



CEU DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HISTORY

The Doctoral Thesis in Comparative History

by

Ágnes Katalin Kelemen

on

**NUMERUS CLAUSUS EXILES: HUNGARIAN JEWISH
STUDENTS IN INTERWAR EUROPE**

will be held on

Monday, 4 November, 2019 at 14:45

in

**Senate Room
Central European University (CEU)
Budapest—1051 Nador utca 9.**

Examination Committee

András Kovács – Chair (Nationalism Studies, CEU)

Michael L. Miller – Supervisor (Department of History, CEU)

Victor Karády – CEU internal member (Department of History, CEU)

Mária M. Kovács – CEU internal member (Nationalism Studies, CEU)

Regina Fritz – external member (Institute of History, University of Bern)

Judith Szapor – external reader (Department of History and Classical Studies, McGill
University)

The doctoral dissertation is available for inspection. Should you wish to access it, please contact

Mónika Nagy (naqymo@ceu.edu)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the dynamics between academic antisemitism, Jewish social mobility and Jewish migration through the case study of the “*numerus clausus exiles*” – as Jewish students who left interwar Hungary due to the antisemitic *numerus clausus* law (Law XXV of 1920) were called by contemporaries and historians. After a conceptual and historiographic introduction in the first chapter embedding this work in the contexts of Jewish studies, social history and exile studies; interwar Hungarian Jewish peregrination is examined from four different aspects in four chapters based on four different types of sources.

In the second chapter an analysis of contemporary Hungarian (Jewish and non-Jewish) discourses is based on pro-Horthy, Conservative, Liberal, Social Democratic, assimilationist Jewish and Zionist press. It is argued that peregrination from Hungary was in the general press recognized as a mostly Jewish phenomenon, caused by the restriction of Jewish access to Hungarian universities, rather than a voluntary movement motivated by thirst for knowledge. In the meantime, the plight of *émigré* students became a central topic in Jewish press because a new Hungarian Jewish community of fate and identity was built on the support mechanism for *numerus clausus exiles*.

Based on a database of over 1000 Hungarian medical and engineering students enrolled in universities abroad between 1920 and 1938 – Czechoslovakia, the First Austrian Republic, Weimar Germany and Fascist Italy – that the dissertation’s author constructed; the third chapter analyzes the social background of *émigré* students – most of whom were Jewish. In this way the case is made that studying abroad was a phenomenon of lower middleclass Jewish youth’s upward social mobility through education rather than an escape route reserved for privileged Jews.

Ego documents written and edited (in most cases even published) by *numerus clausus exiles* provide the source base for the fourth chapter which reconstructs their own narratives on their

peregrination. The prevalence of interpreting their student migration as exile from the Hungarian homeland unfolds both from autobiographies and memoirs written decades later and from letters sent while studying abroad, albeit with important individual variations.

Based on digital databases, the fifth chapter follows up the career and life trajectories of students after their studies abroad. Four basic patterns are distinguished among the biographies of the over 1000 subjects: the most successful ones emigrated to the Western world usually through step-migration through Weimar Germany and did not return to Hungary. Few numerous clausus exiles immigrated to Palestine, however, they played important roles in the higher education and scholarship of Mandate Palestine and later of the State of Israel. Most numerous clausus exiles were forced to return to Hungary in the late 1930s due to the spread of hostility towards foreign Jews across Europe. They belong to two main groups, namely Shoah victims and Shoah survivors. The latter were likely to stay in Hungary for the rest of their lives after liberation, their experience with emigration notwithstanding, because they received opportunities for career advancement earlier denied to them and many believed this was also a chance to redeem Hungary from inequalities and injustices through Socialism. At the same time, quite a few numerous clausus exiles were put on show trials in the Stalinist period due to their past abroad and many more got disillusioned by the discrepancies between the ideal of Communism and the reality of State Socialism.

Finally, it is argued in the final conclusions that this study speaks to the larger questions of how a minority can respond to discrimination and how individual initiatives from below can develop into communal agency based on solidarity.

CURRICULUM VITAE

EDUCATION

- 2015-2019 Ph.D. program in Comparative History, CEU
- 2012-2014 Master of Arts in Nationalism Studies with a specialization in Jewish Studies, CEU
- 2008-2012 Bachelor of Arts in History and Religious Studies, ELTE

WORK EXPERIENCE

- 2014 tour guide in Hungarian, English and German, Hungarian Jewish Museum
- 2009-2013 youth counselor and mentor for youth counselors, JDC Lauder International Jewish Youth Camp

RESEARCH PROJECTS

- 2019 *Saul's children*, Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives

PUBLIC LECTURES

- 2018 Introduction to and moderation of the “Eszterház” Jewish Book Club’s session dedicated to *The Chosen* by Chaim Potok, Bálint Jewish Community Center, Budapest
- 2017 *Zsidó diákok vándorúton* (Jewish Students on the move), Public lecture at the Budapest University of Jewish Studies/Rabbinical Seminary
- 2017 Introduction to and moderation of the “Eszterház” Jewish Book Club’s session dedicated to *Life with a Star* by Jiří Weil, Bálint Jewish Community Center, Budapest
- 2017 Conversation with Ágnes Patakfalvi-Czirják and Gábor Egry about Ernő Gáll in “Szabad a pálya” radio show on Klub rádió
- 2017 Interview about Vilmos Vázsonyi in “Panoptikum” radio show on Klub rádió, reporter: Sándor Szénási

CONFERENCES

- 2018 *People and Ideas on the Move: Interaction, Interconnection and Entanglement* – 12th Graduate Conference in European History, University of Vienna 2017
- 2017 *Beyond Established Narratives – New Approaches to European History from Early Modern Times to the Present* – 11th Graduate Conference in European History, European University Institute, Florence

- 2016 *A kisebbségi lét politikája, szelleme és etikája – konferencia Gáll Ernő születésének 100. évfordulója alkalmából* [The Politics, Spirit and Ethics of Minority Status – Conference for the Centenary of Birth of Ernő Gáll], Institute of Political History, Budapest
- 2015 *48th Annual Conference of the Association for Jewish Studies*, San Diego
- 2014 *A Cedaka – Társadalmi igazságosság* [Tzedakah-Social Justice], Budapest University of Jewish Studies/Rabbinical Seminary
- 2014 *German-Jewish Migration to Sweden*, University of Uppsala
- 2014 *International Conference on Jewish-Italian Literature*, Ljubljana

GRANTS AND AWARDS

- 2018-2019 Full CEU Doctoral Fellowship
- 2019 Academic Achievement Award for Advanced Doctoral Students
- 2017 Academic Achievement Award for First-Year Doctoral Students
- 2017 Leo Baeck Fellowship – granted by the German Studienstiftung and the Leo Baeck Institute London
- 2015-2016 Full CEU Doctoral Fellowship
- 2014-2015 Paideia Scholarship – granted by Paideia - The European Institute for Jewish Studies in Sweden
- 2012-2014 Partial CEU Fellowship for Master's Students

LANGUAGES

- Hungarian (mother tongue)
- English (proficient user)
- Italian (proficient user)
- German (independent user)
- Modern Hebrew (basic user)
- Yiddish (reading)
- Latin (capable of independent reading and translation)
- Classical Hebrew (capable of independent reading and translation)

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Editorship

- Ármin Bálint, *Feljegyzések Gyuri fiam részére. Napló 1944-ből (Notes for My Son, Gyuri. A Diary from 1944)*. Foreword and notes by Ágnes Katalin Kelemen (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő, 2014).

Articles in peer-reviewed journals

- Ágnes Katalin Kelemen, “Peregrináció, emigráció, száműzetés. A két világháború közötti magyar diákvándorlás és a numerus clausus összefüggései [Peregrination, emigration, exile. The interconnection between interwar Hungarian student migration and the numerus clausus],” *Múltunk*, 63 (2018):4, 4-31.
- Ágnes Katalin Kelemen, “<Az asszimiláció az élet nagy iskolája volt> A zsidó önazonosság és szolidaritás kérdései Erdélyben az első világháború után [<Assimilation was a great school of life> Questions of Jewish identity and solidarity in Transylvania after the First World War],” *Múltunk*, 62 (2017):4, 137-159.
- Agnes Katalin Kelemen, “The Exiles of the Numerus Clausus in Italy,” *Judaica Olomucensia*, (2015):1, 56-103.
- Agnes Katalin Kelemen, “The Semaphore of Mobility: Hungarian Jewish Press and Peregrination to Fascist Italy,” *Annali di Storia delle Università Italiane*, 19 (2015):2, 41-53.

Book chapters

- Agnes Katalin Kelemen, “Migration and Exile: Hungarian Medical Students in Vienna and Prague, 1920-1938,” János Kenyeres et al. (Ed.), *At the crossroads of human fate and history – Studies in honour of Tibor Frank on his 70th birthday* (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd University, School of English and American Studies, 2018), 222-241.
- Ágnes Katalin Kelemen, “Visszapillantás a toronyőrre. Bálint Györgyről (The Tower Watchman in Retrospect. György Bálint),” Teri Szűcs and Gábor Schein (Eds.), “Zsidó” *identitás-képek a huszadik századi magyar irodalomban (“Jewish” Identities in Twentieth Century Hungarian Literature)* (Budapest: ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, 2014), 91-100.

Book reviews

- Agnes Katalin Kelemen, “Catastrophe and Utopia: Jewish Intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1930s and 1940s by Ferenc Laczó and Joachim von Puttkamer,” *East Central Europe* 45 (2018):2-3, 372-375.
- Agnes Katalin Kelemen, “Zionists in Interwar Czechoslovakia: Minority Nationalism and the Politics of Belonging by Tatjana Lichtenstein,” *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 24 (2017):4, 657-658.

Other publications

- Agnes Kelemen, “New Approaches to the History of the Jews under Communism,” *Judaica Bohemiae* 52:2,123-126.

- Ágnes Katalin Kelemen, “Cedaka az Olaszországban tanuló numerus clausus száműzöttekért [Tzedakah for the Exiles of the Numerus Clausus Studying in Italy],” *Yerusha- Online Journal of Judaism and Cultural Anthropology*. <http://yerushaonline.com/?q=cedaka&view=e841d79486> (Accessed: May 9, 2018).
- Ágnes Katalin Kelemen, “A numerus clausus száműzöttjei. Magyar orvostanhallgatók külföldön [The Exiles of the Numerus Clausus. Hungarian Medical Students Abroad],” *Szombat*, 29:1, 9-12.