



Tibor Frank

## Approaches to Interwar Hungarian Migrations, 1919–1945

The social upheavals that followed the First World War drove astonishing numbers of people in all directions. Russian and Ukrainian refugees escaped Bolshevism in Belgrade; Poles were relocated into reemerging Poland; Hungarians escaped from Romania and the newly established states of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Many people went on substantial and extended study tours to Germany, much as others had done before the war. Migrations were not limited to Jews suffering from the political and educational consequences of the White Terror in Hungary. Yet Jewish migrations were a definitive pattern of the 1920s, when the “Numerus Clausus” act of XXV: 1920 excluded many of them from college. A significant, though smaller, group of non-Jews also left Hungary at the same time. Motivated by anti-liberal politics, poverty, or curiosity, gentiles of mixed convictions and confessions hit the road and tried their luck in Paris, Berlin, or Hollywood.

keywords: intellectual migration, interwar period, Jewish-Hungarian emigrants, prosopography

### 1

Research on the history of intellectual migrations from Europe, a broad and complex international field, was based initially on eye-witness accounts which served as primary sources, rather than on scholarly literature.<sup>1</sup> Laura Fermi’s classic study on *Illustrious Immigrants*, which focused on intellectual migration from Europe between 1930 and 1941, falls into this category.<sup>2</sup> Research proper first began to yield results in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Soon after Fermi’s pioneering venture, Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn significantly extended the period of investigation through a series of related articles in their work, *The Intellectual Migration – Europe and America, 1930–1960*.<sup>3</sup>

---

1 Norman Bentwich, *The Refugees from Germany, April 1933 to December 1935* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1936); Norman Bentwich, *The Rescue and Achievement of Refugee Scholars: The Story of Displaced Scholars and Scientists 1933–1952* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1953).

2 Laura Fermi, *Illustrious Immigrants. The Intellectual Migration from Europe 1930–41* (Chicago–London: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

3 Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn, eds., *The Intellectual Migration. Europe and America, 1930–1960* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969).

From the outset, German-Jewish emigration was the most thoroughly researched sub-topic, a pattern that was partly reinforced by H. Stuart Hughes' *The Sea Change – The Migration of Social Thought, 1930–1965*, an excellent survey of the movement of European thinkers and thinking before and after World War II.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the 1970s, the first guide to the archival sources related to German-American emigration during the Third Reich had been compiled.<sup>5</sup> The 1980s produced a much-needed biographical encyclopedia, which paved the way for further quantitative research.<sup>6</sup> Soon the results of this research became available in a variety of German, English, and French publications focusing on German, German-Jewish, and other Central European emigration in the Nazi era.<sup>7</sup> The primary foci of the research of the 1980s were the émigré scientists and artists who fled Hitler, with growing interest in U.S. immigration policies during the period of Nazi persecution of the Jews of Europe.<sup>8</sup>

In contemporary statistics and journalism, most refugees from Germany were hurriedly lumped together as “Germans” or “German-Jews” without their actual birthplace, land of origin, mother tongue or national background being considered as they were forced to leave Germany. This unfortunate tradition has persisted in the otherwise rich and impressive historical literature on the subject. The great and unsolved problem for further research on refugees from Hitler's Germany remained how to distinguish the non-German (including Hungarian) elements: people, problems, and cases in this complex area. This is important, not only for Hungarian research, but also because it may result in a more realistic assessment of what we should (and should not) consider “*German science*” or “*German scholarship*” of the interwar period.

---

4 H. Stuart Hughes, *The Sea Change. The Migration of Social Thought, 1930–1965* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975).

5 John M. Spalek, *Guide to the Archival Materials of the German-speaking Emigration to the United States after 1933* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978).

6 Herbert A. Strauss and Werner Röder, eds., *International Biographical Dictionary of Central European Emigrés 1933–1945* (Munich–New York–London–Paris: K.G. Saur, 1980–1983).

7 Peter Kröner, ed., *Vor fünfzig Jahren. Die Emigration deutschsprachiger Wissenschaftler 1933–1939* (Münster: Gesellschaft für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, 1983); Jarrel C. Jackman and Carla M. Borden, eds., *The Muses Flee Hitler. Cultural Transfer and Adaptation 1930–1945* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian, 1983); Robin E. Rider, “Alarm and Opportunity: Emigration of Mathematicians and Physicists to Britain and the United States, 1933–1945,” *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences* 15, Part I (1984): 107–76; Jean Michel Palmier, *Weimar en Exil. Le destin de l'émigration intellectuelle allemande antinazie en Europe et aux Etats-Unis* (Paris: Payot, 1988).

8 Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933–1945* (Bloomington–Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987).

Laura Fermi was probably the first person to notice the significant difference between German refugee scientists and Hungarians forced to leave Germany. Her *Illustrious Immigrants* included a few pages on what she termed the “Hungarian mystery,” referring to the unprecedented number of especially talented Hungarians in the interwar period.<sup>9</sup> The systematic, predominantly biographical treatment of the subject was begun by Lee Congdon in his eminent work, *Exile and Social Thought*, which surveyed some of the most brilliant careers of Hungarians in Austria and Germany between 1919 and 1933.<sup>10</sup> Physicist George Marx made a similar contribution, mostly biographical in nature, to our understanding of the achievements of the great Hungarian-born scientists of this century.<sup>11</sup> In a recent book, the outstanding chemist and historian of science István Hargittai assessed the achievements of five of the most notable Hungarian-born scientists who contributed to the U.S. war effort.<sup>12</sup> My own *Double Exile*, on which much of this article is based, is an extensive history of this generation.<sup>13</sup>

## 2

Intellectual fermentation in Hungary, particularly in fin-de-siècle Budapest, brought about and was created by a uniquely gifted generation. Changes in the structure and organization of Hungarian society, along with the distinctive features of Hungarian assimilation, helped to nurture a typically Hungarian, and more specifically Budapest, talent. These patterns of assimilation in pre-World War I Austria-Hungary and Hungary, as well as in the United States, share a number of remarkable similarities.

This article discusses some of the impulses that influenced a generation of mostly Jewish-Hungarian emigrants, presenting them by way of *prosopography*, a vision of a group rather than merely a series of personal biographies. Several of these émigré Hungarians were not Jewish, but the overall nature of emigration from Hungary in the interwar period was in fact Jewish. In an effort to identify

9 Fermi, *Illustrious Immigrants*, 53–9.

10 Lee Congdon, *Exile and Social Thought. Hungarian Intellectuals in Germany and Austria 1919–1933* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991).

11 George Marx, *The Voice of the Martians*, 2nd ed. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1997).

12 István Hargittai, *The Martians of Science: Five Physicists Who Changed the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

13 Tibor Frank, *Double Exile: Migrations of Jewish-Hungarian Professionals through Germany to the United States, 1919–1945* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009).

the conditions of “Hungarian genius,” one can make the following propositions. By the late nineteenth century, feudal privilege was on the decline in Hungary, with hereditary prerogatives challenged and occupational status gradually evolving as a source of prestige.<sup>14</sup> This constituted a particularly welcome opportunity for the transformation of a variety of marginal ethnic, social, and religious groups that had never had access to hereditary privilege, and this social change encouraged the greater participation of Jews in the world of learning—in exchange, as it were, for their growing willingness to assimilate. The fact that the state wished to increase the number of people self-identified as *Magyars* in the multiethnic country opened doors that were closed elsewhere, at least for a time. Previously excluded groups flooded into these professional domains and made a mark for themselves.

The rapidly developing economy<sup>15</sup> of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy put a premium on the development of technology, mathematics, medicine, science, and finance, whereas conservative control was often exercised over the humanities and the arts, which were viewed as more political.

The newly established (1873) capital city of Budapest played an outstanding role in generating this new, modern culture and spreading an innovative spirit in and out of the country. Budapest developed as a center of economy, culture, and learning, and by the beginning of the twentieth century, the special social and intellectual chemistry of the city resulted in unusually creative and productive thinking, with mathematics and music as the most evident examples.

Because of the traditionally elitist nature of Hungarian (and Central European) education, universities could absorb only a fragment of the available research talent, and many great minds found themselves teaching in high schools. Moreover, as the very definition of the teaching occupation included original research, gifted students at the best schools encountered brilliant researchers at a much earlier age than they did in the U.S. or, sometimes, even in Western Europe.<sup>16</sup>

---

14 Péter Hanák, “Problems of Jewish Assimilation in Austria-Hungary in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in *The Power of the Past. Essays for Eric Hobsbawm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 235–50; György Ránki, “Die Entwicklung des ungarischen Bürgertums vom späten 18. zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert,” in *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert. Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich. (Eine Auswahl)*, ed. Jürgen Kocka, vol. 1 of *Einheit und Vielfalt Europas*, ed. Jürgen Kocka (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995 [1988]), 230–48.

15 David F. Good, *The Economic Rise of the Habsburg Empire, 1750–1914* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London: University of California Press, 1984); John Komlos, *The Habsburg Monarchy As a Customs Union: Economic Development in Austria-Hungary in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

16 Frank, *Double Exile*, 55–73.

Intellectual, artistic, and musical talent was accorded high prestige. A cultural premium on the idea of competitive knowledge poured into education. Practices such as student competitions and specialized journals for high school students, designed to help identify outstanding talents, led to the celebration of gifted students and provided a different kind of prestige than occupational status alone. Cultural emphasis on modernism paved the way to an increasing educational experimentalism, mainly in the best schools of fin-de-siècle Budapest, which prized inductive reasoning, pattern-breaking innovation, less formal relations between teacher and student, and personalized education.<sup>17</sup>

### 3

In the new political framework of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (based on the 1867 Compromise between Austria and Hungary), Hungary bore witness to unprecedented and unrepeated economic expansion, social transformation, and cultural upsurge.<sup>18</sup> In the period that began with the unification of Pest, Buda, and Óbuda in 1873 and ended with the outbreak of World War I, the newly established capital city of Budapest became a thriving metropolis. Migrations in and out of the multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual Habsburg Empire produced a vivid, lively, and flourishing cultural climate in which Jews made significant contributions to a blossoming urban lifestyle. The rapidly changing social structure, the appearance of daring social ambitions, and the emergence of new classes all contributed to a need for a modern school system, which was, after Habsburg beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century, largely imported from Germany.

The *gimnázium* (a type of grammar school) was an elitist institution for the burgeoning middle class. It offered academic studies and approaches that were recognized as appropriate tools for training the mind and nurturing talent. Teaching was typically based upon providing factual knowledge with the intention of using inductive reasoning. Most of the best high schools were under the direct control of the Roman Catholic, Calvinist, or Lutheran Church, which represented a high level of discipline and strict moral expectations. They also had faculties that included highly educated and very demanding priests.

17 Theodore von Kármán with Lee Edson, *The Wind and Beyond: Theodore von Kármán, Pioneer in Aviation and Pathfinder in Space* (Boston–Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1967), 20–2.

18 Tibor Frank, “Hungary and the Dual Monarchy, 1867–1890,” in Peter F. Sugar, Péter Hanák, Tibor Frank, eds., *A History of Hungary* (Bloomington–Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 252–66.

The *Mintagimnázium* was a state school (established in 1872, its official name was the *Magyar Királyi Tanárképző Intézet Gyakorló Főgymnasiuma*) experimental in nature and different from the average *gimnázium* in many ways. It represented a forerunner of modern educational principles.

Mathematics education was given particular emphasis and promoted by professional organizations, journals, and competitions. Competition was strongly supported and advocated. Outstanding students in mathematics enjoyed both acknowledgment and appreciation.

German influence had a long tradition in Hungary. Hungarian city dwellers were mostly German-speaking, even as late as the middle of the nineteenth century. Partly because of the influence of the Habsburg court, German was the language of government and administration before the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, and German played a prominent role among members of the mercantile class well into the 1870s and 1880s. German was the language of culture in general, and as a *lingua franca* in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy it functioned as a bridge between Germany and the Monarchy. For example Hungarian students often attended universities in German-speaking countries.<sup>19</sup>

A subsequent step in the transfer of educational expertise occurred after 1919–1920, when émigré scholars and scientists took the fruits of their outstanding Hungarian education with them as they left the country, mostly for Germany and then on to the United States.

It would be tempting to think that a careful analysis of the conditions under which talent prospered in fin-de-siècle Budapest would yield a reliable method for the creation of genius. When discussing the achievements of mathematician John von Neumann (János Neumann, 1903–1957) and his near equals, a cautious distinction has to be made between talent as teachable and genius as inborn. Furthermore, formal education, however innovative and exemplary its methods may be, existed within the larger social context of the culture and its many influences on the mind of the student.

In a pioneering inquiry into the nature of problems and their solutions, Michael Polanyi (Mihály Polányi, 1891–1976) raised one of the most crucial questions of his generation: “To recognize a problem which can be solved and

---

19 László Szögi, *Magyarországi diákok németországi egyetemeken és főiskolákon, 1789–1919* [Hungarian Students at German Universities and Colleges, 1789–1919], vol. 5 of *Magyarországi diákok egyetemjárása az újkorban* [Hungarian Students at Universities Abroad in the Modern Times] (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Levéltára, 2001).

is worth solving is in fact a discovery in its own right.” Declaring this as the creed of his generation in a 1957 article for *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*,<sup>20</sup> Polanyi spoke for and of his generation when discussing originality and invention, discovery and the heuristic act, investigation and problem solving. “The interpretative frame of the educated mind,” he continued, “is ever ready to meet somewhat novel experiences and to deal with them in a somewhat novel manner.” Polanyi had his own views of genius:

genius makes contact with reality on an exceptionally wide range: by seeing problems and reaching out to hidden possibilities for solving them, far beyond the anticipatory powers of current conceptions. Moreover, by deploying such powers in an exceptional measure—far surpassing our own as onlookers—the work of genius offers us a massive demonstration of a creativity which can never be explained in other terms nor taken unquestioningly for granted.<sup>21</sup>

The extraordinary intellects nurtured by the *Mintagimnázium* or the *Fasori gimnázium* (a Lutheran grammar school in Budapest, founded originally in 1823 in Pest) and other élite schools of fin-de-siècle Hungary cannot be attributed exclusively to the unique social and cultural features of the period, the innovative educational approaches, or the characteristics of innate genius, but to an unusual confluence of these three powerful factors, none of which exists in isolation. While we should attempt to discover talent at an early age and continue to cultivate it through personal attention and acknowledgment, creating a competitive spirit and training minds through problem solving, simply by instituting more of these educational practices into today’s pedagogy we would still remain unable to recreate the Hungarian geniuses of the past as long as we are not also able to ensure that the other economic, social, political, and cultural factors that helped create Hungary’s legendary minds are brought into play.

Culture transfer helped shape the arts and sciences in Hungary near the highest level of European education. The influence of the Prussian school system and of European art, music, and science, directly benefited Hungary and had a major impact on teaching, learning, and research. Much of the result was once again exported by eminent exiles—from Hungary to Germany, and then from Germany to the United States.

---

20 Michael Polanyi, “Problem Solving,” *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* VIII, no. 30 (1957): 89.

21 Polanyi, “Problem Solving,” 93–4.

4

The period of 1918–1920 marked the end of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and historical Hungary within it, and heralded a vastly different period in national history during which some of the best minds, most of them Jewish-Hungarian mathematicians, scientists, and musicians, found themselves compelled to leave the country.<sup>22</sup>

The social and legal interplay of Jewish-Gentile relations—which included religious conversion, mixed marriages, forced and voluntary assimilation (*Magyarization*) and ennoblement—had become prevalent by World War I. Post-World War I social dynamics coalesced to give rise to a significant intellectual and professional emigration from Hungary. It was in this post-War social upheaval, and particularly at the time of the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic (*Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság*) of 1919, that professional and intellectual emigration became widespread; moreover, intellectual emigration came to be seen as one possible solution to the problems of Hungary’s upwardly mobile and suddenly overgrown Jewish middle and, particularly, upper-middle classes, the Jewish-Hungarian intellectual élite.

Most of the people who left Hungary in 1919 and the early 1920s were directly involved in the so called “aster revolution” of 1918 (headed by the government of Count Mihály Károlyi, who led the first republic in the history of Hungary) or the Bolshevik-type Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, and/or were, as a consequence, threatened by the ensuing anti-Semitism unleashed in the wake of this disastrous political and social experiment. It is sadly ironic that most Hungarian Jews who felt endangered after 1919 were from the perspective of many of their everyday cultural habits more Hungarian than Jewish, representing mostly an assimilated, Magyarized, typically non-religious middle or upper-middle class which had profoundly contributed to the socio-economic development and, indeed, modernization of Hungary. Their exodus was a tremendous loss for the country and a welcome gain for the countries in which they chose to settle.

For the intellectually gifted Hungarians, often of Jewish origin, who started their migration toward other European countries and the United States after the political changes of 1918/1920, the typical choice was to move to one of the German-speaking countries, most often Austria or Germany, but also

---

22 Despite profoundly different political conditions that followed, some of the great traditions of education, particularly science and mathematics education have survived even to the present day.



Czechoslovakia and even Switzerland, all of which boasted prestigious German-speaking universities. Berlin was certainly not the only destination, though many of the emigrants chose to settle there and the German capital became a powerful symbol of interwar migration centers. After what often proved to be the first step in a chain- or step-migration, most Hungarian émigrés found that with the rise of Hitler as Chancellor of Germany they had to leave the countries in which they had settled and continue on their way, in most cases ultimately to the United States. This was not the only pattern that emerged, but it was the most typical.

## 5

As a European phenomenon, professional migration after World War I was not peculiar to Hungary. The War was followed by immense social convulsions that drove astonishing numbers of people in all directions. Russian and Ukrainian refugees escaped Bolshevism, Poles were relocated into reemerging Poland, Hungarians escaped from the newly established (or aggrandized) states of Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia and tried to find some place in the new Hungary.<sup>23</sup>

Outward movements from Hungary in the 1920s were part of this emerging pattern and cannot be defined as emigration proper. Many people went on substantial and extended study tours of varied length—just as others had done before World War I. Contrary to general belief, migrations were not limited to Jews suffering from the political and educational consequences of the counterrevolutionary White Terror in Hungary, a reaction to the two revolutions of 1918/1919. A significant, though smaller, group of non-Jews also left Hungary at the same time. Motivated by anti-liberal politics, poverty, or curiosity, gentiles with dramatically mixed convictions hit the road and tried their luck in Paris, Berlin, or Hollywood. Future Nobel Laureate Albert Szent-Györgyi (1893–1986), authors Sándor Márai (1900–1989) and Gyula Illyés (1902–1983), artists Aurél Bernáth (1895–1982) and Sándor Bortnyik (1893–1976), and other prospective gentile luminaries were among the most distinguished émigrés after 1919.<sup>24</sup> Yet Jewish migrations were a definitive pattern of the 1920s, when the “Numerus Clausus” law of XXV: 1920 excluded many of them from colleges, limiting the

23 Geoffrey Barraclough, ed., *The Times Atlas of World History* (Maplewood, N.J.: Hammond, rev. ed. 1984, repr. 1988), 265.

24 Frank, *Double Exile*, 140–2, 153–4.

number of students attending university on the basis of the proportions of the religious and ethnic groups in the Hungarian population.

In an effort to increase their chances of getting into the United States, many Hungarians who left the successor states of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy deliberately identified themselves as “Romanians,” “Czechoslovaks,” or “Yugoslavs,” since the U.S. Quota Laws of 1921 and 1924 enabled very few Hungarians to enter the country. Nevertheless, most migrants were directed to centers in Europe, primarily in Germany. German centers of culture, education, and research represented the pre-eminent opportunity for young Hungarians searching for patterns and norms of modernization.

## 6

One of my intentions in this article has been to show and document both the transit role of Germany, and particularly Berlin, in the history of Hungarian intellectual migrations and the role of Hungarians in the great exodus from Germany after the Nazi takeover.

Links between the two countries were anything but new. During much of its modern history, Hungary in some way formed a part of or was strongly influenced by the greater German cultural realm. Indeed it developed on the fringes of German civilization. The tendency to frequent German cultural and educational centers was natural for the Hungarian upper and upper-middle classes throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Most Hungarians who went to Germany after World War I were of Jewish origin. Many were forced to leave Hungary because they had been politically involved in the Hungarian revolutions of 1918/1919. Others became innocent victims of the anti-Semitic campaign and legislation that followed the abortive Bolshevik-type coup in 1919, the first of its kind in Europe. These groups typically spoke good German, had been educated in the German cultural tradition, and had had many earlier contacts with Germany and other German-speaking cultural and scientific centers in Central Europe. It seemed natural for them to seek what turned out to be temporary refuge in the intellectually flourishing and politically tolerant atmosphere of Weimar Germany.

Though the Hungarian government realized the potential loss the country would suffer from intellectual exile, most émigrés resisted official endeavors to lure them back to Hungary and chose to stay in Germany until Hitler took over

as Chancellor in January 1933.<sup>25</sup> Hungarian scientists, scholars, artists, musicians, filmmakers, authors, and other professionals enjoyed recognition and prestige in Weimar Germany. This “German” reputation helped them rebuild their subsequent careers in England and, particularly, the United States, where after 1933 most of these “German” Hungarians were headed.

The rise of anti-Semitism and the Nazi takeover reminded Jewish-Hungarians in Germany of their earlier experiences in Hungary, and this historical *déjà-vu* often spurred them to take action more quickly than many native Germans did. Prompted by the lessons of their *double exile*, several Hungarians played important roles in rescuing victims of Nazi Germany and also became active in anti-Nazi movements and instrumental in promoting the A-bomb and other Allied efforts to defeat Germany and Japan.

Continuing research is needed to provide further statistical evidence regarding the actual number of immigrants in Weimar Germany, including the number of émigré Hungarians and their social composition. It would be important to learn more about social networking, bonding and inter-group relations among the various émigré groups and individuals, including Hungarians, as well as the relationship between immigrants and the German population. Little is known of the politics of many of the immigrants: their political sympathies, party affiliations and political organizations await study.

Individual immigrant groups had specific ways of thinking, communicating and arguing. A comparison would offer insights into their cultural differences and their varied contributions to German civilization. A systematic study of the pre-Nazi German periodical literature might well cast more light on the achievements and contributions of Hungarians and other émigré intellectuals in Weimar Germany.

## 7

Many refugee Hungarians were mistaken by American agencies and individuals as German refugees. Born in the last decades of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Jewish-Hungarian professionals often spoke German as a mother tongue and had attended some of the best schools of the Monarchy. Many of them had studied and received their degrees in Germany and been employed by German universities and other institutions. Members of the large group of Hungarian-

---

<sup>25</sup> Frank, *Double Exile*, 121–66.

Jewish scholars and scientists with German training were often invisible to immigration authorities because they were lumped together with German and German-Jewish scholars fleeing Nazi Germany. This raises the question as to whether in the case of scholars and scientists it makes more sense to speak of the country (or culture) of origin or the country (or culture) of education as the site of natural connection.

Many requests for assistance were denied by the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars in the U.S. because the applicants had Hungarian rather than German citizenship. Until 1938, when the first anti-Jewish Bill was passed in Budapest, Hungarians did not seem to be an endangered species, and the Committee focused its efforts on the Germans and German-Hungarians who were in acute trouble. This explains why the Committee (and probably several other organizations) turned to those Hungarians who were closely associated with Germany, were German citizens, had German jobs, and were under actual threat after the rise of Hitler and the Nazi party.

Ousted from Germany in or soon after 1933, many Jewish-Hungarian professional and intellectual refugees were still able to return to Hungary to work or visit. Between 1929 and 1938 (the year of the first anti-Jewish bill), Hungary provided a modicum of shelter for its Jewish population, increasingly an illusion that proved to be deceptive and ultimately lethal.

The dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Peace Treaty of Trianon eliminated much of the geographic and social mobility in the area or made it very difficult. Escaping interwar Hungary was, in fact, not only a form of geographic relocation, but also a vehicle of social mobility. Weimar Germany was one of the great European centers of modernization, science and culture. It attracted migrants from all regions, mostly the peripheries of Europe, as did the United States, which from a global perspective had also increasingly become such a center. Emigration facilitated the transfer of Hungarian middle class values and possibilities into the much larger and more articulate German and American middle-class. This made the integration of newcomers usually quick, effective, and lasting, and led to professional success. Upon arrival in the U.S., immigrants from socially backward Hungary found themselves in an incomparably larger, more modern, dynamic, and professional middle-class where talent was appreciated and fostered. American middle class values and institutions made integration relatively easy, both socially and mentally.

Rescue operations in the pre-World War II period were made extremely difficult by the restrictionist 1924 quota law (in effect until 1965), raging unemployment, and growing anti-Semitism in the U.S. As only the top people from even the German group were wanted, the agencies carefully skimmed the very best and turned away “second-class” professionals. The growing need of European professionalism and know-how, and especially the later demands of the war effort, made it imperative for the U.S. to allow the immigration of the most brilliant specialists.

Refugee organizations in the United States were not based on charity. They had their own American professional motives and interests and served their country and institutions, while also saving European lives. Interwar migration did not stop upon arrival in the U.S., but continued from institution to institution until the newcomer found his/her “final” place or destination. Step-migration was to become an almost global phenomenon.

Networking, cohorting, and bonding were strong among the Hungarian refugees, and some, like physicist Leo Szilard (Leó Szilárd, 1898–1964) and engineer and aviation pioneer Theodore von Kármán (Tódor Kármán, 1881–1963) did their best to help fellow refugees.<sup>26</sup> Their “private” or combined private/institutional rescue operations were part of U.S. relief, an effort often shared by outstanding American scholars, themselves mostly of European origin.

Jews arriving from Hungary seemed to have been more Hungarian than Jewish (at least from the perspective of their observable cultural habits), though the question of their religious affiliation awaits further research. Assimilation in Hungary certainly left a lasting imprint on their faith. Many of the American citizens initiating or participating in the rescue missions were themselves Jewish and were driven by special sensitivity to the bond of shared background, as well as a more keen sense of danger.

Contrary to common belief, not all émigré Hungarians were Jewish in the period of 1919–1945. Though the overwhelming majority of exiles were Jewish, a relatively small group of Hungarian gentiles, politically liberal, radical, or leftist, also left the country, as did others who simply hoped to pursue more rewarding careers. Some of them returned to Hungary at a later point, though many such as Nobel Laureate Albert Szent-Györgyi and author Sándor Márai left again after 1945.

The lack of a sufficient knowledge of English isolated many of the immigrants and hampered their social integration into the American community. However,

---

<sup>26</sup> Frank, *Double Exile*, 243–63, 270–78.

their repeated traumata in interwar Europe led them to become militant anti-Nazis and anti-Communists, who looked upon the United States as a bulwark of freedom and fought against all forms of totalitarianism. Coming from this background, some of the very best and ablest minds joined the U.S. war effort and contributed to the fall of tyranny in Japan and German-dominated Europe.

The number of notable Hungarian-American refugees in the interwar years is difficult to assess. I have compiled a list of some 250 eminent Hungarian professionals who immigrated to the U.S. between 1919 and 1945 that is attached as an appendix to my book *Double Exile*.<sup>27</sup> Though the list is incomplete, it presents a wide variety of outstanding specialists whose presence in the United States was, and in some cases still continues to be, an important contribution to American science, education and culture. That the bulk of this outstanding group lived relatively happy and successful lives in America is further evidenced by their life span. As documented by the list, a surprisingly large percentage of immigrant Hungarian-Americans lived well into old age: approximately 33 percent lived to 85 or more, 20 percent to 90, and 1,5 percent to more than 100. In other words, every third member of this group reached an age that was unusual even for Americans, as the elderly U.S. population during the period between 1920 and 2000 represented only 0,2 to 1,5 percent of the total U.S. population.<sup>28</sup>

The group of Jewish-Hungarian refugees may be considered to have had something of a group-biography. One can look upon the members of this large and diverse group as having lived essentially the same life and write their shared, common biography in terms of a *prosopography*. Yet, this prosopography must not fail to transmit the extent to which Hungary's loss of some of its most outstanding talent remains a source of pain, pride, fear and anger in the national consciousness. Hungary's fundamental educational contributions to these outstanding minds, in combination with the energizing modernism of Germany and other western European countries, were fertilized again by the nurturing soil of their new homeland in the U.S. The step-migrations of this transient generation, tossed and turned as it was by the traumatizing historical-political events of the era, produced a range of contributions that are rightly owned by many countries, and can be seen as foreshadowing the emergence of a global human identity in the twenty-first century.

---

27 Frank, *Double Exile*, 439–52.

28 For the survey of the U.S. Census Bureau see *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2012* (New York: World Almanac Books, 2012), 617.

*Bibliography*

- Barraclough, Geoffrey, ed. *The Times Atlas of World History*. Maplewood, N.J.: Hammond, rev. ed. 1984, repr. 1988.
- Bentwich, Norman. *The Refugees from Germany, April 1933 to December 1935*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1936.
- Bentwich, Norman. *The Rescue and Achievement of Refugee Scholars: The Story of Displaced Scholars and Scientists 1933–1952*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1953.
- Breitman, Richard and Alan M. Kraut. *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933–1945*. Bloomington–Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Congdon, Lee. *Exile and Social Thought. Hungarian Intellectuals in Germany and Austria 1919–1933*. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Fermi, Laura. *Illustrious Immigrants. The Intellectual Migration from Europe 1930–1941*. Chicago–London: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- Fleming, Donald and Bernard Baylin, eds. *The Intellectual Migration. Europe and America, 1930–1960*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969.
- Frank, Tibor. *Double Exile: Migrations of Jewish-Hungarian Professionals through Germany to the United States, 1919–1945*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009.
- Good, David F. *The Economic Rise of the Habsburg Empire, 1750–1914*. Berkeley–Los Angeles–London: University of California Press, 1984.
- Hanák, Péter. „Problems of Jewish Assimilation in Austria-Hungary in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.” In *The Power of the Past. Essays for Eric Hobsbawm*, 235–50. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Hargittai, István. *The Martians of Science: Five Physicists Who Changed the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Hughes, H. Stuart. *The Sea Change. The Migration of Social Thought, 1930–1965*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975.
- Jackman, Jarrel C. and Carla M. Borden, eds. *The Muses Flee Hitler. Cultural Transfer and Adaptation 1930–1945*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian, 1983.
- Kármán, Theodore von, with Lee Edson. *The Wind and Beyond: Theodore von Kármán, Pioneer in Aviation and Pathfinder in Space*. Boston–Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1967.
- Komlos, John. *The Habsburg Monarchy As a Customs Union: Economic Development in Austria-Hungary in the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Kröner, Peter, ed. *Vor fünfzig Jahren. Die Emigration deutschsprachiger Wissenschaftler 1933–1939*. Münster: Gesellschaft für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, 1983.

- Marx, George. *The Voice of the Martians*. 2nd ed. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1997.
- Palmier, Jean Michel. *Weimar en Exil. Le destin de l'émigration intellectuelle allemande antinazie en Europe et aux Etats-Unis*. Paris: Payot, 1988.
- Polanyi, Michael. "Problem solving." *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* VIII, no. 30 (1957): 89–103.
- Ránki, György. "Die Entwicklung des ungarischen Bürgertums vom späten 18. zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert." In *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert. Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich. (Eine Auswahl)*, edited by Jürgen Kocka. Vol. 1 of *Einheit und Vielfalt Europas*, edited by Jürgen Kocka, 230–48. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995 [1988].
- Rider, Robin E. "Alarm and Opportunity: Emigration of Mathematicians and Physicists to Britain and the United States, 1933–1945." *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences* 15, Part I (1984): 107–76.
- Spalek, John M. *Guide to the Archival Materials of the German-speaking Emigration to the United States after 1933*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978.
- Strauss, Herbert A. and Werner Röder, eds. *International Biographical Dictionary of Central European Emigrés 1933–1945*. Munich–New York–London–Paris: K. G. Saur, 1980–1983.
- Sugar, Peter, Péter Hanák, Tibor Frank, eds. *A History of Hungary*. Bloomington–Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Szögi, László. *Magyarországi diákok németországi egyetemeken és főiskolákon, 1789–1919*. [Hungarian Students at German Universities and Colleges, 1789–1919], vol. 5 of *Magyarországi diákok egyetemjárása az újkorban* [Hungarian Students at Universities Abroad in the Modern Times]. Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Levéltára, 2001.
- The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2012*. New York: World Almanac Books, 2012.