# **Chapter IV. Jewish Exiles**

“Subconsciously something in the Jew seeks to escape the morally dubious, the distasteful, the petty, the unspiritual, which is attached to all trade, and all that is purely business, and to lift himself up to the moneyless sphere of the intellectual, as if – in the Wagnerian sense – he wished to redeem himself and his entire race, from the curse of money.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Such phenomenon of Jewish upward social mobility often driven by a (potentially subconscious) desire for assimilation described by Stefan Zweig in his famous memoir was characteristic of the Hungarian numerus clausus exiles, as we are going to see. But who were they exactly? Since the essence of the numerus clausus was to reverse Jewish upward social mobility and middle-class integration through limiting their educational mobility, identification of the numerus clausus exiles is here to be understood in terms of their social background. Jews from what social background were able to study abroad and thus study in higher education despite Hungary’s numerus clausus? The contemporary and historical assumption that student migration was the escape route for the wealthy Jewish youth will be challenged by empirically examining the “ideal type” of the numerus clausus exile.

Their social profile will be compared with that of Jewish youth who made it into the 6% Jewish quota and thus studied in Hungarian higher education. It is possible to hypothesize that Jewish families who possessed economic and social capital were able to mobilize their influence for the sake of getting their children in the Jewish quota in a Hungarian university. Autobiographic sources reveal the importance of nepotism in getting into the Jewish quota independently from the grades in the secondary school diplomas, whereas since so few Jews were admitted to Hungarian universities, in theory only those with excellent grades had a chance.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Possibly, the emigrants were those who lacked such means. According to an earlier interpretation, the statistical data on the families of Jewish students enrolled in Hungarian higher education in 1932–33 suggest that Jewish students who studied in Hungary came from rather well-to-do families.[[3]](#endnote-3) A smaller scale research on Hungarian numerus clausus refugees at the University of Bologna hinted at the possibility that Jewish migrant students who studied in Italy were not predestined for higher education. Their birth certificates and residence certificates showed that their majority did not come from urban middleclass intellectual families. On the contrary, they characteristically hailed from the provincial lower middle class and tended to represent the first generation in their family to study at a university.[[4]](#endnote-4)

The hypothesis presented here is grounded in an extrapolation from this small study. It is, thus, assumed that a significant part of the numerus clausus exiles pursued university studies in spite of and not because of their social background and not as a means of maintaining a social status already achieved by their family but as a means of moving upward. Thus, besides the hypothesis that most Hungarian migrant students were Jewish (according to the definition implied in the enacting clause of the numerus clausus law);[[5]](#endnote-5) ), it is assumed that Jewish students’ emigration in the age of the numerus clausus helped Jewish upward social mobility which was meant to be reversed by the law. If this is so, the majority should have come from small towns and villages rather than from urban centers, and from less educated rather than high school or university graduate fathers (the available sources only identify the fathers’ occupations, mothers are only mentioned if widows).

In order to test the hypotheses, a sample of Hungarian students enrolled in every fifth academic year after 1921–22 in medicine and engineering in Vienna, Prague, Berlin and Bologna was constructed.[[6]](#endnote-8) Austria, Germany and Italy were the three most popular target countries of Hungarian student migration in the interwar period, but in the very beginning of the 1920s Czechoslovakia also had a huge popularity. Medicine and engineering were the study fields most often chosen by migrant students, due to these degrees’ easy international transferability. The sample includes every Hungarian student,[[7]](#endnote-9) not only Jews, so as to test the hypothesis of a Jewish majority among them.

At the same time some limitations of the sample – owing to the survival and accessibility of sources – need to be pointed out. Not all universities’ relevant data survived the Second World War and slightly different type of data was collected about students in different countries. The sources are the enrollment forms and students’ documents preserved in the archives of the University of Vienna, of the Technical University (former Technical College) of Vienna, of Charles University in Prague (which inherited the documents of the German University of Prague closed down in 1945), of the Czech Technical University (which preserves the archive of the German Technical College of Prague closed down in 1945), of the Humboldt University (former Friedrich-Wilhelm University) in Berlin, of the Technical University (former Technical College) of Berlin, and of the University of Bologna.

These sources do not give an insight into the financial background of students’ families, except for a few special cases when students submitted certificates of poverty to achieve the reduction of their tuition fee.[[8]](#endnote-10) However, in the case of Vienna, Prague, and Berlin, the enrollment forms almost always include the father’s occupation and, in Bologna, it is revealed by the birth certificates. Hence, the focus will be on educational mobility, thus whether the students, who by virtue of being university students were necessarily high school graduates, stemmed from fathers with a lower level of education. In the end the database that came into being, contains information precisely 1,031 Hungarian students enrolled in the medical faculties of the University of Vienna, of the German University of Prague, of the University of Bologna, of the German Technical College of Prague, of the Technical College of Berlin, and of the Engineering Faculty of the University of Bologna. We know the place of birth, the gender and the study field of all of them, but about the majority we know more: religion, date of birth, place of residence, father’s name and father’s occupation. In some faculties in some academic years even more data was required to be filled in the enrollment form, namely citizenship, mother tongue, nationality, previous place of study, and the father’s residence.

By ‘numerus clausus exiles’ are meant such students who studied abroad in the age of the numerus clausus (1920–45) presumably because of the Jewish quota. This also includes converts, because they were normally counted as Jewish in Hungary when universities applied the numerus clausus. Nevertheless, Jewish religious affiliation is the best proxy for identifying numerus clausus exiles, yet since there were converts among them, I separated the issue of religion and being numerus clausus exiles by handling them as two different variables in my dataset.

When analyzing the data of Hungarian students found in university documents abroad, I regard everyone who claimed Jewish religion or nationality as a Jew as well as a numerus clausus exile.[[9]](#endnote-11) A moral dilemma is posed, however, by the cases where students claimed another religion than Jewish, but they are known from their biographies to be of Jewish origin. On the one hand, historians have to respect the self-identification of their subjects, on the other hand, it is only possible to examine the consequences of antisemitism if we take into account that certain people were regarded as Jewish by antisemites even if this was against their will. In addition, since conversion was one of the strategies to evade the numerus clausus and also a possible reaction to the 1919–20 white terrorist pogroms in Hungary, Jews who converted and enrolled in a foreign university as Christians, are not to be regarded as Jewish, but they are *par excellence* numerus clausus exiles. It is noteworthy, nonetheless, that the large majority of students of self-reported Jewish religion in my dataset suggests that the numerus clausus exiles typically held their Jewish religious affiliation and were not eager to hide it when enrolling in a university abroad.

With regard to the fewer than a dozen students who did not fill in the row for religion in their enrollment form abroad, I found out that they were Jewish from the database of university students of interwar Hungary, since they also enrolled in Hungary at some point after their emigration. Knowing that, I regard them as numerus clausus exiles. Similarly, I regard Leo Szilard and his brother, Bela Silard, as numerus clausus exiles. Their religion was Calvinist by the time they enrolled in the Technical College of Berlin. However, it is well known from their biographies that they were originally Jewish and converted shortly before they left for Berlin as a consequence of a humiliating antisemitic attack they had suffered at the Technical University of Budapest. When they went to register for the academic year 1919–20, they were stopped at the entrance and were told that Jews could not study there. In vain Leó argued that they were not Jewish but Calvinists; they were beaten up.[[10]](#endnote-12)

In short, Jewish religion is not a perfect proxy to identify numerus clausus refugees among Hungarian migrant students, but the best we have. In addition, Jews are such a majority in the sample even without those who did not self-identify as Jews, that it confirms the hypothesis that an overwhelming majority of Hungarian students abroad were Jewish in the 1920s and 1930s. After taking into account all the above considerations, I found that 919 out of the 1,131 students, thus 81% of my sample, were Jewish by religion. When counting the numerus clausus exiles in the sample, I needed to take into consideration external information besides the university documents. However, in the end the number of numerus clausus exiles (921) is almost identical to the number of those who were Jewish by religion. Such proportion strikingly reaffirms the estimation of Alajos Kovács, who assumed that, after 1920, 80% of Hungarian students abroad were Jewish (not counting the 5–7% who went to study abroad with a stipend provided by the state).[[11]](#endnote-13)

However, numerus clausus exiles did not constitute the same majority in all the examined faculties. The proportion of numerus clausus exiles among Hungarians was highest in Bologna (95%) and lowest in Berlin (70%) (See Table IV.1.) It is still noteworthy that this contrast is exaggerated by the fact that in Bologna the information on religion comes from official documents while in Berlin it was self-reported. Examining all the four cities, the study field made more difference than the study location. Less than three-quarters (72%) of engineering students, while more than four fifths (85%) of medical students were numerus clausus exiles. (See Table IV.2.)

Table IV.1. Migrant students by study location

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Study location** | **Berlin** | **Bologna** | **Prague** | **Vienna** |
| Numerus clausus exiles | 82 (70%) | 73 (95%) | 445 (87%) | 321 (85%) |
| Whole sample | 137 | 86 | 530 | 378 |
| Total | 137 | 86 | 530 | 378 |
| Number | 117 (100%) | 77 (100%) | 509 (100%) | 376 (100%) |
| Missing Data | 20 | 9 | 21 | 2 |

*Table IV.2. Migrant students by study field*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Study field** | **Engineering** | **Medicine** |
| Numerus clausus exiles | 246 (72%) | 675 (85%) |
| Whole sample | 341 | 790 |
| Total | 341 | 790 |
| Number | 316 (100%) | 763 (100%) |
| Missing Data | 25 | 27 |

After investigating the social background and social mobility of the students, with particular regard to numerus clausus exiles among them (their majority), it was compared to the social background and mobility of Jewish students who in the age of the numerus clausus were studying in Hungarian universities, thus were admitted in the framework of the restrictive Jewish quota. The latter group’s data were extracted with the help of Victor Karády, Péter Tibor Nagy, and Csaba Bendzsák from the historical sociological survey on university students in Hungary, conducted in the research project “Culturally Composite Elites, Regime Changes and Social Crises in Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Confessional Eastern Europe.”[[12]](#endnote-14)

The most important information available in university documents about the social background of students is the father’s occupation. I used one of the categorizations applied by Victor Karády and Péter Tibor Nagy in the abovementioned research where occupations were divided in thirteen categories.[[13]](#endnote-15) In this system one takes into consideration both educational level and social class, hence for example secondary school teachers and elementary school teachers are separated. This enabled me to look at the émigré students’ social mobility. My special interest was to what extent these students with so much intellectual ambition as to emigrate and thus pursue studies despite of the numerus clausus, came from intellectual families. It is noteworthy that for being high school graduates (a prerequisite for university enrollment) they could already regard themselves as intellectuals according to the social norms of the period. However, they intended to work in the prestigious liberal professions.

Regrettably, the father’s occupation is only known in about two thirds of the cases (66%), since every third student left the row blank. The two thirds we know, however, confirm the hypothesis that the typical numerus clausus refugee was not of intellectual and privileged origin. The proportion of retailer and shopkeeper families, thus the lower class of merchants is especially striking (42%). Since four in five (921 out of 1,131) students are numerus clausus exiles, their characteristics are to a large extent the features of the whole group. Yet, having a retailer father is remarkably more frequent among them (42%) than the whole sample (37%). (See Table IV.3.) The only other category where there is a visible difference between the whole sample and the numerus clausus exiles is the proportion of fathers of unknown profession, where only 33% of Jewish students, while 38% of all students did not provide information. This means that students of unknown religion usually provided very few information about anything in enrollment forms. Thus, Jewishness was not something migrant students were especially eager to hide.

Table IV.3. Fathers’ occupations among migrant students

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Father's occupation** | **The whole sample** | **Numerus clausus exiles** | **Class background** |
| farmer (*földműves*) | 13 (2%) | 11 (2%) | lower than middle class |
| unskilled and skilled worker (*munkás, szakmunkás*) | 27 (4%) | 26 (4%) |
| artisan (*kisiparos*) | 49 (7%) | 40 (7%) |
| retailer (*kiskereskedő*) | 264 (37%) | 257 (42%) | lower middle class |
| private clerk (*magánhivatalnok*) | 58 (8%) | 49 (8%) |
| public clerk (*közhivatalnok*) | 97 (14%) | 78 (13%) |
| specialized public employee (*szakosított közalkalmazott*) | 11 (2%) | 6 (1%) |
| clergy, teacher, employed intellectual in humanities (*pap, tanár, alkalmazott humánértelmiségi*) | 23 (3%) | 20 (2%) | Middle class proper |
| elementary school teacher and director (*tanító, elemi iskolai igazgató*) | 6 (1%) | 5 (1%) |
| doctor, medicine related intellectual (*orvos, egészségügyi értelmiségi*) | 44 (4%) | 33 (5%) |
| other professional intellectual (*más szakértelmiségi*) | 48 (7%) | 37 (4%) |
| high bourgeois, entrepreneur (*nagypolgár, önálló vállalkozó*) | 38 (5%) | 28 (5%) | upper middle class |
| living from revenues, retired (*magánzó, nyugdíjas*) | 27 (4%) | 23 (4%) |  |
| Total | 1131 | 921 |  |
| Number | 705 (100%) | 613 (100%) |  |
| Missing data | 426 | 308 |  |

Considering that medical and engineering students are under examination, thus, youth who aimed to enter classical liberal professions, we can speak of keeping an already achieved social status by the family if the father is to be found among the “specialized public employees,” the “clergy, teachers and employed intellectuals in humanities,” “doctors and medicine-related intellectuals,” and “other professional intellectuals.” In the interwar period people employed in these fields were high school graduates and normally also pursued some kind of professional training after the secondary school leaving exam/“matura” (*érettségi* in Hungarian), although it was not necessarily a university education.

In terms of social stratification generally, out of the thirteen professional categories applied in this study, the first three (farmers, workers and artisans) can be considered as lower than middle class; the next four (retailers, private clerks, public clerks, specialized public employees) as lower middle class or petty bourgeoisie; the next four as middle class proper (clergy and teachers and employed intelligentsia in the humanities, elementary school teachers and directors, doctors and medicine-related intellectuals, other professional intellectuals) and entrepreneurs as upper middle class or high bourgeoisie. Living from revenues is left out from the stratification because *magánzó* basically functioned as a category to account for the unidentifiable professions.

In this sense, 13% of numerus clausus exiles came from a lower than middleclass background, 64% from the lower middle class, 12% from the middle class proper and 5% from the upper middle class. Thus, for over three-quarters of those participating in higher education, it meant upward social mobility, a means to achieve a middle class status their family did not possess. (See Table IV.3.)

This conclusion becomes especially important when compared to the background of Jewish students in Hungarian higher education in the age of the numerus clausus.[[14]](#endnote-16) Importantly, the following comparisons are made between medical students only, because regrettably in the case of engineering students abroad, we lack information on the father’s occupation in almost half of the cases (49%). (See Table IV.4.) The comparison leads to the striking result that the proportion of middle class Jews was, as expected, higher among those who studied in Hungary than among those who emigrated. However, somewhat surprisingly, Jewish students under the numerus clausus in Hungary also tended to come from the lower middle class, even if to a less extent than emigrants. When examining all the Hungarian medical faculties together, the social recruitment of Jewish medical students abroad and in Hungary seems to be very similar. (See Table IV.5.) However, when separating the medical faculty of Budapest where the Jewish quota was more severely implemented than in the provincial institutions,[[15]](#endnote-17) we see that the share of middleclass Jews was especially high there. (See Table IV.6.) Such examination reveals two other important details. On the one hand, the share of medical students whose father worked in medicine as well, was significantly lower among the emigrants (6%) than among those enrolled in Budapest (21%) or one of the provincial Hungarian universities (10%). This confirms that the offspring of medical dynasties had a higher chance to be admitted in the Jewish quota then others.

Yet another noteworthy circumstance to take into account is that some numerus clausus exiles succeeded in continuing their studies in Hungary. Thus, there are overlaps between Jewish (in terms of the numerus clausus) students abroad and in Hungary during the 1920s and 1930s which makes the difference in the social recruitment of the two groups all the more remarkable and reinforces the hypothesis that social capital had an important role in getting in the Jewish quota within Hungary.

Even if someone started studying abroad, it was a good strategy to look for professional connections within Hungary for the sake of getting into a Hungarian university later. For example, László Farádi enrolled in the Viennese medical school in 1926, while he continued to apply to the universities of Pécs and Budapest each year up until 1930 when he succeeded to enroll in Pécs thanks to a fortunate encounter with Sándor Gorka, a biology professor in Pécs.[[16]](#endnote-18)

Table IV.4. Fathers’ occupations among Jewish medical students abroad and in Hungary

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Father's occupation** | **Abroad (Vienna, Prague, Bologna, Berlin, 1921, 1926, 1931, 1936)** | **In Hungary (first year enrollments, 1919-1938)** | | **Class background** |
| **Budapest** | **Pécs, Szeged and Debrecen** |
| farmer | 7 (1%) | 13 (2%) | 32 (2%) | lower than middle class |
| unskilled and skilled worker | 24 (5%) | 22 (4%) | 59 (4%) |
| artisan | 35 (7%) | 27 (5%) | 132 (8%) |
| retailer | 210 (43%) | 102 (19%) | 550 (35%) | lower middle class |
| private clerk | 33 (7%) | 83 (15%) | 172 (11%) |
| public clerk | 55 (11%) | 40 (7%) | 67 (4%) |
| specialized public employee | 4 (1%) | 24 (4%) | 25 (2%) |
| clergy, teacher, employed intellectual in humanities | 17 (3%) | 25 (5%) | 47 (3%) | Middle class proper |
| elementary school teacher and director | 5 (1%) | 12 (2%) | 26 (2%) |
| doctor, medicine related intellectual | 31 (6%) | 114 (21%) | 161 (10%) |
| other professional intellectual | 24 (5%) | 35 (6%) | 78 (5%) |
| high bourgeois, entrepreneur | 24 (5%) | 28 (5%) | 121 (8%) | upper middle class |
| living from revenues, retired | 19 (4%) | 14 (3%) | 95 (6%) |  |
| Number | 488 (100%) | 539 (100%) | 1565 (100%) |  |
| Missing data | 187 | none | none |  |
| Total | 675 | 539 | 1565 |  |

*Table IV.5. Class background of Jewish medical students abroad and in Hungary*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Vienna, Prague, Bologna, Berlin (1921, 1926, 1931, 1936)** | **In Hungary (1919-1938)** | **Class background** |
| 14% | 14% | lower than middleclass |
| 62% | 51% | lower middleclass |
| 16% | 24% | middleclass proper |
| 5% | 7% | upper middleclass |
| 4% | 5% | living from revenues, retired |
| 675 | 2104 | Total |
| 675 (100%) | 2104 (100%) | Number |
| 187 | none | Missing data |

Table IV.6. Class background of Jewish medical students abroad, in Budapest and in the provinces

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Vienna, Prague, Bologna, Berlin (1921, 1926, 1931, 1936)** | **In Hungary (1919–38)** | | **Class background** |
| **Budapest** | **Pécs, Szeged and Debrecen** |
| 14% | 11% | 14% | lower than middle class |
| 62% | 45% | 52% | lower middle class |
| 16% | 34% | 20% | middle class proper |
| 5% | 5% | 8% | upper middle class |
| 4% | 3% | 6% | living from revenues, retired |
| 675 (100%) | 539 (100%) | 1565 (100%) | Number |
| 187 | none | none | Missing data |
| 675 | 539 | 1565 | Total |
| 2104 | |

The share of Jews with Hungarian last names was also examined, because the Hungarianizationof Jewish family names was historically an important marker of assimilation. (See Table IV.7.) Unsurprisingly, Jews who emigrated were significantly more likely to have a non-Hungarian last name than those who studied in Hungary. Thus, Jews of less assimilated background may have more easily chosen emigration. In addition, they were presumably more familiar with non-Hungarian parts of the former Habsburg Monarchy (with Vienna and Prague) and may have had a better knowledge of German (to the point of bilingualism) than their more assimilated peers, possibly thanks to less exclusively Hungarian language use in their families.

A case in point is Arthur Linksz, the bilingual son of a Hungarian Modern Orthodox rabbi and a German native-speaker Moravian mother, who went to study medicine in Prague. Last names hinting at “Eastern Jewish” (i.e., Galician; for instance several versions of Abramowitz and Moskowitz) family roots suggest a less assimilated background than Hungarian last names, but also imply lesser endowment with social capital. Students of such background experienced less pull factors for Vienna, Prague, and Berlin than their peers with German last names, but more push factors in Hungary than their peers with Hungarian last names.

Table IV.7. The share of Hungarian family names among Jewish medical students abroad and in Hungary

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **University location** | **Study field** | **Time period** | **Hungarian family names** |
| Vienna | medicine | 1921, 1926, 1931, 1936 | 27.3% |
| Prague | medicine | 1921, 1926, 1931, 1936 | 32.6% |
| Prague | medicine and engineering | 1921, 1926, 1931, 1936 | 33.5% |
| Budapest | medicine | 1920–29 | 42.9% |
| Szeged | medicine | 1919–46 | 42.7% |
| Pécs | medicine | 1918–51 | 37.3% |
| Debrecen | medicine | 1919–53 | 39.4% |

Concerning my own dataset on emigrant students, it is more exhaustive regarding geographical information than regarding fathers’ professions. Regarding the whole sample, more than every third student (35%) was born in Budapest. (See Table IV.8.) Noteworthy, that interwar Budapest was significantly smaller than the city we know now, since such large districts as Újpest, Rákospalota, Csepel, Kispest, and Pesterzsébet were incorporated only in 1950. Thus, practically even more than 35% of the students lived in the proximity of the capital, even having the opportunity to get their secondary education there. Therefore, with regard to categorizing regional selection, I used “Budapest and its suburbs” as a region, as was customary before the Second World War.

Table IV.8. Types of birth place among migrant students

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of place of birth** | **The whole sample** | **Numerus clausus exiles** |
| Budapest | 393 (35%) | 311 (34%) |
| Towns with county rights | 160 (14%) | 129 (14%) |
| Towns with settled councils | 189 (17%) | 175 (19%) |
| Other localities (villages and small towns) | 350 (31%) | 288 (32%) |
| Abroad (outside of pre-WWI Hungary) | 22 (2%) | 7 (1%) |
| Total | 1,131 | 921 |
| Number | 1,114 (100%) | 910 (100%) |
| Missing data | 17 | 11 |

Table IV.9. Regional selection of migrant students

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Region of birth** | **The whole sample** | **Numerus Clausus exiles** |
| Budapest and suburbs | 433 (39%) | 346 (38%) |
| Left bank of the Danube | 43 (4%) | 34 (4%) |
| Right bank of the Danube (Transdanubia) | 154 (14%) | 122 (13%) |
| Between the Danube and the Tisza | 150 (13%) | 132 (15%) |
| Fiume and surroundings | 2 | 2 |
| Croatia and Slavonia | 4 | 3 |
| Transylvania | 15 (1%) | 11 (1%) |
| Left bank of the Tisza | 123 (11%) | 107 (12%) |
| Right bank of the Tisza | 159 (14%) | 141 (15%) |
| Crossing of Tisza and Maros | 9 (1%) | 5 (1%) |
| Abroad (outside of pre-WWI Hungary) | 22 (2%) | 7 (1%) |
| Total | 1,131 | 921 |
| Number | 1,114 (100%) | 910 (100%) |
| Missing data | 17 | 11 |

When looking at the provenance of numerus clausus exiles within the sample, we see that they were basically as likely to be born in Budapest as anyone. More than a third of them (39%) hailed from Budapest and less than a third of them (32%) from small towns and villages. They similarly determined the whole sample’s characteristics in terms of regional selection. (See Table IV.9.) After Budapest and its surroundings the Western and central (Transdanubia and the region between the Danube and the Tisza rivers) and the Northeastern part of pre-Trianon Hungary (the right bank of the Tisza river in regional terms which is now the Eastern part of Slovakia) sent the most students, however, significantly smaller groups stemmed from here than from the capital’s surroundings. A képen szöveg, térkép látható

A leírás teljesen megbízhatóThe following map (Image IV.1.) demonstrates such regional concentrations.

Image IV.1. Emigrant students’ places of birth

Fortunately, the university archive sources as well as emigrant students’ ego documents, provide an insight in the complex matrix of their Hungarian as well as Jewish self-identifications and into a lot more. University enrollment forms tell us what students wanted the administrators to think of them. In some contexts, it was not the complete truth, most notably with regard to the place of residence when enrolling in a Czechoslovak institution of higher education. Other questions are not as much about truth or lies as about reflections on someone’s temporary self-perception, such as nationality and religion.

The Czechoslovak authorities were enormously suspicious of Hungarian students’ places of residence in Czechoslovakia, since it was assumed that they only claimed this residence in order to avoid paying the high tuition fees imposed on foreign students. Many Hungarian Jews indeed had relatives in the territory of current Slovakia, thus could easily claim residence there, especially if they or their parents had been born there. The same strategy did not work in Austria, even though motivation to use it certainly existed, since tuition fees for foreigners were very high there as well.[[17]](#endnote-19) In contrast, in Italy foreign students enjoyed partial or full tuition waiver (depending on the university and on the academic year), hence they were interested in claiming their residence and citizenship in Hungary.[[18]](#endnote-20)

Autobiographical evidence confirms that the Czechoslovak clerks’ suspicions were grounded. It seems that indeed students in the precarious situation the numerus clausus put them in, attempted to seize every possibility to study abroad and to decrease the costs thereof. The country of birth and the country of residence was different in 57% of the cases in the Prague sample, counted on the basis of post-1920 state borders, thus involving moving of the person not only of the border. However, not only students’ emigration but the migration of families too was a normal fact of life. The latter was especially widespread in pre-WWI Austro-Hungary. Hence, differing country of citizenship and of residence cannot be simply attributed to false residence claims. Arthur Linksz’s uneasiness to answer the question where he came from was quite typical: “What should I respond to the question where I come from? From Pest? I lived there some of the good years of my adulthood and I came here [in the United States] from there. From Galgóc? There I was merely born. From Devecser? I was a child there. Some say I am from Pápa, I indeed went to gymnasium there, some say I am from Kőszeg, because my father became the rabbi of Kőszeg later.”[[19]](#endnote-21)

Linksz indeed did not really belong to former Upper Hungary or Slovakia. From the point of view of Czechoslovak authorities, it was logical to see him as someone exploiting every contingent circumstance he could (that he happened to be born in Hhlovec/Galgóc). At the same time, it is understandable that he did everything in his power to study where it was the easiest for him which was Czechoslovakia where he had family ties.

That being said, those who enrolled in Prague show a tendency to be resident in a different country than their country of birth and a different place of residence from that of their fathers (37%), unlike students enrolled in the three other examined cities, including Vienna where it was similarly disadvantageous to be a foreigner. In addition, Jewish families extended not only beyond the Hungarian-Czechoslovak, but also beyond the Hungarian-Austrian border, hence many Hungarian Jews had relatives in Austria.[[20]](#endnote-22) Yet among the students enrolled in Vienna, 85% were resident in the same country where they were born and 84% of them claimed to be resident in the same place where their fathers.

Mapping the localities Hungarian medical students in Prague claimed as their permanent addresses and their fathers’ residences visualize the discrepancy that made Czechoslovak clerks suspicious. The students claimed permanent addresses in Czechoslovakia (See Image IV.2.), while their fathers’ residences have a visible concentration in post-Trianon Hungarian territory. The contrast is especially interesting when mapping the same students’ birth places whose concentration also delineates a map of post-Trianon Hungary. (See Image IV.3.)

A képen térkép, szöveg látható

A leírás nagyon megbízható

Image IV.2. Places of residence of Hungarian medical students enrolled in the German University of Prague

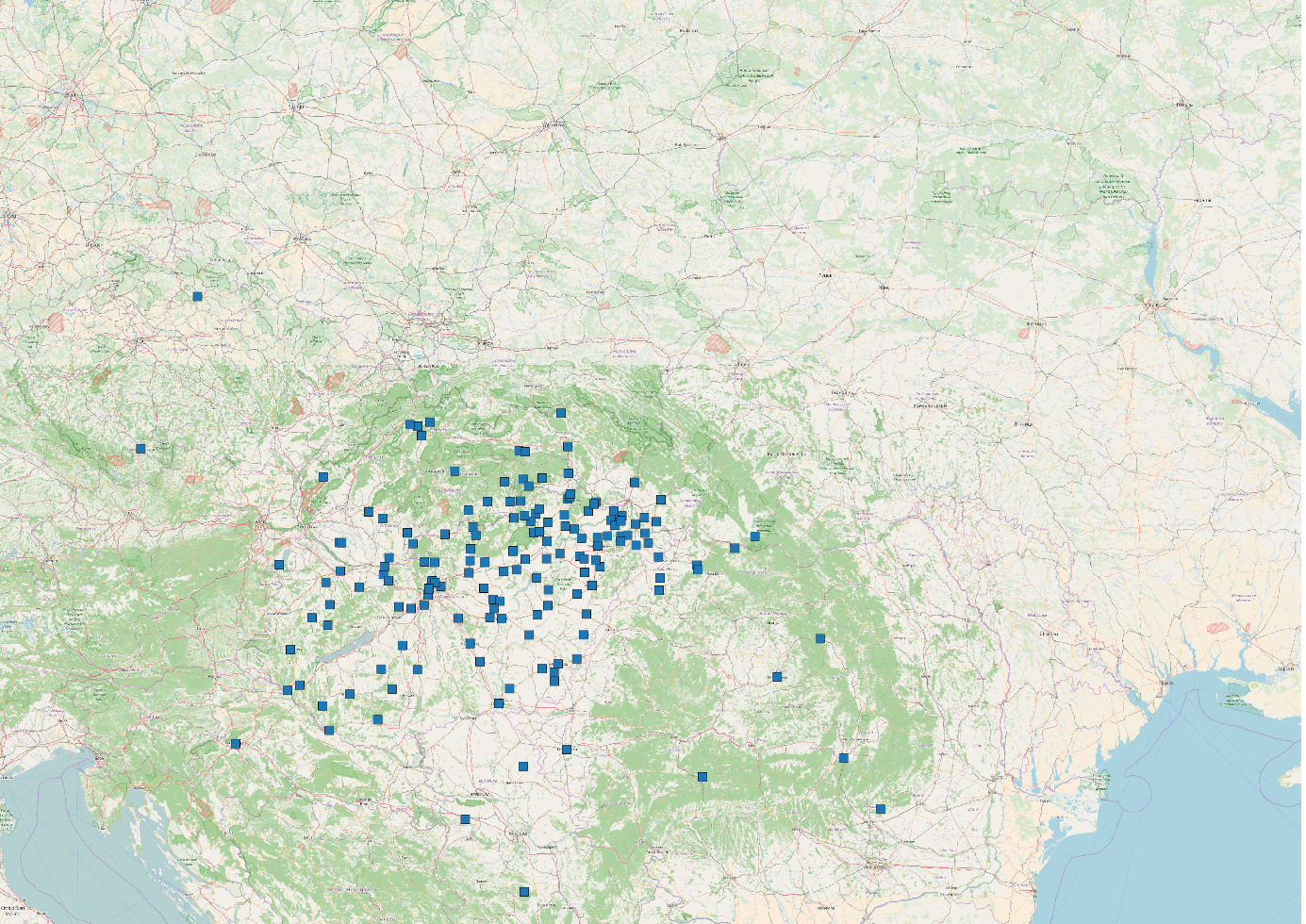


Image IV.3. Places of birth of Hungarian medical students enrolled in the German University of Prague

Moving beyond the geographical coordinates of one’s provenance, the act of filling an enrollment form also provided an opportunity for students (and for the historian who studies them) to position themselves in a matrix of self-identification. Depending on the location of the university and the time of enrollment, they could claim to be Hungarian in terms of mother tongue, nationality, or citizenship and Jewish in terms of religion or nationality.

In Vienna and Prague there was a possibility to self-identify as Jewish in terms of religion *and* nationality as well, although in Vienna the category was labelled with the more racial term *Volkszugehörigkeit* (“ethnic belonging”). In 1926, 1931, and 1936 the enrollment form contained a row for nation and the legal category of a Jewish nationality existed both in Austria and in Czechoslovakia, unlike in Hungary where even the racist numerus clausus law was implemented on the basis of religious affiliation.

We know the self-reported nationality of 60% of the sample. Since the possibility of reporting one’s national belonging when enrolling only existed in the two countries – Austria and Czechoslovakia – where Jews were perceived as members of a national as well as a religious group, it is significant that 102 students declared Jewish as their ethnicity or nationality. At the same time, it is important to note that students of Jewish nationality who turn up in more than one academic year I examined, often switched between Jewish and Hungarian nationality. Thus, their Jewish national self-identification was not necessarily an expression of Zionist commitment. Yet it means that they did not reject the idea that Jews were possibly a nation(ality), contrary to the mainstream Jewish public opinion in contemporary Hungary.

In the Hungarian legal system, the Jewish nationality did not exist. The numerus clausus was endorsed on the basis of religion. Jewish nationality, or more often Jewish *népfaj* (*Volksstamm*) was mostly evoked in an antisemitic context, in the enacting clause of the numerus clausus law most notably. A positive claim to Jewish nationality was rare.[[21]](#endnote-23) The Jewish communities’ institutional structure – on whom fundraising activity for the sake of numerus clausus refugees relied – was dominated by assimilationists who thought of Jews as “Hungarians of the Israelite faith,” who were also conservative and had been terrified enough by Bolshevism in 1919 to be in several aspects supportive of the antisemitic new “Christian Course” for its anti-Communism.

By contrast, Zionists in Vienna and Prague were an important current within the Jewish scene and these cities gave place to important Zionist congresses during the interwar period. Zionism was also important in university life in Vienna. Zionist was one of the three main categories of student fraternities (*Burschenschaften*), besides Pan-Germanists and Liberals. Importantly, the Burschenschaft scene was a central part of student life, as half of the students “wore colors”, thus belonged to a Burschenschaft.[[22]](#endnote-24)

This visibly had an impact on the Hungarian migrant students, since almost every fifth Hungarian Jewish student (18% in total) declared to be ethnically Jewish and in Prague every tenth Hungarian Jew reported to be of Jewish nationality. However, we must remember that in Prague engineering students are also part of the sample, among whom the proportion of Jews was lower than among medical students. Vienna offered a variety of student associations. Among others there were student clubs for Jewish students organized by study field, such as the *Jüdisch-akademischer Techniker Verband* (“Jewish-Academic Engineer Association”) and the *Akademischer Verein Jüdischer Mediziner* (“Academic Association of Jewish Physicians”). The latter had 12 members who also belonged to the *Bécsi Magyarnyelvű Főiskolai Hallgatók Egyesülete/Verein Ungarisch Sprechender Wiener Hochschüler* (“Association of Hungarian Speaking Viennese Students”).[[23]](#endnote-25)

In addition, among the 92 medical student members of the *Bécsi Magyarnyelvű Főiskolai Hallgatók Egyesülete*, 81 were Jewish, as we learn from their individual enrollment forms, including the president and the first secretary.[[24]](#endnote-26) Seven of the medical student members were not Hungarian citizens, and six of these seven were Jewish. Thus, this club also attracted Jews who came from territories lost to Hungary in 1920. This suggests that by calling the club an association for Hungarian speakers rather than just Hungarians was a choice for the sake of inclusion. Apparently, those students who were interested in joining groups based on their origin at all, were enthusiastic both about their Jewish and Hungarian identities.

To sum up, the picture that unfolds from the sample of Hungarian migrant students in Vienna, Prague, Berlin and Bologna recalls the opening quotation for the chapter by Stephan Zweig, who saw a massive drive in Jewish merchants’ children to leave commerce behind and become intellectuals in general, and liberal professionals in particular. The hypothesis that the large majority of migrant students in the age of the numerus clausus were refugees of antisemitism was confirmed and even its extent (81%) matched the contemporary expectation (80%). Four out of five Hungarian students abroad were numerus clausus exiles.

The hypotheses connected to social mobility were not all confirmed. The empirical study proved that peregrination was an escape route to evade the numerus clausus for the less privileged Jewish youth. Numerus clausus refugees were less likely to stem from the middleclass or the *haute bourgeoisie* than Jewish students who studied in Hungary. Thus, social capital was indeed an important factor in getting in the Jewish quota. At the same time, surprisingly, half of Jewish students within Hungary also hailed from the lower middleclass. Thus, the numerus clausus did not deprive higher education from its function of means of Jewish social mobility even though it gravely restricted the number of Jewish students in Hungarian universities.

The hypothesis about the geographical aspect of social mobility of numerus clausus exiles was rejected. Over one-third was born in Budapest and less than one-third came from small towns and villages. In terms of regional selection, after Budapest and its suburbs, the western (Transdanubia) and central parts (between the Danube and the Tisza rivers) of Hungary sent the most students. At the same time, in Hungary half of Jewry lived in the capital and around it, hence the fact that this was not the case among numerus clausus emigrants, demonstrates the social mobility of provincial Jewry despite of the numerus clausus.

On the whole, from the university documents the upwardly mobile son of a Jewish small-scale merchant from the capital, emerges as the “ideal type” of the numerus clausus exile. (About the few women among them, see Chapter VI.) Their positioning themselves in the matrix of religious, ethnic and national self-identification was visibly influenced by the realities experienced abroad. In Austria and Czechoslovakia, the category of Jewish nationality existed and almost one fifth of the sample identified with it in their university documents, even though in Hungary this legal category did not exist. In Vienna we find numerus clausus exiles as active members of both Jewish and Hungarian student associations, thus even if they did not reject Zionism and the concept of a Jewish nation, many held on to their Hungarian national identity.

1. Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 11–12. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. For instance, Miklós Szabolcsi was admitted to the faculty of humanities in Budapest in 1938 despite his merely “good” secondary school diploma because his father asked the historian Gyula Szekfű to help, drawing on to their former professional cooperation. Another example is László Farádi’s admission in the medical faculty in Pécs in 1930 because he was on a list of “Jewish students to be admitted.” Yet another example is Miklós Kun’s being admitted in medicine in Szeged in 1932 because his uncle had good acquaintances among medical professors. Miklós Szabolcsi, “Apámról és emlékiratairól [About my father and his memoirs] [Preface to the Memoirs of Lajos Szabolcsi],” in Lajos Szabolcsi, *Két emberöltő. Az Egyenlőség évtizedei, 1881–1931.* [Two generations. The decades of “Egyenlőség” Jewish weekly newspaper, 1881–1931](Budapest: MTA Judaisztikai Kutatócsoport, 1993), 15; László Farádi, *Diagnózis az életemről* [A diagnosis of my life], (Budapest: Gondolat, 1983), 123; Miklós Kun, *Kedves Hilda. Egy elmeorvos az elmebeteg huszadik században* [Dear Hilda. A psychiatrist in the insane twentieth century] (Budapest: Medicina, 2004), 32. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Out of those 1,965 Jewish students, 781 came from families that worked in commerce and banking, 347 from families involved in mines and industry, and 628 in intellectual professions. Bernard Klien, “Hungarian Politics and the Jewish Question in the Inter-War Period,” *Jewish Social Studies* 28, no. 2 (1966): 84. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Agnes Katalin Kelemen, “The Exiles of the Numerus Clausus in Italy,” *Judaica Olomucensia* 2, nos. 1–2 (2014): 84–86. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Nr. 123.033/1920 decree of the Minister of Religion and Public Education regulated the execution of Law 1920/XXV. (known as the numerus clausus) and quoted the statistics of citizens of the Israelite religion as the number of citizens of a distinct nationality (*nemzetiség*). Thereby, it implicitly converted Jews from a religious to a national group, even though in the Hungarian legal system Jews only existed as members of a religious denomination. A. m. kir. vallás- és közoktatásügyi miniszter 1920. évi 123.033. számú rendelete, *Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára* (Collection of Decrees of Hungary), 1920: 1517–22 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The numerus clausus law was promulgated in 1920 and, thus, 1921–22 was the first academic year when the quota had a full impact on university itineraries. Then, every fifth year of the period was used to gain snapshots of the history of Hungarian students’ presence in the cities concerned which are known to be the most popular target cities from the contemporary statistics on Hungarian students abroad published for each academic year in the *Hungarian Statistical Yearbooks* of the 1920s and 1930s. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
7. Since most universities did not register citizenship, “Hungarian” does not necessarily mean a Hungarian citizen in this context. Instead I used a broad definition when I selected which students to include in my database. I chose to include everybody who was born in the territory of post-Trianon Hungary, was resident there or had studied there before enrolling in a university abroad, since they were likely to be influenced by the numerus clausus introduced in 1920 when making a decision about their studies. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
8. For example, Fascicolo degli studenti, Facoltà di Medicina a Chirurgia (from now on Med. E chir.) 6625 Fischer Julie. Archivio Storico dell’Università di Bologna (from now on referred to as ASUB); Fascicolo degli studenti, Med&chir 11856 Borgida Veronika. ASUB. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
9. I cannot know if anyone else among the non-Jewish (by religion) individuals in my dataset were converts. However, they are less than one-fifth of the examined group and it seems realistic that there were that many non-Jews among Hungarian students. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
10. William Lanouette and Bela Silard*, Genius in the Shadows. A Biography of Leo Szilard* *– The Man Behind the Bomb* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 48–49. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
11. Alajos Kovács, “Magyarországi zsidó hallgatók a hazai és külföldi főiskolákon [Hungarian Jewish students at Hungarian and foreign universities],” *Magyar Statisztikai Szemle* 16, no. 9 (1938): 898. Those who went to study abroad with a stipend form the Hungarian state, were unlikely to be Jewish due to antisemitic policies, hence Kovács did not count them in this estimation. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
12. Victor Karady and Peter Tibor Nagy, “Culturally Composite Elites, Regime Changes and Social Crises in Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Confessional Eastern Europe (The Carpathian Basin and the Baltics in Comparison, cc. 1900–1950),” Accessed November 22, 2021, http://elites08.uni.hu. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
13. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
14. I compared the following datasets with mine: Karady and Nagy, “Culturally Composite Elites*”* http://elites08.uni.hu/ (Accessed: November 22, 2021); Processed prosopographical databases (sets of statistical tables for multivariate data analyses) related to students and educated elites in Hungarian institutions of higher education (cc. 1867–1949)/ II. Medical doctors, pharmacists, veterinaries/ i. Graduates of Medicine at the Medical Faculty of the University of Budapest (1770–1950); Karady-Nagy, *Culturally composite elites,* http://elites08.uni.hu/ (Accessed: November 22, 2021)/ Processed prosopographical databases (sets of statistical tables for multivariate data analyses) related to students and educated elites in Hungarian institutions of higher education (cc. 1867-1949)/ VIII. Students of technological training. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
15. Mária M. Kovács, *Törvénytől sújtva. A numerus clausus Magyarországon, 1920–1945* [Doww by law. The numerus clausus in Hungary, 1920-1945] (Budapest: Napvilág, 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
16. Farádi, *Diagnózis,* 119–22. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
17. Foreigners paid a triple tuition fee. If they passed a colloquium successfully each semester, they could be “equalized” (*gleichgestellt*) with Austrian students, while Austrian students were exempted from tuition fees for the same achievement. Farádi, *Diagnózis*, 54. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
18. In 1923, the government instructed universities to exempt foreign students from tuition fees for two years and in 1926 to exempt them from half of the fees for the entire length of their studies. For entitlement to this discount the students needed to prove their foreign citizenship and residence in their home country. Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo* [History of the Italian Jews under Fascism] (Torino: Einaudi, 2008), 80; Francesca Pelini and Ilaria Pavan, *La doppia epurazione. L’Università di Pisa e le leggi razziali tra guerra e dopoguerra* [The double purge. The University of Pisa and the racial laws between war and post-war period] (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009), 43. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
19. Arthur Linksz, *Harc a harmadik halállal*. *Ifjúságom Magyarországon* [Fighting the Third Death. My Youth in Hungary] (Budapest: Magvető, 1990), 49. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
20. Famous examples are the Polanyi siblings and Arthur Koestler. Laura, Adolf, and Karl Polanyi were born in Vienna and had relatives there, but by the time their younger brother, Michael, was born, the family had moved to Budapest. Arthur Koestler had an Austrian mother, was brought up in Budapest, but ultimately graduated from secondary school in Vienna. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
21. Unlike among Hungarian Jews in Czechoslovakia and Transylvania after WWI. Éva Kovács, *Felemás asszimiláció: A kassai zsidóság a két világháború között (1918-1938)* [Ambivalent assimilation: The Jewry of Košice between the two world wars, 1918–38] (Dunajská Streda: Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2004); Attila Gidó, *Két évtized: A kolozsvári zsidóság a két világháború között* [Two decades: The Jewry of Cluj between the two world wars] (Cluj-Napoca: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2016). [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
22. Arthur Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue. The First Volume of an Autobiography: 1905–1931* (London: Vintage, 2005), 107–09. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
23. “Mitgliederliste des akademischen Vereines jüdischer Mediziner aufgenommen am 5. November 1927 [List of Members of the Jewish Medical Students’ Association on November 5, 1927]”, S164.120, Archives of the University of Vienna; “Statuten des Vereines ungarisch sprechender Wiener Hochschüler 6.XII.1929 [Statutes of the Hungarian Speaking Viennese Students, December 6, 1929]”, S164.201, Archives of the University of Vienna. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
24. Looking at the whole membership, not only at medical students (who were the majority with 92 students out of 148), we find that 17 out of 20 students who were in the leading committee of the association, were Jewish. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)