chapter. Most importantly, it represented the most modern and highly expensive, Bauhaus-type housing of the city, mainly built in the 1930s. No wonder that the neighborhood, which was heavily populated by the Jewish middle and upper middle class in the interwar period, served as a natural site for the designation of the International Ghetto, mostly housing well-to-do and prominent Jews already clustered in the area. On the other hand, these houses in Újlipótváros were also congested similarly to Jewish apartments in yellow star houses elsewhere, as each Jewish family was assigned one room, shared often by four or more people, which sometimes led to complicate situations:

> …a recently divorced woman lived there with her little daughter. Her boyfriend had moved in, with intentions to marry her. Then she took in two of her women friends and their families. Finally came the divorced husband who could not find an apartment elsewhere, and took the maid's room in that big apartment. They said the divorced husband was head over heels in love with her ex-wife".[122]

[121] Ibid. 39.
[122] Ibid. 30.

Paradoxically enough, according to Szép, who drew his conclusions based on his Thököly and Pozsonyi út experience, the main division between discriminated Jews was whether and for how long they had converted to Christianity. As he noted, besides social differences, the main distinction within the population was between old Christians – those converted before the anti-Jewish measures – and new Christians and the Jews of Jewish persuasion. This was because old Christians were often antisemitic themselves, and they did not want anything in common with the rest of the residents:

> They wouldn't even allow their children play with those of recent converts. At the Thököly Road air-raid shelter a woman, a postal employee, would not sit next to my sister, a teacher of Hungarian. Here on Pozsonyi Road…One lady jumped up from her seat, shouting: 'I'm not sitting next to that Jew!' The other lady, who had sat there with her husband, turned to us plaintively: …We have been Catholics for over two years. Both women wore diamond crosses on a chain'[123].

This strategy of dealing with anti-Jewish policies by alienating them is similar to Szép's strategy to distance himself from the base reality by avoiding contacts in the streets and regarding the world around him with sarcasm. Yet there is a crucial difference: namely that Szép does not legitimate the enforced racial policy, whereas the attitude of old Christian Jews cited above did. The following story might also shed light to the varied, positive and negative accounts on the same building manager provided by various yellow star house inhabitants in 1945 analyzed in the previous chapter: Old Christians might have received preferential treatment, and they themselves might have had little solidarity in store for the rest of the discriminated

[123] Ibid. 22.

population, and thus antisemitism could paradoxically have created a common ground between antisemitic Gentiles and old Christians.[124]

In the case of Szép, however, building managers were not memorialized as antisemites who tried to profiteer from the tribulations of "their" Jews. According to *The Smell of Humans* there were two house managers sharing responsibilities: one of them was an Austrian-born Nazi-hater baron and a certain "Mr. K". The baron would be responsible for counting the Jews when they had to get back in the afternoon, and he was the one who granted Jews the right of not wearing a yellow star within the building. As the Jewish population of the building was comprised of former company owners, inventors and intellectuals, there was an immediate solidarity between the well-educated and wealthy baron and the rest of the residents. Szép, however, does not analyze how and why the Baron took up the position of the building manager. Showing the friendships that developed between him and the Jews, the Baron even let a Jewish friend ("Director V.") listen to the London broadcast at his place every night, which the privileged guest jotted down in shorthand, and than read aloud for the rest of the residents waiting at another apartment. The other building manager is also depicted as being decent and giving concessions to Jews. For instance he condoned the sunbathing on the rooftop:

> You can imagine what a blessing this was; lounge chairs from balconies appeared on the roof, and red-and-green striped beach umbrellas. Bathing suits were taken out, there was even a shower up there, just like at the beach".[125]

[124] On the divergence of Hungarian Jewish experience during the Shoah see Gerő András, *The Jewish Criterion in Hungary* (Boulder: New York, 2007) as well as Rigó Máté "A zsidó szempont," *East Central Europe* (online edition), http://www.ece.ceu.hu/?q=node/61 (accessed June 1, 2009).
[125] Ibid. 28.

This episode shows the importance of the survival strategy characterized by creating normalcy within the extreme circumstances, which theme comes up in several narratives on survival in ghettoes and concentration camps.[126] Creating the illusion of normalcy within the yellow star house had a key role in preserving the dignity of Szép: the fact that he could continue on reading till late at night, sunbathe on the roof and not wear a yellow star within the building were essential practices in achieving the narrator's psychological integrity.

Being a well-known journalist and a renowned writer, Szép's other strategy – that partially accounted for his satirically cheerful manner of narrating German occupation and subsequent Arrow Cross rule – was to implicitly rely on his fame and to hope deliverance through this. This passive strategy worked out for him until the world of at least limited rationality did not fade away. His experience – that many prominent and well-known Hungarian Jews might have shared – as a well-known writer, which represented a high social prestige at the time saved him from many troubles that "ordinary" Jews had. Among others it facilitated him getting a Swedish safe conduct pass for which hundreds were queuing:

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[126] While the various contexts differ significantly as well as the seriousness of risks taken, contesting and getting beyond discriminatory policies either by disregarding them or by trying to live a normal life is a common theme in ghetto diaries and memoirs, both those referring to the Nazi and the Communist regime. See for instance the episode in Ringelblum's *Diary* in which he comments on Lag b'Omer celebrations and other instances of normalcy within the Warsaw Ghetto (287), or for a similar story depicting how inmates in Theresiendtadt simply disregarded the ban on smoking see Eva M Roubickoca, *We're Alive and Life Goes On: A Theresienstadt Diary* (New York: Holt& Company, 1998), 11. For resistance through returning to normalcy within a stalinist internment camp see Faludy György, *My Happy Days in Hell* (London : Andre Deutsch, c1962).

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[127] Ibid. 40.
[128] Ibid. 4.
[129] Ibid. 41.

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Tivadar S. (Schwartz – Soros), the protagonist, narrator and author of *Maskerado* remembers that he was dead set on not obeying any regulations that came from the Jewish Council, yet he wavered for weeks before making the decision to adopt a false, Christian identity for himself and his family. Writing the original Esperanto version of his study in 1965, in the aftermath of the Eichmann trial and two years after Hannah Arendt's seminal and later contested study was first published on

[130] See Lévai Jenő: *Fekete könyv a magyar zsidóság szenvedéseiről* (Budapest: Officina, 1946), 248-256.

the negative role of Jewish Councils in the Final Solution[131] – Soros clearly condemned the Budapest *Judenrat*, claiming as a lawyer that they have no right to issue orders.[132]

Though Soros was resolute about obtaining false documentation, all his Christian and Esperantist friends whom he approached with the plan to buy their documents – which they could claim to have lost – backed out with various excuses; among the persons who refused were a chimney sweep, a destitute intellectual and a left-wing journalist.

While his uniquely wide social network among Gentiles as an assimilated Hungarian-Jewish lawyer did not yield immediate results, he finally ended up obtaining the necessary documentation to his family members, though from various sources. Interestingly, the first main help came from a building manager and his family, who immediately handed over their documents to Soros. He could count on their help, as being a legal representative and administrator of their building, he did important favors for the building manager. When, for instance, he applied for the position, Soros granted him the job even though he did not possess the necessary deposit. At another instance, around early April 1944 Soros was summoned to the police after getting into a debate with an influential tenant of the building – a member of parliament according to the author – who criticized that the building is not heated properly. At the police, Soros, – whom the police agent did not dare to criticize due to his higher social standing as a lawyer – successfully defended the building manager, who was blamed for the situation by the police. After this, Soros dared to request their documents as an exchange for his help: this is how his son Paul and wife Julia obtained false identities.

[131] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979),118.
[132] See Chapter 3 of *Maskerado* on his opinion on the Jewish Council.

Moreover, he decided on making a hiding place in the very same Eskű square (today Március 15 square) building where the helpful and reliable building manager held his position, and where his mother-in-law lived as well. For the residents, the establishment of the safe and comfortable hiding place with a huge iron door was camouflaged as renovation activity. The place, designed by prominent architect Lajos Kozma, Soros' friend and hiding partner, had a built-in safety buzzer to the house manager and proper ventilation, as well as two separate openings; the meals were brought daily from a different upscale restaurant by the building manager.

Soros rightly comments on the establishment of their bunker that "the arrangements showed that we had both been avid readers of Jules Verne in our youth"[133]. When investigated in more detail, however, the key to their success seems more intricate. What is clear is that going hiding was not a decision made on the spur of the moment, and it was a decision contingent upon social position, personal networks and financial means, which all delimited both the number of those "Jews" who could engage in it, and those who could successfully carry on this practice possibly for months. The case of Soros shows that not simply Gentile acquaintances and friends were necessary – which many assimilated "Jews" had – but the presence of previous exchanges (in this case, of positions) that rendered requests for papers or for a hiding place at a Gentile family a successful enterprise. Moreover, an operationalizable knowledge of possible hideout places in the city, as well as the means to construct such a hiding place, with at least the tacit approval of the Gentile majority was also essential in this venture.

Besides networks with Gentiles, the importance of family connections is emphasized by the fact that Soros obtained false papers for himself through his

[133] Ibid. 51.

Nyíregyháza brother, who considered that it will be safer for him to hide in the countryside, and sent Gentile identification papers (in the name of Elek Szabó) through an agent, which enabled Soros to live under false documents in Budapest.

Till mid-June, everything seemed to be fine with their tactics: while Soros and Lajos Kozma found refuge in their bunker, his wife stayed at a Gentile family's one-room apartment, his 18-year old son pretended to be a Gentile student with false documents and George stayed with an ethnic German family friend in Buda. The boys would meet their fathers in Rudas spa every day for a swim, long after it was banned for Jews; after a while a locker-room attendant made an insinuating (or joking) remark that might have been understood as a sign that he knows that they are Jews. When George tipped him, he thanked it in the name of the Jewish religious community. After this event they decided never to set foot in the spa again.[134]

A major blow to the tactics of Soros came when the building of his bunker was designated as a yellow star house in June 16, which prompted them to find another place: similarly to the establishment of the bunker, Lajos Kozma, his hiding partner solved the situation by finding a room through an aunt recently fled from Slovakia in an apartment near Blaha Lujza square. With this move, Soros possibly chose a riskier path than by staying at a designated yellow star house. By remaining in the bunker they could have risked being identified as Jews more easily and if the building manager did not supply them with food, they would have had to leave their shelter occasionally. On they other hand, if they stored enough food in the place, they could have safely survived by literally incarcerating themselves: this was, however, not an option for Soros, who took responsibility for a whole family and who enjoyed being around people in the city these days. In their new apartment as subtenants at a family

[134] Soros, *Maskerado*, 96.

which soon turned out to be *Nyilas*, however, they had to prove that they are not "Jews" at every moment, and their fate was at the mercy of their landlord and his wife. For Lajos Kozma – who according to Soros did not have the characteristic "Jewish" features and who looked "more like a Chinese mandarin than a Budapest Jew"[135] – concealing the fact that he is persecuted posed no problem. Concealing the fact that Soros is Jewish posed a larger problem, especially when it turned out that the previous tenants were hauled by the police on a report by the landlady, who suspected that they are Jewish. Again, it was Kozma who saved Soros by turning the accusation of landlady into farce and irony:

> At this point the conversation took an unexpected turn. The landlady was speaking: 'You should take a good look at that Lexi [nickname of Elek Szabó, the *alter ego* of Tivadar Soros], you know, Lajos. It looks to me as if there's something a bit Jewish about him.'
>
> We'd better tell him that to his face,' said Lajos, opening the door wide and smilingly repeating what the landlady had said. I was not entirely prepared for the question, but instinctively felt that I could defend myself by laughing it off.
>
> 'It could be,' I replied good-humoredly. 'The Latin proverb says, "*Mater simper certa est*: the mother is always certain." But the father never.[136]

Irony and laughing in itself, however, would not have worked on their own. When moving to the building, Soros introduced himself as a wine trader to the landlords, and offered them 20 liters of wine, with an agreement on future bargain price deliveries. While he contended in his memoirs on this deal as something that "ought

[135] Ibid. 50.
[136] Ibid. 111.

to have aroused their suspicions"[137] he felt reassured by the fact that it was such a great opportunity for the landlords to have him that they would not bother deciphering his seemingly false identity. After the Nyilas couple would spend evenings discussing the front situation with the "Jewish" Soros who seemed to possess and expert opinion, they concluded that he must be part of the Hungarian Defense Section, a secret governmental intelligence agency.[138]

Wine was also a good tool to charm the building manager as well. Corroborating the vetting committee files analyzed in the previous chapter, Soros also emphasizes the significance of charming the building manager:

> Since the building manager in a Budapest apartment house knew everything that was going on, the building manager soon found out about this wine business too, and so he also had to receive his quota.
>
> To obtain it you had to take the streetcar, or, if the streetcars were not running, walk, to the outskirts of the city to Budafok. And if the air-raid sirens went off, it could take half the day to get back".[139]

Purchasing and delivering the wine involved multiple risks: being identified as having false papers, being pointed out as a "Jew" by passers-by or becoming suspicious as a black marketer were all risks that Tivadar Soros took according to his memoir. The question really is, however, whether he would have been safer as a Jew in hiding if he engaged in any other kinds of activity, like shopping, taking up a job or simply staying at home? Or putting it differently, did he take up a risk according to the social rules that applied in 1944, or do his deeds only seem risky in retrospect? Again, the notion of "situated rationality" described in the previous chapter is revealing, as by this it is possible to highlight the coherence of his actions, and it also

[137] Ibid. 127.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid. 110.

helps explain how the pre-war notion of risk changed in the extreme situation of 1944. As risk became the rule rather than the exception guiding daily life and influencing chances of survival, actors were more willing to take risks than before. A parallel to this scene on the altered perception of risk is present in Szép's memoir as well, who did not cease sunbathing on the rooftop when the air-raid siren went off, as he ceased to be frightened by the frequent bombings: "For us Jews the worst tribulations was our defenselessness, and our chief fear, deportation to a concentration camp. Death in a bomb explosion was no big deal, in comparison".[140]

Soros' account points to the fact that given the chaotic conditions in the city that was regularly bombed and which had an overlapping network of German, Arrow Cross leaning and old-stock conservative centers of power (analyzed in chapter 3), creating a bureaucratic miscommunication in Budapest, the strategy and actions of Soros had a significant chance of being crowned with success. While many Jews simple got a Schutzpass that did not help the majority during the Arrow Cross days, his strategy was to build up a complete identity with birth and marriage certificates and other documents with the help of forgers and paper laundries that provided all he needed: moreover, shortly after the German occupation he acted as a middleman between the forgers and his friends who needed papers, and through this business he earned the necessary amount of money his family needed. Some of these documents were not completely correct: they were either mistyped or the seal was wrong, nevertheless he never ran into any trouble with them. This proves that while lives could depend on having the necessary identification at hand in 1944, controlling authorities – with a presumably low level of education and meager bureaucratic experience – easily put up with foolproof papers.

[140] Szép, *The Smell of Humans*, 15.

All in all, these documents were enough to help Tivadar Soros to survive for months: his path of adopting a pseudo identity fitted his personality and proved to be beneficial in the long run. While there are major differences between the strategies adopted by Szép and Soros, they both chose to create normalcy within their own lives: Szép achieved it in a yellow star house and while Soros adopted a pseudo identity that helped him live an almost unrestricted life. They both lived amidst risks and took risks, cooperated and networked similarly to many other persecuted "Jews" in Budapest. They successfully found and exploited those assets they had – fame as well as managerial skills respectively – in order to assure their survival. While their narratives testify that antisemitism played a key role in understanding the tragic events of 1944, they also prove that antisemitism was not the all-encompassing factor that decided on the fate of Budapest Jewry, despite wishes of the rabidly antisemitic press. As Ernő Szép's and Tivadar Soros' memoirs show, some Gentiles continued to be friendly with "Jews" despite the regulations, while others used the antisemitic agenda of the regimes to further their own goals. This maze of individualistic pursuits practiced by Gentile in the partial chaos of the approaching front, however, left enough possibilities for some "Jews" to save their lives through various means.

5.3 Strategies of Survival in Warsaw: a Dissimilar Parallel to the Budapest Case

Surviving the Second World War in Warsaw was different from surviving German occupation in Budapest, and despite the many similarities analyzed below, it prompted for different and more complicated personal and collective strategies, mainly due to the more fierce and long German occupation.

A major difference between the possible strategies stemmed from the difference of historical contexts in which the German occupation and the persecutions took place. Though being different in nature from its Hungarian counterpart, Poland also witnessed official antisemitism in the interwar period, which primarily stemmed from the nationalist nation building process, which, to a different extent, but affected other minorities like Byelorussians and Ukrainians as well.[141] Jews were, however, regarded differently as their economic domination perceived by many was seen as parallel to the political domination of Polish Lands in the previous two centuries; according to the historian of the time, Raphael Mahler, many saw the ousting of Jews from this position as a patriotic obligation.[142] Despite attempts to introduce the *numerus clauses* in higher education and to restrict Jewish commercial activity, the interwar period witnessed flourishing Jewish cultural life in Poland, and especially during Józef Piłsudski's rule (1926-1935), no serious antisemitic agenda gained ground. The second half of the 1930s, however, brought an escalating wave of antisemitism, and according to Gutman, it became part of the national consensus that Jewish population is to be decreased by mass emigration.[143] The Yad Vashem chief historian also argues that the short-lived Polish-Jewish reconciliation did not have lasting effects during the German occupation, and that antisemitism did not weaken significantly after 1939. To support this view, however, he only gives an illustration of Polish antisemitic behavior documented in Emanuel Ringelblum's diary written in the Warsaw ghetto; in the very same diary, however, there are many instances of Poles expressing solidarity with Jews and actively helping them, which are not

[141] Yisrael Gutman, "Polish Antisemitism Between the Wars, An Overview," in *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars* ed. Yisrael Gutman et al. (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1989), 97 – 108.
[142] Raphael Mahler, "Antisemitism in Poland", in Essays on Antisemitism, ed. Koppel S. Pinson (New York: The Conference on Jewish Relations), 165-166.
[143] Gutman, "Polish Antisemitism…", 105.

mentioned by Gutman. These cases will be analyzed below, yet first the different contexts of Jewish survival possibilities in Warsaw and Budapest need to be discerned.

At the time of establishing the yellow star houses in Budapest, the Soviet army was drawing near the Hungarian border at a rapid speed, and even to the most fanatic local Nazi supporters, it was clear that the *Reich* is facing serious military troubles and that huge efforts are needed to overcome these. When the Ghetto was established in late November, the Red Army had already occupied the eastern strips of Hungary and was drawing near to Budapest. As a consequence of this, the Budapest Ghetto was short-lived, lasting for only six weeks, and it thus was very different from the Warsaw ghetto, which lasted for almost three years.

The most important differences that distinguished the framework of personal resistance to Nazi anti-Jewish policies is that in Poland Jews were seen as fellow victims of the German occupation, while in Hungary no such sentiment prevailed; the country remained an Ally of Nazi Germany even after the occupation, and while ordinary Hungarians did not necessarily sympathize with Germans, there was no sense of German subjugation, fortified by Miklós Horthy staying in power as well till mid-October 1944.

Despite all the differences, there were similar personal strategies of survival employed in both cities, yet as the global framework of the war was different, the chances of success were much higher in Budapest than in Warsaw. It is impossible to verify, which societies as wholes proved to be more helpful, though this has been an ongoing debate ever since in both Hungary and Poland.[144] Bibó's seminal study on the

[144] See Bibó István, "The Jewish Question in Hungary After 1944" in Democracy, Revolution, Self-determination, ed. Nagy Károly (New York: Boulder, 1991) 89-154.
Csordás Gábor "Hacsak egy is" (Even if only one…) in *Holocaust emlékkönyv a vidéki zsidóság deportálásának 50. évfordulója alkalmából,* ed. Králl Csaba (Budapest: TEDISZ, 1994) 158-160.

Jewish question, in which he claimed that fewer helped the Jews than it would have been possible, is corroborated by the melancholy of survivors who did not receive help, despite having had friendly relations with Gentiles: "My father had a Christian colleague" – remembers Erika Izsák, a Budapest survivor – "with whom they had a really good relationship. They had a large house in Buda, and my father sent mom and me to ask whether we could hide at their place…they apologized and came up with all sorts of reasons, but refused. We got another bitter experience and had to rush in order to get back before our street time was up…"[145] .

One similar Jewish strategy in both cities was (i) to appeal to the solidarity of Gentile friends, and to hide Jewish children at these families. One such rescuer remembers that: "Did I help Jews during the German occupation? It was entirely normal for me to help someone the Germans intended to kill"[146] Again, the common ground is emphasized against the Germans, which was, however, not that matter of fact in the case of Hungary, though the risk of hiding Jews would have been much smaller. After the Warsaw ghetto was sealed, it was almost impossible for Gentiles to help their Jewish friends, unless they managed to escape, similarly to medical doctor Szapiro's family that fled the Ghetto in 1942. Their case represents (ii) the second possibility, namely being hidden by Gentiles illegally within the city, which motive also came up in the trials of building managers. Being hidden in a Warsaw suburb for a day, they were escorted at night to the Polish Petri family's downtown home, where they were hidden in the cellar during the day, with only at nights being able to come out to the apartment. Later on, the Gestapo raided Petri's home, but due to a

[145] *Centropa. Zsidó élettörténetek a huszadik században.* (Centropa. Jewish Life Stories in the 20th Century) Izsák Erika interviewed by Dóra Sárdi in February 2001 and August 2005. http://www.centropa.hu/object.36201806-0a30-40bd-b1c8-2f7ab76755d9.ivy?full=true (accessed May 6, 2009).

[146] The memories of Bronislawa Gniewaszewska, in *Out of the Inferno, Poles Remember the Holocaust* ed. Richard C. Lukas (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1989), 68.

preparation of nicotine, the dogs did not smell humans in the cellar. After this, when other residents of the building were out, in 1943 another hiding place was constructed for the Szapiro family, this time under the cellar.[147] While the motive of open resistance did not come up in the testimony above, as a difference with the Budapest example it can be mentioned that many Poles who rescued Jews were themselves involved in illegal resistance against German rule. In the memoirs of Wanda Draczynska, all her friends and relations seem to have been connected to the resistance: "In Warsaw, most people had some affiliation with an underground organization, even if they did not formally take an oath. I always seemed to be running errands for the Home Army, without formally being a member."[148]

There are a number of instances – similarly to Budapest – in which (iii) the passive participation of those are mentioned who noticed but did not report hiding families to authorities. Similarly to building managers, they were mostly comprised of that part of local population which had power on a local level "…Jadwiga was seen by Karol Zipser, the director of the firm where I worked. Normally, if anyone came, Jadwiga hid on a suitcase rack in the bathroom. For some reason, Zipser went into the bathroom and climbed up the ladder we kept there, but he said nothing. We all knew what was in store for us if Germans found out. In the same apartment building there had lived a Polish policeman married to a Jewish woman, they were both shot by the Germans".[149]

Similarly to Budapest, there existed (iv) the possibility of passing for Christian, especially for those Jews who were not considered to have Semitic features.

[147] The memories of Stefan Petri, in *Out of the Inferno, Poles Remember the Holocaust* ed. Richard C. Lukas (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1989), 136-137.
[148] The memories of Wanda Draczynska , in *Out of the Inferno, Poles Remember the Holocaust* ed. Richard C. Lukas (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1989), 59-60.
[149] The memories of Urszula Holfeld , in *Out of the Inferno, Poles Remember the Holocaust* ed. Richard C. Lukas (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1989), 75-

A common practice that was prevalent in both cities for Jews in hiding was to learn Christian prayers, that could prove essential when caught by the Germans, yet they were not enough for survival in most cases. According to memoirists like Tivadar Soros[150] and others hiding, passing for a Christian was an extremely tedious task, as Roman Polanski's 2002 movie, *The Pianist* also highlights it.[151] Its difficulty did not only stem from the length of German occupation, but also from the hostile environment and the multiplicity of factors that could have spoiled the attempt.

J. Kowalski, who remembers to have furnished several Jews with false identification papers through the Home Army, notes how one of his protégées got caught by the Christian residents in the building: "The young man, who did not look Jewish, felt safe and secure. But soon after taking up residence there, he began an intimate relationship with a promiscuous girl who immediately became aware of his Jewishness. Perhaps more out of stupidity and carelessness, the Polish girl told others of her discovery".[152] Though this one case cannot be a basis of sweeping conclusions, it still highlights how normalcy found its way in the extreme situation of the German occupation, with people resuming activities that normally would be alien to such adverse circumstances. When compared to Budapest, it possibly had some connection with the long years of occupation and persecution in Poland, that normalized even the most extreme and inhuman circumstances. Commenting on the Budapest situation, both Ernő Szép and Tivadar Soros note in their memoirs[153] that in the extreme situation of most rabid Arrow Cross rule in Budapest – that they perceived as being

[150] Soros, 2000.
[151] *The Pianist*, DVD. Directed by Roman Polanski, 2002, Hollywood, CA: Universal Studios, 2002.
[152] The memories of J. Kowalski, in *Out of the Inferno, Poles Remember the Holocaust* ed. Richard C. Lukas (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1989), 102.
[153] Soros Tivadar, *Maskerado* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2000), 134.
Ernő Szép, *The Smell of Humans, A Memoir of the Holocaust in Hungary* (Central European University Press, 1994.)

interim and soon to be over – persecuted and hiding Jews were less keen on continuing on with their love lives, though the occasion would have presented itself:

> There were some good-looking women here and there in the house, you might ask, did I try courting one or another. The answer is no, even though I was as starved for love as for cigarette. But no, no and no, I did not have the gall to make up to a woman whose man had been carried away…Nor can I say of any women in the building that she offered herself by words or by any other signs to me or to any other men around.[154]

It is apparent that the context of the yellow star house in which Szép lived is different from the Polish ghetto, yet it is clear how he highlights that they were expecting the situation of discrimination to be temporal and every resident acted accordingly.

All in all, a comparison of Warsaw and Budapest reveals that similar survival strategies were mirrored in different tactics and practices in the two cities due to the difference of contexts. While in Budapest they were focused on the temporal nature of the extreme situation, in Warsaw their success correlated with the extent to which these practices could became viable in the long run, as in Budapest the harshest discrimination lasted for three month, whereas in Warsaw well over three years. Despite the differences, in both cities local powers had a great influence on the success of these strategies. Besides that, making use of the nooks and crannies of the apartment building and transforming its normal functions into that of a hiding place was key in both cities. It is no wonder that after the Warsaw uprising, the Ghetto –

[154] Szép, 1994, 22-23.

that was fought from house to house – was leveled by Germans, making any further urban resistance impossible.

Conclusion

While the quite eerie drawings in *A Harc* showing "yellow star men" as powerful figures who terrorize everyday "non-Jewish" residents on the Budapest street in 1944 is a mendacious representation of the fragile social position of contemporary Budapest Jewry, it still highlights the frustration that many *Nyilas* and their sympathizers could have felt about the solution of the Jewish question in Budapest. Uniquely within Axis-dominated Europe, by 1944 Budapest became the only large city where the ghetto was set up very late in the history of the Second World War and where mass-scale deportations to death camps never materialized.

As overlapping ministerial, German and municipal bureaucracies had competing plans about the solution of the Jewish question, the fate of discriminated "Jews" largely depended on local power structures that had become vitally important especially between March and October 1944, before the outright *Nyilas* terror began. As it was demonstrated in the thesis, the anti-Jewish decrees of the municipal and ministerial authorities acquired varied meaning on a local level, based on local "Jewish" – "non-Jewish" cooperation or hostility, as well as on individual strategies of coping with discrimination.

The analysis in the thesis united three levels of investigation to approach the everyday survival strategies during the persecution of Budapest "Jews". First, I turned to an administrative-bureaucratic analysis of anti-Jewish spatial regulations that were assiduously investigated by Tim Cole in *Holocaust City*. Nevertheless I was

not primarily interested in how the different ordinances imagined to reshape city space, but I investigated how these paradigm changes between different policies were used by various actors who aimed to turn the changes into their own advantage. The investigation showed that the administrative tussle over the concentration of the "Jewish" population as well as the willingness to take "Christian" interests into account when deciding on the ghettoization of Budapest Jewry created an adminsitrative void for several months in which local and individual actors could effectively pursue their interests. Studying bureaucratic ordinances in view of the contemporary press as well as personal sources raised questions about the tenability of Cole's argument that started out from the tacit assumption that city space was a playground of different administrative bodies who could freely implement various policies on it. Looking at sources other than official ordinances revealed the cleavages between desired policies and everyday practice based on highly localized social networks and spatially contingent processes.

On a second level, I analyzed the perspective of the official discourse on "Jews" in 1944 in order to get closer to the language use of personal sources from the period and to find out to how the contemporary press reflected on the changing situation of the Budapest "Jewry". It turned out that the antisemitism of the press served with ready-made stereotypes and clichés that were duly echoed in interactions with authorities – for instance when writing petitions – as well as in several everyday interaction between "Jews" and "non-Jews". The application of these clichés, however, depended on the nature of social interaction: for instance, they were possibly applied when individual interests were articlulated to manipulate official policy or when they could be utilized by a building manager to acquire the power position within an apartment building. On many other occasions, however, individual

interests of “Jews” and “non-Jews” prompted for putting antisemitism aside: for instance when by overriding official regulations “Jews” were allowed to hide in exchange for money or when “non-Jews” helped to preserve “Jewish” assets etc. and saved lives during Nyilas raids in an apartment building. More than anything else, the analysis of the 1944 press reveals that the antisemitism of these papers manipulated but did not reflect everyday interactions; on the other hand, these papers distorted events and falsely reported on “Jewish – “non-Jewish” interactions to sustain and verify the official policy according to which only hostility and conflict of interests can exist between the discriminated minority and the majority population. Thus by contrasting the press with other types of sources the thesis revealed that taking the articles reporting on everyday interactions between “Jews” and “non-Jews” at face value leads to a distorted understanding of the Holocaust in Budapest.

This antisemitism, however, failed to become the major factor in influencing all the actions of the “non-Jewish” population. Similarly to the results of studying the materialization of anti-Jewish ordinances in everyday life, contrasting the desires of antisemitic press with studies of interactions between “Jews” and “non-Jews” reveals that the press could never fully influence the behavior of its readers. Moreover, the papers analyzed in the thesis constantly expressed their indignation about the lack of their all-pervasive impact on the “Christian” population, who did not behave as a unified antisemitic horde fighting the social influence of Budapest “Jews”.

The analysis of the thesis comes to a full a circle on its third and most revealing level, when I approach the Holocaust in Budapest from the point of view of personal survival strategies through the perspective of Alltageschichte. This is the part that provided the most relevant contribution to existing scholarship, as it was highlighted that the way local population used and contested antisemitic policies in

1944 was actually more important than the content of these policies. While much emphasis was accorded to study ordinances and decrees in connection with the Holocaust in Budapest in historical scholarship[155], the thesis showed that the extent to which these policies were implemented showed significant variations. Especially on the level of apartment buildings and yellow star houses, it was revealed that the experience of persecutions and discrimination was constructed differently depending on the relationship of individual "Jews" with the building manager and the building manager to higher authorities, as well as the location of the building and the social networks, financial capacities, the age as well as the gender of the persecuted.

While simply studying the decrees and anti-Jewish laws might steer one to give credit to a universalized Holocaust narrative in the case of Budapest, looking at individual cases reveals that the extent to which the persecuted coped with these regulations varied to a large extent. Though nominally the anti-Jewish decrees affected all the "Jews" equally within the capital, several of them – like Hilda Gobbi and Tivadar Soros whose cases were analyzed in the thesis – could simply go illegal and ignore the regulations. Others like Ernő Szép and many Jews in yellow star houses got concessions from various representatives of power, like building managers, doctors and "non-Jewish" neighbors. Some of the persecuted, especially the solitary, the elderly as well as women and children got a much rawer deal than the discriminatory ordinances prescribed. As opposed to cities where ghettoization was brutally enforced and contrary to the experience of provincial Jewry, Budapest was a place where there was much room for contesting these policies based on the mobilization of social networks and financial circumstances among other factors

[155] Szita Szabolcs, *A zsidók üldöztetése Budapesten* (Budapest: Magyar Auschwitz Alapítvány, 1994); Lévai Jenő, *A pesti gettó csodálatos megmenekülésének hiteles története* (Budapest: Officina, 1946); Karsai László, Holokauszt, (Budapest: Pannonica, 2001).

analyzed in the thesis. Necessarily, this led to a divergence of individual stories – with many common patterns – that all testify the uniqueness of the Holocaust in Budapest.

In other words, the investigation focusing on the micro power structures within apartment buildings showed that the quality of everyday life and the experience of persecution were actually more contingent on the local than on the "global", country-scale and capital-scale processes within this period.

While "anti-Jewish" ordinances were issued one after the other following the German occupation, and "Jews" were forced to move into designated apartment buildings in June, those "Jews" who were in the city did not experience physical threat coming directly from the Germans or from the hostile Hungarian state. While antisemitic decrees issued after the German occupation – like yellow star wearing regulations, shopping restrictions and forced relocations – significantly influenced the framework of everyday life that characterized Budapest Jewry, the divergent individual experiences show that the effect of discriminative policy was measured out on the local level: official policy, for instance prescribed the wearing of yellow star for "Jews" on a city scale, yet the neighbors and the building managers were the ones who enforced or alleviated this regulation on the micro level, similarly to many other top-down ordinances analyzed in the thesis.

In terms of the Holocaust scholarship the thesis prompts for a more serious recognition of local processes in the outcome of antisemitic persecutions and survival in extreme situations brought about by Nazi rule. Though the Holocaust in Budapest was unique as it provided more possibilities for maneuvering and individual agency than the given political contexts in various East and Central European cities, it all the

more highlights the shift[156] to the recognition of the role of individual actors and acts of resistance during the Shoah. This approach on the one hand reveals the tragedies that happened off the death camps, in the cellars, streets and apartments of various cities, yet it also highlights the possibilities of successful survival strategies, as cities provided more chance to survive almost everywhere than concentration camps did. Although this reconceptualization of the Holocaust might destroy social taboos and reveal how everyday people were entangled in oppression and persecution[157] yet it also highlights the agency of the persecuted and how the discriminated populations did their best to contest hostile policies through expressing their Eigensinn in various forms. In terms of urban history and the "spatial turn" the thesis pointed out how the success of various survival strategies during the Holocaust in Budapest depended on how they made use of city space, and how the city provided many "liminal spaces" like hide-outs, courtyards and public spaces where going unnoticed or pursuing individual interests was made possible. In terms of studying the Holocaust in an urban environment, the thesis argued that besides focusing on the regulations that affected or were attempted to affect city space it is just as important to study how regulations were contested, carried out or disregarded on a local level. All the more so as without checking the efficacy of bureaucratic ordinances and the fulfillment of top-down attempts in people's everyday lives, the historian might just echo the wishes of perpetrators and end up creating a story alienated from the multi-faceted reality of a period in question.

[156] See for instance Christopher Browning, *Ordinary men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the final solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).
[157] On the German context see Arthur Welzer et. al. *Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt: Fisher, 2002).

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